



St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church
Heliopolis, Egypt



**Commentary on
the Gospel of St. John**



*In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
the One and Only God,
Amen.*

An exegetical study of the Holy Bible

"commentaries on the New Testament"

The Ecclesiastical Encyclopedia

"New Testament expositions"

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All biblical quotations are taken from the New King James version of the Holy Bible



*His Holiness Pope Tawadros II
118th Pope of Alexandria
and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark*

Introduction to the Gospel according to St. John

1. The author:

The author is St. John the Evangelist. He is the brother of James, the son of Zebedee. Like their father, both brothers were fishermen. Their mother, Salome, was among the women who ministered to Christ (Matthew 27:55 & 56, Mark 15:40 & 41, and Luke 8:3). Our Lord called both brothers to serve, and labelled them "**Boanerges**," meaning, "**sons of thunder**."

John was a very close disciple of Christ's; along with Peter and James, they witnessed Christ's raising Jairus' daughter from the dead (Luke 8:51 - 55), and Christ's transfiguration (Matthew 17:1 - 8 and Mark 9:2 - 9).

John was the disciple who leaned against Christ's breast during the Last Supper (John 13:25), and he was the sole disciple who had accompanied Christ to the Cross. Christ honoured him by entrusting to his care His mother, the holy virgin, St. Mary. (John 19:26 & 27)

John was the first disciple to come to the tomb (since he had outrun Peter, John 20:3 & 4). St. Paul testified, saying that John was one of the Church's pillars (Galatians 2:9).

In addition to his gospel, St. John authored three ministerial epistles, in addition to the Book of Revelation; he was thus also labelled "*St. John the Revelator*."

2. Timing of the gospel's writing:

It was the last (chronologically) gospel, most likely written around 85 - 90 A.D.

3. His symbol:

St. John is symbolized by an eagle, due to the Divine sublimation of his gospel, which soars with us to the utmost spiritual heights.

4. Where was the gospel written?

It was most likely written in Ephesus, prior to St. John's exile to the isle of Patmos.

5. The gospel's main characteristics:

a- The gospel aims to complete the picture, painted by the other evangelists, of the Son. Whereas the other three focused on our Lord Christ's deeds, parables and miracles, John dedicated his gospel to proving Christ's Divinity. Christ's miracles and aphorisms presented therein had the sole purpose of accentuating the Son's consubstantialism

with the Father. Thus, in John 20:31, we read: **"....but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."**

b- St. John's gospel is also characterized by its mention of Christ's final words and prayer with His disciples and with the Father; those were given in Chapters 14, 15, 16 & 17. Those details were not mentioned by any of the other three evangelists.

c- Another unique feature of St. John's gospel is his detailed mention of Christ's theological debates with the scribes and Pharisees; in several of those He expounded the mysterious relationship between Him and the Father. None of them understood Him.

d- Also mentioned emphatically in the gospel is Christ's atoning sacrifice. Thus, the verses given in Chapter 6:32 - 59, accentuate the significant effectiveness (mentioned in all gospels) of consuming the true body and blood of mankind's Saviour.



*"Interpretation of the holy Bible - the New Testament"
taken from the series: "Patristic expositions and meditations"*

*An exegetical study of
the Gospel according to St. John*

Chapter 1

***the eternal birth - testimony of St. John the Baptist -
calling the disciples***

1. The eternal birth - verses 1 - 8:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light." (John 1:1 - 8)

Verses 1 & 2:

While other evangelists carefully recorded, chronologically, events surrounding Christ's nativity, John focused on Christ's eternal birth since, his primary task, was to prove Christ's Divinity, against all the doubts which the Jews had promulgated around the Person of Christ. The most powerful verse is ***"and the Word was God."*** For this reason, we find that some denominations that refute Christ's Divinity, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, changed this verse to read, "and the Word was a god."

"The Word" refers to the Divine Mind, hence, the second Person of the Holy Trinity. Thus, the Word emanates from, and is equal to, the mind.

The second verse provides further clarification, namely, the eternal co-existence of the Father and the Son. There was never a moment (in human terms) when the Father existed alone. The Son's eternal birth is fully linked to the Father's existence; this is akin to saying that the sun's appearance is completely linked to its rays.

Verses 3 - 5:

This is a clear reference confirming Christ's Divinity - since He is the Creator: ***"without Him nothing was made that was made."*** See also Hebrews 1:2.

John continues with a spiritual dimension comparable to his theological one - hence, **"in Him was life,"** meaning that Christ was not only the Creator, but also the source of life and power to all His children who had believed on Him and were baptized (in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.) St. John also calls the Jews' rejection of Christ **"darkness,"** hence, **"And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."**

+ Dearly beloved, do you thank our Lord Christ for being the creation of His hands, to whom He granted the breath of life, and to whom He desired fellowshiping with Him in the light? Indeed, those who sincerely believe that they are our Master's focal point, will find nothing to offer than a lifestyle of thanksgiving.

Verses 6 - 8:

These verses present St. John the Baptist and his mission, namely, preparing people for accepting Christ. The intent was neither to attract people to himself, nor to have them believe on him.

+ Preparing people to accept Christ is the responsibility of all His Church's congregation. A true Christian does not believe that he is light - rather, he is the reflection of Christ's light on all around him. He would thus witness either through words, like John's testimony, or through his deeds. Others would then see Christ's light through him.

2. St. John the Baptist's mission - verses 9 - 13:

"That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (John 1:9 - 13)

Verses 9 - 11:

These verses speak, once more, of Christ, the Saviour. Although our Lord Christ was being constantly awaited by the Jews, they neither recognized Him, nor did they accept Him.

+ Today, we encounter similar situations: some accept Christ, while some reject Him. Some claim to be His children, yet their deeds reject Him. Accepting Christ is not a declaration; rather, it is submission of the soul and will to His will, and applying all His commandments in our life - hence: **"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."** (Matthew 5:16)

Verses 12 & 13:

"But as many as received Him.....those who believe in His name" - A special gift has always been available to those who follow Christ, namely, the gift of sonship to God. Biological birth identifies a person's ancestry and earthly inheritance - all of which perish and disappear. However, spiritual birth, contingent on the Faith and baptism (Mark 16:16), yields Divine sonship, plus immortal heavenly inheritance.

+ *This is the gift which we all acquired, free of charge, through the holy sacrament of baptism; this, in turn, casts a tremendous load on the shoulders of a Christian, namely, the question that he must constantly ask himself: "Do I trace my ancestry to the world or to Christ - have I been born biologically or spiritually?" Such a scrutinizing question implies daily self-examination, yielding a significant effect on our spiritual life with God.*

3. Christ's incarnation - verses 14 - 18:

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.'" And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." (John 1:14 - 18)

Verse 14:

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" - This refers to the mystery of incarnation, which is a fundamental tenet of the Christian Faith: God the Word became flesh. In the Nicene Creed we say, *"He became incarnate from the Virgin Mary and was made man."* Put differently, Christ the true God acquired a body, a spirit and a human soul, united with His Divinity, thus becoming a perfect God and a perfect Human being (see 1 Timothy 3:16).

"Became" does not mean that the Divinity became material flesh, rather, it was united with the flesh.

In the holy Bible, the term ***"flesh"*** is used in the following contexts:

- a- ***"For no one ever hated his own flesh...."*** (Ephesians 5:29).
- b- ***".....make no provisions for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts..."*** (Romans 13:14).
- c- ***"....they are no longer two, but one flesh..."*** (Matthew 19:6)

Furthermore, Baruch prophesied the advent of the incarnate Word, living among us, saying, **"This is our God, and there shall none other be accounted of in comparison of Him.....Afterward did He shew Himself upon earth, and conversed with men."** (Baruch 3:35 - 37)

Verse 14 not only accentuates fundamental tenets of Christianity, but it also embodies spiritual meanings, including:

"Became flesh" - The Christian person has become a child of God - because the only begotten Son of God became man.

"And dwelt among us" - With amazing humility, He lived in our midst, as one of us; He experienced our pains and sufferings. He even helped the afflicted - the only person feeling your pain is He Who suffered for your sake. Such is your Christ (Hebrews 2:18).

"We beheld His glory" - Indeed, it was very difficult to discuss God's glory prior to the incarnation. When Moses tried to see God's glory, he received the Divine response: **"....no man shall see Me, and live."** (Exodus 33:20)

On the other hand, through Christ's incarnation, we witnessed the glory of the incarnate God in His miracles - feats which only God could do.

As a Human, Christ set for the example of a sinless person; He projected for us the image of the perfect man, Whose likeness we should strive to attain, without resorting to excuses of worldly, extenuating, circumstances.

"As of the only begotten of the Father" - This distinguishes Christ's sonship to God from ours: His sonship is the Divine nature sonship, hence, the eternal Word, begotten of the Father, before all ages. On the other hand, we acquired our sonship by believing on the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, through the sacrament of baptism.

"Full of grace and truth" - Grace constitutes the free gift which Christ grants us. Truth is the manifestation of God's truth, while believing on Him.

Verse 15:

This is a testimony for John the Baptist. It confirms what was said previously, and foretells Christ's advent after him. He refers to Christ's immortality, and Christ's precedence over him.

Verses 16 & 17:

Christ fully satiates all believers on Him, who seek Him, hence, **"of His fullness we have all received."**

"Grace for grace" - This is a reference to the difference between Old and New Testament grace: the former was limited to prophets, commandments and hope, while the latter was spoken by God through His Son and through His free redemption. The law never offered justification to anyone - it merely clarified the way. Christ, on the other hand, is **"the way, the truth, and the life."** (Chapter 14:6)

Verse 18:

God desired to reveal to us the nature of His essence, in a tangible way, hence, incarnation of the Word.

"In the bosom of the Father" - This refers to the intimate union between the Father and the Son. This also means that during Christ's incarnation on earth there was no separation between Him and the Father - He remained omnipresent and omniscient.

"He has declared Him" - This provides further confirmation of the eternal union between the Father and the Son.

4. Testimony of John the Baptist - verses 19 - 36:

"Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." Then they said to him, "Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?" He said: "I am 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Make straight the way of the Lord," ' as the prophet Isaiah said." Now those who were sent were from the Pharisees. And they asked him, saying, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" John answered them, saying, "I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know. It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose." These things were done in Bethabara beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing. The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.' I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water." And John bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and testified that this

is the Son of God." Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God!" (John 1:19 - 36)



Verses 19 - 28:

Several possibilities surrounded the person of John the Baptist. He could have been a false prophet, like some who preceded him, he could have been Elijah, Christ's forerunner (see Malachi 3:1 and 4:5), he could have been a true prophet as Moses had foretold (see Deuteronomy 18:15), or he could have been the awaited Messiah. Therefore, a delegation of scribes, Pharisees and Levites was sent to investigate that powerful personality, which had already attracted many followers.

The willingness of the Jews should be highlighted: they knew that Christ was of the tribe of Judah, of David's seed, while John was from the tribe of Levi, the tribe of priesthood. Upon asking John, he humbly sidestepped all those issues, and focused on his task to prepare the nation for the baptism of repentance, in order to receive Christ, Who solely has the authority to baptise with the Holy Spirit. John also testified that Christ was present, and incarnate among them. With further humility, John concluded that he was nothing compared to the glory of the One coming after him, Whose sandal strap he was unworthy to loose (in those days, that was among the duties of slaves).

+ *John's testimony teaches us two lessons:*

a- *The primary task of each Christian is witnessing for Christ, our God and Saviour.*

b- We should be humble: we must not claim glory for ourselves - it suffices us to be proud of serving His name as we prostrate at His feet.

"Bethabara" - This is the place where Joshua had crossed to the promised land with the Israelites.

Verses 29 - 36:

John reveals to us another mystery of the Holy Spirit's work: he had not, a priori, seen the Person of Christ, yet John knew, through the Holy Spirit's guidance, that he would know Christ, unequivocally, by a clear sign, hence, **"the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove."**

Furthermore, through his testimony, John confirmed that Christ is the Son of God (verse 34), and **"the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"** Christ descended from the mount of temptation, to start His ministry, and offer Himself a Sacrifice for the sins of the world.

John witnessed in three stages: verses 19 - 28, verses 29 - 34, and verses 35 & 36 while addressing his two disciples Andrew and John.

+ Dearly beloved, the Holy Spirit Whom you have acquired through Chrismation, is capable of guiding you through life's hardships; you will then be tranquil at all times, and you will learn God's will more and more throughout your life.

5. Christ calls some of His disciples - verses 37 - 46:

"The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and seeing them following, said to them, "What do you seek?" They said to Him, "Rabbi" (which is to say, when translated, Teacher), "where are You staying?" He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where He was staying, and remained with Him that day (now it was about the tenth hour). One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. Now when Jesus looked at him, He said, "You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas" (which is translated, A Stone). The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote--Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." And Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."" (John 1:37 - 46)

Verses 37 - 39:

Upon hearing John's testimony concerning Christ, two of his disciples followed Christ. Then Christ asked them, "***What do you seek?***" They answered saying that they wanted to know where He resided. Their discipleship to Christ followed His welcoming them, and their spending the day with Him.

+ *When you follow the Lord, He will ask you what your intentions are. Following the Lord must stem from full faith and submission - not driven by any personal motives, pride, or merely spending your spare ime.*

Verses 40 - 42:

Andrew was one of John's two disciples who followed Christ. He invited his brother Simon, and told him "***We have found the Messiah.***" In reference to Peter's future ministry and faith, Christ renamed him "***Cephas***" (which is translated "a stone").

There are several examples in the holy Bible of names being changed in reference to a person's great forthcoming mission; those include "Abram" who became "Abraham," and "Jacob" who became "Israel." This is the custom in today's Coptic Orthodox Church, upon ordainment of bishops, priests and deacons - each one is given a saint's name reflecting his future responsibilities.

Verses 43 - 45:

Our Lord Christ proceeded north towards the region of Galilee, continuing to call His disciples - He encountered Philip, who hailed from Bethsaida, which was also the hometown of Andrew and Peter; Philip obeyed Christ's call to follow Him. Subsequently, Philip went to his friend Nathanael and told him that they had found Christ, the awaited Messiah, and that He was Joseph's Son, hailing from Nazareth. Nathanael eventually was named Bartholomew, one of Christ's disciples.

Verse 46:

Nathanael impulsively condemned the entire population of Nazareth.

+ *We learn from Nathanael not to judge anyone - we may, unknowingly, condemn saints, as Nathanael did impulsively concerning Christ Himself.*

The Jews were aware that Christ would hail from Bethlehem, the city of David (see Micah 5:2, Matthew 2:5 & 6 and John 7:42), not from Nazareth of Galilee.

6. Nathanael's belief - verses 47 - 51:

"Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!" Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael answered and said to Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." And He said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.""
(John 1:47 - 51)

Verses 47 - 49:

Upon seeing Nathanael, Christ preempted him by saying that he was a true Israelite - hence, not a Galilean Gentile. Nathanael was amazed, hence, ***"How do You know me?"*** Christ continued saying that He had known Nathanael for a long time - since he was under the fig tree....

It is speculated that, in the days when Herod had ordered the execution of all the Bethlehem children two years and under, Nathanael's mother had hidden him under a fig tree - hence, a situation that was only known to Nathanael and his mother. His mother subsequently raised him in a place where Herod's troops would not find him.....

Thus, Christ revealed to him that well-kept secret. Nathanael then ascertained that Christ was indeed the awaited Messiah, the King of Israel, the Son of God.

It should be noted that Christ was not in Bethlehem at that time; rather, He was on the way to Egypt with St. Joseph and the holy virgin St. Mary.

Verses 50 & 51:

Christ added to Nathanael that his faith would increase, not merely because Christ knew all secrets, but also because, upon following Christ, he would witness much greater things, namely, Christ's crucifixion and redemption, reconciliation of celestials with terrestrials, the angels' ascent to heaven bearing believers' prayers, and the angels' descent from heaven bearing Christ's overflowing bounties.



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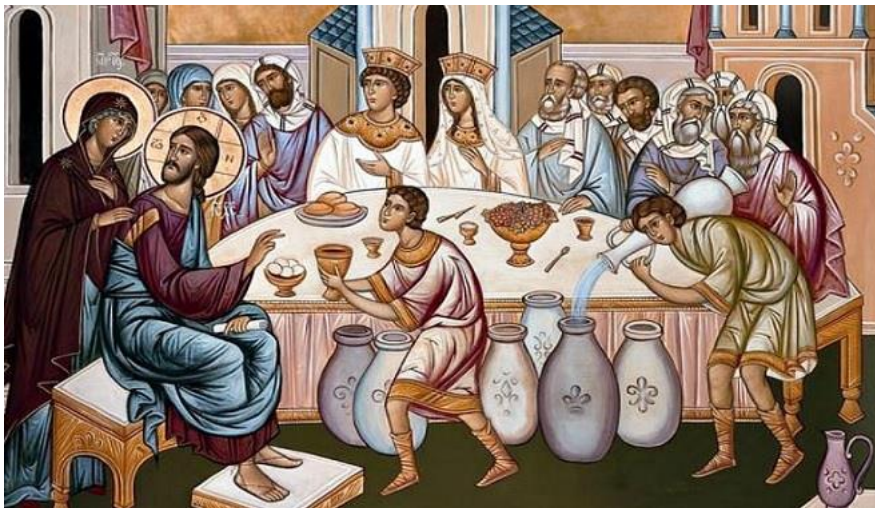
*An exegetical study of
the Gospel according to St. John*

Chapter 2

the wedding of Cana of Galilee - Christ purges the temple

1. The wedding of Cana of Galilee - verses 1 - 11:

"On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it." Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece. Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." And they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, "Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast." And they took it. When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom. And he said to him, "Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!" This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him." (John 2:1 - 11)



The wedding of Cana of Galilee

Verses 1 & 2:

Cana's actual location is uncertain - but the commemoration of the miracle of the wine is traditionally fixed at Kefer-Kenna (also known as Kefr Kana and Kfar-Cana), about 5km north-east of Nazareth on the road to Tiberias.

Despite the tediousness of the journey, our Lord Christ courteously accepted the invitation to attend, along with His mother and His disciples, the wedding at Cana. Fellowshiping is one way of expressing love; furthermore, Christ honoured holy matrimony, which would become one of the Church's sacraments.

That wedding was on the third day following Christ's calling to Nathanael.

Verses 3 -5:

The holy virgin's love and motherhood is demonstrated by her sensing the needs of her hosts prior to their asking for help. The host had run out of wine - in those days, it would have normally consisted of fermented grape juice without any additives.

The holy virgin, motivated by love, hastened to request Christ to save their hosts from embarrassment. Starting Christ's miracles at that point was not part of the Divine economy - thus, He told St. Mary, "**Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.**" Christ meant to say, "You are human, and you know neither God's wisdom, nor His appointed time." However, Christ honoured His mother, and responded to her intercession, since she was His mother, the holy virgin, St. Mary.

Clearly, St. Mary fully believed that Christ would accept her intercession, since she asked the servants to obey Him.

+ *My beloved brother, make all your petitions to God, regardless of their complexity or difficulty - He loves you. Seek the saints' intercessions, especially St. Mary's, since they are highly favoured with God.*

Verses 6 - 11:

In that house there were six waterpots of stone, with an approximate capacity of about 80 litres each. The Jews used them for purification in accordance with Mosaic law. Our Lord instructed the servants to fill them all with water - then He told them to take the pots "**to the master of the feast.**" When the latter tasted the wine, he realized that it was of a very high quality - whereupon he blamed the groom for keeping the best wine till the end, while serving the lesser quality at the beginning, not knowing

that the wine he had just tasted had been transformed from water. The servants plus all the guests realized that they had witnessed a great miracle - a miracle of creation: Christ created fermented wine from water. That was Christ's first miracle; the Coptic Orthodox Church celebrates it, on third day following Theophany, as one of the Lord's minor feasts.

2. Purging the temple - verses 12 - 18:

"After this He went down to Capernaum, He, His mother, His brothers, and His disciples; and they did not stay there many days. Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business. When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up." So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?"" (John 2:12 - 18)



Christ purged the temple

Verse 12:

Our Lord Christ established Capernaum - a significant city by the Sea of Galilee - as His headquarters, to be used as a springboard for His ministry, after Nazareth.

"His brothers" - The Coptic Orthodox Church believes in the holy virgin's "perpetual virginity;" St. Mary did not give birth to anyone other than our Lord Christ - her virginity remained intact throughout her life, and she never had a marital relationship with her betrothed, Joseph. Thus, Christ did not have any biological brothers from St. Mary, which is consistent with Ezekiel's prophecy: **"Then he shall go out, and after he goes out the gate shall be shut."** (Ezekiel 46:12) His "brothers" were in fact His cousins since, in those days and in that part of the world, "cousins" were customarily referred to as "brothers."

Verses 13 - 17:

During their most important feast - the Jewish Passover - the Jews used to converge on Jerusalem, to Solomon's temple, to celebrate and offer sacrifices. That was precisely what our Lord did. John tells us that, upon entering the temple, Christ was grieved and angered at what He saw: **"He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business."** The temple had been converted to a veritable marketplace, thus desecrating the temple and defeating the purpose of worship. The biblical text is quite clear: Christ's actions accentuate His strictness, and zeal for His, and His Father's, house.

+ There is a difference between two kinds of anger: misguided, heated anger, which many justify for themselves and which God condemns, versus zeal and holy anger against our sins, championing the oppressed, or in defence of God's house and its rights.

My dear brother, we are in dire need of having a zealous spirit for our Church, which is the house of God, angels and saints. God is quite zealous for His glory and Church.....let us - the Church's children - not offend others by deeds and appearance, unfit for the honour of the house of God - the terrestrial heaven - to which David refers, saying: **"Holiness adorns Your house, O Lord, forever."** (Psalm 93:5)

We should pose the following terrifying question to ourselves: "What if our Lord came to visit His Church now - as He visited His temple??! Will He be pleased with what He sees??.....Start by asking yourself that question.

Verse 18:

The Jews, priests and merchants did not accept what Christ did; therefore, they asked Him, **"What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?"** That would have been similar to what Moses had done with Pharaoh, to prove that he had been sent by God. Their question translates to: "By what authority are You doing this, given that You are not among the temple's servants and priests, and given that you have not shown us wonders or miracles, that would convince us to listen to You?"

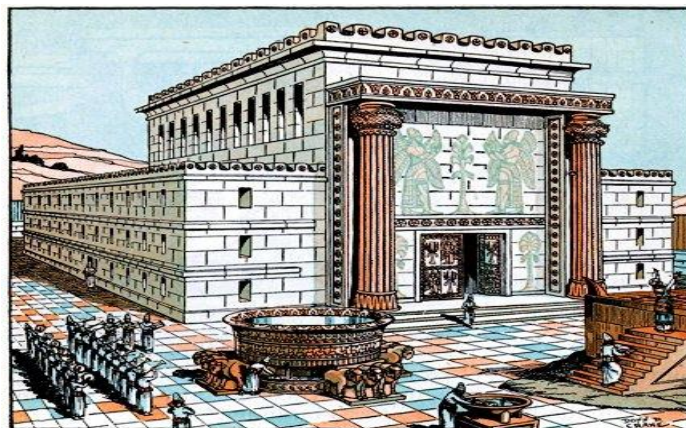
+ Throughout our lives, such an attitude would be inconsistent with submission to God's will and commandments; since, among Faith's most significant conditions (as indicated earlier) is unconditional belief.

It should be noted that, throughout His ministry, our Lord Christ celebrated Passover four times: the first was the one under discussion now, the second was when He healed the afflicted of Bethsaida (Ch. 5:1), the third was when He fed the multitudes (Ch. 6:4), and the fourth was when He was crucified (Ch. 11:55).

Furthermore, our Lord purged the temple twice: the one at hand, at the outset of His ministry, and the second time at the end of His ministry on earth, four days prior to His crucifixion: (Matthew 21:12 & 13, Mark 11:15 - 17 and Luke 19:45 & 46).

3. Christ foretells His death - verses 19 - 25:

"Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" But He was speaking of the temple of His body. Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said. Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man." (John 2:19 - 25)



Solomon's temple

Verses 19 - 22:

Christ subsequently surprised the Jews with a statement they had not been expecting, namely, ***"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."*** They failed to understand that He was prophesying His death and resurrection - so they mocked Him!

The temple's 46 years of construction has the following history: construction of the first temple, built by Solomon, lasted seven years, and was completed in 950 B.C. - it was destroyed by the Babylonians. The temple was subsequently rebuilt by Zerubabel in 515 B.C. and restored/renovated by Herod during the period 16 B.C. to 30 A.D. Those periods add up to 46 years.

The reader could link what the Lord said in these verses to Matthew 12:39 and Luke 11:29. In those verses, when the Jews asked for a sign, our Lord told them that the only sign was that of Jonah the prophet - through which He had also foretold His death and reurrection after three days. The Jews also failed to understand.

Prophecies are often difficult to understand, but when they materialize, their truthfulness is realized, and the truthfulness of the prophet is established. The disciples understood and their faith proved well-founded after Christ's resurrection.

Verses 23 - 25:

Although many believed, due to Christ's miracles (we do not know how many - see Ch. 21:25), He did not trust them. He could search the depths of their hearts, and knew that their faith was superficial since it was primarily motivated by fascination.

The expression "***because He knew all men***" is a strong indication of Christ's Divinity.

+ *Dearly beloved, what type of faith do we harbour, given what was mentioned in Matthew 3:23 and Mark 4:2 - 20? Is it a solid faith anchored within us through the Holy Spirit, or is it a purely theoretical faith, surfacing in moments of tranquility, and disappearing at the cross?*

Our Church teaches us not to be fooled by quick results, lest we should be likened unto the Jews; they quickly turned against Christ crying "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" May the Lord edify our faith.



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Chapter 3

the Sacrament of Baptism - belief on Christ

1. The Sacrament of Baptism - verses 1 - 8:

"There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."" (John 3:1 - 8)

Verses 1 & 2:

"Pharisees" - That Jewish sect maintained the outward appearance of righteousness, adhering to the literal interpretation and practice of the law and elders' traditions. The term *"Pharisee"* means *"one who is separated."* Characterized by showing off, they were the most powerful opponents to Christ throughout His ministry. One of them, Nicodemus, enjoyed a distinguished social and religious stature, being a ruler of the Jews.

"This man came to Jesus by night" for two reasons:

- a- To obtain personal, first-hand information about the Person of Christ, avoiding all hearsay, and
- b- To ensure he was not exposed, since he feared other Pharisees would find out about his encounter with Christ.

+ *Nicodemus' encounter with Christ teaches us to have a personal relationship with Christ, to talk to Him, and to fellowship with the holy Bible and with the sacraments - rather than merely hearing about Christ through others.*

Nicodemus started his conversation by respectfully addressing Christ as "**Rabbi**" indicating high regard among the Jews. He also proclaimed his faith, although he needed confirmation - as indicated earlier, that was the object of his encounter.

Verse 3:

Christ responded without asking Nicodemus. It may be understood from Christ's response that the question pertained to salvation, and conditions for accessing the kingdom. Furthermore, we see in Christ's response, a proclamation to Nicodemus of Christ's awareness of his thoughts, which also proves Christ's Divinity.

Verses 3 - 7:

Christ started His response by a phrase He used frequently, namely, "**Most assuredly, I say to you....**" This confirms the truthfulness of the Speaker, as well as the importance of the topic at hand.

Christ teaches that salvation is not restricted to Jews (v. 16) - rather, it is available to all, with the following conditions:

a- "**Unless one is born again**" - This refers to the birth of sonship to God through the Holy Spirit. This renders us children of heaven, alienating us from all worldly evil pleasures.

b- "**Born of water and the Spirit**" - This refers to the same birth mentioned in "a" above. It is given from a more tangible perspective - hence, the Sacrament of Baptism. For this reason, the Coptic Orthodox Church takes great care to teach that there can be no salvation without the spiritual birth acquired through the holy Sacrament of Baptism. Faith is thus a necessary but insufficient condition.

Verse 4:

We have here a situation, recurring frequently, and accentuated by St. John - namely, the human mind's inability to understand the Divine intent. Nicodemus failed to understand the meaning of being born again. Our Lord was also misunderstood when He spoke of the temple's destruction ("His Body" - Ch. 2:19), and during His discussion with the Samaritan woman (Ch. 4:7 - 14). Nevertheless, our Lord always ensures that, in the end, we do understand His intent.

Verse 7:

There is a great difference between being affiliated with heaven through the new birth, and being affiliated with the flesh.

+ Having acquired the new spiritual nature, free of charge, through the Sacrament of Baptism, do we really lead a spiritual lifestyle, or are we led by carnal desires?

Dearly beloved, the Holy Spirit has granted you what others are incapable of understanding - do you appreciate such a gift, and such a responsibility? This is an invitation for you to ask: "Throughout all my dealings and relationships, am I behaving as a heavenly person, or am I governed by the world's rules and materialism like everybody else?"

It should be noted that the expression "**you must**" places significant emphasis on Christians' obligation to be born again (through baptism.)

Verse 8:

"The wind" - This refers to the Holy Spirit and His mysterious work. Although you do not see Him, you can feel the effects of His work. Analogously, when we see a tree swaying in the wind we cannot see the wind itself. Similarly, we see the effects of the Holy Spirit on all who have received Him through Chrismation, or through the laying-on of apostolic hands (see Acts 19:6). Consequently, such is the case with all who have been born of the Spirit: the Holy Spirit imparted to them power, love, wisdom, patience, meekness and spiritual perception. Baptism imparts to us three essential attributes:

- ownership by God not by Satan,
- power exceeding that of Satan, and
- a tendency towards good not evil.

2. The significance of Faith and its sublimation - verses 9 - 15:

"Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."
(John 3:9 - 15)

Verses 9 & 10:

Nicodemus' amazement and incredulosity continued in his discussion with Christ, and Christ chided him gently: ***"Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things*** [these spiritual matters and the Divine intent]?"

The ultimate meaning here is that theoretical and literal knowledge do not reflect God's intent and thought.

+ Such is the state of many of us now: we read the holy Bible - we may even teach it - but we do not perceive the spiritual dimensions of the word of God, which understanding can only be possible through humility, the Holy Spirit's guidance, and submission to the Church's guidance.

Verse 11:

Nicodemus remained bewildered, so our Lord resumed His explanation, confirming that His testimony was truthful, and using the uncommon plural pronoun - hence, **"We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness."** Use of the plural pronoun is a clear indication of the Holy Trinity's unity. The Holy Trinity alone can witness for Himself. Through ignorance, the world rejects God and the Holy Trinity's teaching.

Verse 12:

"If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" - The direct meaning is "Given that you do not accept simple matters, how would you perceive more complicated spiritual issues?"

"Earthly things" - This refers to spiritual issues necessary for life on earth, such as baptism (spiritual rebirth). It could also refer to Christ's use of a terrestrial analogy to expound the spiritual intent, when He linked the earthly wind to the Holy Spirit's work in believers' lives.

"If I tell you heavenly things" - This means that there are fundamental and necessary tenets of the Faith, constituting more difficult components for the human mind to absorb; these include Christ's relationship with the Father: **"I and My Father are One"** (Ch. 10:30), Christ's atoning death on the Cross, Christ's resurrection and ascension.....all of which transcend terrestrial comprehension, or tangible concepts.

Verses 13 - 15:

Christ's concluding remarks to Nicodemus encompassed three proclamations concerning His Divinity:

- He was the incarnate God Who descended from heaven, Who would ascend to heaven, and Who resides in heaven simultaneously. This means that during Christ's ministry on earth He never left heaven through His boundless Divinity.

- The Son of Man's crucifixion was inevitable and necessary for fulfillment of redemption. Christ referred to what Moses had done, namely, when he raised the bronze serpent according to God's commandment (see Numbers 21:8 & 9) in order to save the Israelites, who had been bitten by the fiery serpents, from death. That incident symbolized the crucified Christ Whose death saved all who believed on Him.

- There is a link between faith and the salvation offered on the Cross - free of charge. Through His redeeming death on the Cross, Christ opened the door to eternal life for all who believe on Him, as a necessary condition.

+ Thus, salvation became a free gift independent of my worthiness - rather, it depends on the grace of God's love for me. He offered the Cross and redemption as a means for deliverance, plus baptism as the entry point. He granted me life to enjoy living here with Him, to witness for Him, and to struggle to attain that salvation - lest I should lose it. Dear Lord, grant me to "work out Your own salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12)."

3. Belief on Christ the Saviour - verses 16 - 21:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God." (John 3:16 - 21)

Verses 16 - 18:

These two verses repeat the notion previously discussed, namely, belief on Christ is the fundamental condition for salvation; however, these verses add a beautiful spiritual dimension: the Divine economy for salvation is purely due to God's unimaginable, limitless, love for mankind. This love, which surpasses all human comprehension, was such that the Father ***".....did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up....."*** (Romans 8:32) for the salvation of the world. This incarnation, and

redemption, neither aimed to condemn, nor to satisfy Divine justice. It would have been very easy for God to utter a single word condemning His creation. Selflessness and death, in order to justify sinners through Christ's blood, is a much more difficult avenue. Whoever rejects that redemption, and this love of the Father Who did not spare His Son, deserves condemnation.

+ *Dearly beloved, Saints are distinguished by their practical perception of this indescribable love. God's love transcends all human emotions, and is "everlasting" (Jeremiah 31:3). God's love satiates the soul and spirit. The saints perceived that kind of love, and forsook everything for its sake - great indeed is their gain! Are we capable, like them, of perceiving this amazing love? Do our deeds reflect it? We do not need to know that God loved/loves us - rather, we need to fellowship with Him in this eternal love....*

Dearly beloved - here is an important question: What have we forsaken for Christ's love's sake, similarly to those saints??

Verses 19 - 21:

Condemnation awaits all who did not accept that love and that light. St. John tells us why they rejected that light: it was because of their wickedness. Evil people abhor light, because it exposes and rebukes their evil deeds.

These days, many people stray away from God and the Church, despite their knowledge of the truth and Christ; their love of sin is the secret driver behind their decision. A spiritual person's behaviour is quite the opposite: motivated by love, he struggles to satisfy God's commandments. His sole comfort lies in Christ - he derives his strength from the Church, and his deeds testify to God's work in his life.

4. The baptism of repentance - verses 22 - 24:

"After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized. Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized. For John had not yet been thrown into prison." (John 3:22 - 24)

Verse 22:

"After these things" - This phrase is used frequently by St. John to transport the reader from one place to another, or from one discussion or situation to another.

"The land of Judea" - That was the region lying east of Jerusalem's hills on the banks of the Jordan. The previous discussion with Nicodemus took place in Jerusalem.

"And baptized" - Christ's disciples were the ones who baptized not Christ Himself (see Ch. 4:2) - but what the disciples did was attributed to their Teacher. Both Sts. John Chrysostom and Augustine agree that the disciples' baptism at that time was not sacramental, unlike their baptism after they had received the Holy Spirit. The former would have been similar to St. John's - hence, a baptism for repentance only.

Verse 23:

This verse tells us about St. John's proceeding across the Jordan to Aenon, near Salim, due to the abundance of water there. It could be inferred that St. John was motivated by the increasing number of penitents. The need for much water could also lead to the inference that baptism was done by full immersion, rather than by sprinkling. Bible commentators have agreed that Aenon and Salim lay west of the Jordan, close to the Judaeian region where Christ and His disciples had resided.

Verse 24:

It could be inferred from this verse that, prior to John's arrest, his ministry had overlapped with Christ's. St. John took care to mention in his gospel (verse 2) that, in his discussion with Christ, Nicodemus testified to Christ's miracles; reading the other three gospels in isolation could lead the reader to believe that Christ's ministry started after John's arrest. In fact, Christ's ministry in Galilee is the part which started after John's arrest.

5. Christ is above all - verses 25 - 36:

"Then there arose a dispute between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purification. And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He Who was with you beyond the Jordan, to Whom you have testified--behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!" John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent before Him.' He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease. He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He Who comes from heaven is above all. And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true. For He Whom

God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure. The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." (John 3:25 - 36)

Verses 25 & 26:

The Jews believed that John's and Christ's baptisms were means of purification and repentance. Despite the correctness of this understanding, it shows that their frame of mind was still anchored in the Old Testament's Mosaic law, which included articles addressing purification. The debate which had arisen was merely about the increasing number of Christ's followers versus the dwindling number of John's. The Jews incited John's disciples who, in turn, went to John, pointing out that he was losing followers, and demanding that he redeem himself and defend his baptism which preceded Christ's.

John's disciples had forgotten John's earlier testimony about Christ, namely, that he was unworthy to untie Christ's sandal's straps, (Ch. 1:27) and that Christ was the Son of God (Ch. 1:34). Put differently, they were blinded by their significant emotional attachment to John and they fell into the snare of envying Christ for the spread of His ministry.

+ *Sometimes we fall into the same trap: we may be biased by our love for, and attachment to, some people, to the extent that we fail to perceive the truth. Thus, we follow them in all respects, even unto ignoring Christ's commandments. Would we not be committing the same error as John's disciples??*

Verses 27 - 30:

In these verses, John's response to his disciples' misguided zeal, was calm and measured; he summarized his ministry as follows:

a- he could neither receive anything, nor claim truths, unless that were granted from heaven (verse 27),

b- he reminded his disciples of what he had previously said, namely, that he was not Christ, rather, he was Christ's forerunner to prepare people's souls,

c- there is a great difference between the Groom - the Creator - Who has the bride (believers' souls), and the Groom's friend who is simply proud of being the Groom's friend, his joy is thus complete (verse 29) since the Church is Christ's Church, and

d- John reaffirms this difference by saying that "**He,**" hence "Christ," and His kingdom must naturally increase, since He alone is the

vine's owner; John, on the other hand must decrease and fade in order to offer his disciples to the true Groom - Christ. This akin to saying "The sun's rays overwhelm all lamps."

+ *Blessed are you, O Baptist! You merit being designated as the greatest prophet ever born! Blessed are you in your humility and in your clear understanding of all issues - you did not attempt to rob God's glory and claim it, and you took nothing that was not handed to you. May we learn from you that we are not worthy of honour, rather, we are mere servants and slaves - we attribute all glory and honour to God and to God alone - our joy in Him Who saved us would this be fulfilled just like yours.*

Verse 31:

The Baptist continues his discussion, accentuating the difference between our Lord Christ and any other terrestrial being - even including John himself. The depth of knowledge, regardless of its extent, of any terrestrial being, is bound to be incomplete and deficient - since it is terrestrial, lacking heaven's revelation of its mysteries. That person's best efforts can only yield earthly, flawed, insufficient to understand or express celestial matters. On the other hand, our Lord Christ is the only One **"Who comes from above;"** hence, He comes from the Father. That is the reason for His being **"above all"** since He stems from the Father, not only from heaven.

Verse 32:

The intent here is that Christ's testimony is the truth which He proclaims and teaches. The expression **"what He has seen and heard"** is the Holy Spirit's use of human terms in order to facilitate our understanding. Testimony to the truth that humans can understand is through both "hearing" and "seeing." That is another way of emphasizing the truthfulness of Christ's testimony, even if humans rejected it. The phrase **"no one receives His testimony"** foretells the rejection of Christ's teaching and redemption, by the scribes and Pharisees, many others who followed, and the Council of the Seventy.

Verses 33 & 34:

This means that, due to Christ's testimony and its truthfulness, he believes and proclaims that God is truthful, since Christ is God, since Christ is the Word of God, since Christ proclaims to the world His Father's words, and since Christ is from the Father and can only say His Father's words. The expression **"God does not give the Spirit by measure"** indicates that the Holy Spirit was granted to all the prophets in accordance with the tolerance level of each person, and in accordance with prevailing

circumstances. On the other hand, in Christ's case, the Holy Spirit is not given **"by measure,"** rather, in the fullness of the Spirit. Put differently, since Christ is God, He did not acquire a **"measure"** of the Holy Spirit - since the Holy Spirit fills Him completely. Also, the Holy Spirit is completely filled with the Son's wisdom. That is another dimension added by the Baptist in his testimony about Christ, distinguishing Him from the rest of His creation.

Verse 35:

"The Father loves the Son" - This is another mystery that John the Baptist revealed, concerning the relationship between the three Persons of the Holy Trinity - hence, "love" is the language of the Holy Trinity.

This verse also provides an indirect clarification, and proof, of the Divinity of our Lord Christ. God said, **"My glory I will not give to another"** (Isaiah 42:8) However, God gave all His glory to the Son: **"The Father....has given all things into His [the Son's] hand."** This is because the Son is consubstantial with the Father, all that is the Father's is the Son's, and all that is the Son's is the Father's.

Verse 36:

St. John concludes this chapter with what he had desired to emphasize (see verses 15, 16 and 18) - namely, there can be no salvation without belief on our Lord Jesus Christ. This verse indeed is the key and summation of the entire chapter.



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Chapter 4

the Samaritan woman - Christ's ministry in Galilee

1. Christ's visit to Samaria - verses 1 - 6:

"Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John (though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples), He left Judea and departed again to Galilee. But He needed to go through Samaria. So He came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour." (John 4:1 - 6)

Samaria:

During the reign of Rehoboam, Solomon's successor, the Israelite kingdom was split into two kingdoms: the northern kingdom, Israel or Samaria, and the southern kingdom, Judah or Judaea. Samaria lay south of Galilee and had a surface area of around four thousand square kilometres. Significant enmity lay between the two kingdoms. The Samaritans chose Jeroboam to be their king. Fearing that his people proceed to worship in Jerusalem, which lay in the southern kingdom, Jeroboam erected for them idols, encouraging them to offer sacrifices in the south - to those idols. Citizens of both kingdoms thus despised each other. Jews travelling to Galilee risked aggression by Samaritans.

Introduction:

Verses 1 - 6 are considered an introduction to the entire chapter, which narrates Christ's encounter with the Samaritan woman. St. John meticulously clarified the circumstances surrounding that significant encounter - as will be elaborated in the paragraphs below.

Verses 1 - 4:

Problems and baseless debates, about John's versus Christ's baptisms (see Chapter 3), prompted our Lord's departure from Judaea.

+ *Our Lord Christ teaches us an important spiritual lesson: we should avoid, nay flee, pointless debates - they constitute wasted time and effort, leading to needless loss of inner peace.*

"But He needed to go through Samaria" - This statement conveys two meanings: the first, simple, meaning, is purely geographic, since Samaria lay on the way to Galilee. The second, more profound, meaning, is spiritual: it points to the Lord's "toil" towards the Samaritan woman's salvation - thus, He had to go through Samaria in order to meet with, and talk to, her.

+ *Dear Lord, Your economy for my salvation is indeed amazing!*

Verses 5 & 6:

"Sychar," a town not far from the better-known Shechem, was the site of "Jacob's well" - that was the well that Jacob had dug to water his flock; the name also confirmed his ownership of that land, which he had subsequently granted to Joseph - setting him apart from his brothers. These verses also confirm the Samaritans' ancestry back to Jacob.

"Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey...." - This clause was the object of much meditation by our Church's forefathers....Behold, our God Who was incarnate, and led a human life, experienced pain and fatigue like any human being. Thus, we should have no excuse for toiling in the service of others. Our Lord walked a distance of about 60 kilometres, enduring the heat and the road's perils - in order to save a single soul!!

This event is perfectly consistent with the events on the Cross: our Lord suffered and thirsted - also at the sixth hour! The aim was salvation: for the Samaritan woman as well as for mankind in its entirety! In both cases, the disciples had left Christ by Himself (see verse 8 below).

We may wonder, whether that was pure coincidence, or a clear prophetic pointer to the events on the Cross?? It should also be noted that the Samaritan woman went to the well at the sixth hour when, most likely, very few women would be around to reproach her of her sinful lifestyle. Christ, on the other hand, loved her, and sought to talk to her!!

2. Christ's encounter with the Samaritan woman - verses 7 - 15:

"A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, "How is it that You,

being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." The woman said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?" Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw."" (John 4:7 - 15)



Christ's encounter with the Samaritan woman

Verses 7 - 9:

Our Lord sent His disciples to buy food, since He had predestined His solitary encounter with the Samaritan woman; this teaches us that in addition to serving the multitude, care for individual souls is equally important. Furthermore, this underscores the significance of individual confessions (hence, the sacrament of penance).

Christ asked the Samaritan woman to give Him water to drink, although He was "***.....the fountain of living waters.....***" (Jeremiah 2:13) and, "***...the fountain of the water of life.....***" (Revelation 21:6)

Christ was sitting by the well, as though He really needed to drink - that was to win her heart humbly.

+ *Humility will facilitate winning other people's hearts, while delivering God's message to them.*

The Samaritan woman's response reminds us of Christ's discussion with Nicodemus (see Chapter 3). A person will normally talk about tangible material. However, Christ talks about a more profound spiritual dimension. The Samaritan woman's response was confined to existing enmity between Jews and Samaritans; she responded negatively to steer the conversation away from her own sins.

Verses 10 - 14:

"If you knew the gift of God" - Here, Christ is not only addressing the Samaritan woman, but also every other soul; it is Christ Who wills, and Who leads the conversation.

+ *Unfortunately, we fail to appreciate the full implications of this great gift - otherwise our lives would be quite different. We continue to seek the world's water, materialism and desires - despite the fact that we know we can never be satiated by it. We ignore the rich and true source which satisfies all thirst, as well as all spiritual and physical needs. Indeed, it is God Who desires to give you everything; whoever accepts God's gift transcends above the world, and will never thirst. God's gift does not only satisfy a person's needs, but that person also becomes a source satisfying others' needs - it is akin to a flowing stream of water satisfying everyone's thirst. This is the source of the spiritual richness we have witnessed in all past and contemporary saints; amazingly, the Holy Spirit's indwelling a person is permanent - lasting unto eternity.*

Regrettably, the meaning of our Lord's words continued to evade the Samaritan woman's understanding; she alternated between her surprise at Christ's access to water - given that He had no bucket (see verse 11) - and her desire to access that water in a physical sense, such that she would not need to travel to the well anymore. She even went further, and mocked Christ, saying that He was not any better than Jacob and his sons who had drunk from that well - could Christ possibly find a better well??

Verse 15:

This verse takes us back to the beginning of the encounter: namely, human nature which consistently fails to appreciate God's gift, of the Holy Spirit indwelling us.

3. **Christ reveals Himself to the Samaritan woman - verses 16 - 26:**
"Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have well said, 'I have no husband,' for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly." The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When He comes, He will tell us all things." Jesus said to her, "I Who speak to you am He."" (John 4:16 - 26)

Verses 16 - 19:

Christ initially spoke to her in spiritual terms, leading her to seek the living water. Subsequently, He revealed Himself to her directly - but in a way that she could absorb. So He told her to bring her husband, if she really sought that living water. She responded with only half the reality, namely, she had no legal husband at that point - she did not openly say that she was living with a man to whom she had not been legally wed. Christ shocked her by revealing that He knew all her past and present deeds. By saying **"Sir,"** she indicated her first spark of faith; initially she had refused to talk to Him, being a Jew, then she mocked Him saying **"Are You greater than our father Jacob"** now, she testified He was **"a prophet."**

+ *My dear friend, there is something that we should learn from our Beloved Saviour, through His previous interaction with the Samaritan woman. We note His amazing tenderness in approaching that wretched, sinful, soul; He was fully aware of her state of sinfulness - yet He praised her twice: once before revealing His knowledge of her sin, hence, "You have well said," and the second time when He said, "In that you spoke truly." Throughout His extremely tender discussion, Christ never hesitated to proclaim the truth, inducing that woman's repentance. May this be a lesson for us all: God, the Just Judge, did not condemn her - rather, He revealed her sin for the purpose of her repentance, not her perdition. Let us deal with sinners with the same degree of tenderness - given that we, too, are sinners, and subject to condemnation. Let us, therefore, praise each glimmer of light in anyone, before instructing them.*

Verses 20 - 24:

Upon realizing that our Lord was not an ordinary person - a Prophet - the Samaritan woman switched her conversation to another issue, namely, the religious differences between Jews and Samaritans, with each side claiming the incorrectness of the other. It would seem that, having established the distinguished nature of Christ, she forgot about the issue of water, and focused on her soul's salvation. Consequently our Lord, perceiving her readiness, started talking to her about the correct understanding of worship, namely, worship is independent of location, rather, it is a function of how we worship - since physical worship divorced from the spirit is unacceptable to God.

"Those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" - This means "worshipping in supplication, while sensing God's presence." God neither accepts purely physical, nor frequent, worship, if decoupled from the spirit - this could mislead a person aiming for spiritual growth. Despite this declaration about worshipping God in any place, Christ accentuated that the Jewish faith was the fundamentally sound one - not the Samaritan's - and that the awaited salvation would stem from the Jews (see verse 22).

"But the hour is coming, and now is" - This is a clear reference to the advent of the awaited Messiah, the demise of both Jewish and Samaritan worships, and the transition to the true spiritual worship. It should also be noted that Christ corrected - but did not annul - the format of acceptable worship. Worship is an obligation towards God; it is an offering of love, respect, supplication, and heartfelt feelings, reflecting a person's sensitization to God's presence. The Church teaches her children how to worship, both as a congregation - hence during celebration of Divine Liturgy - and as individuals in solitary prayers.

Verses 25 & 26:

The woman resumed her spiritual discussion. She mentioned the awaited Messiah Who knows/knew everything. At the point when she expressed her hope in the awaited Messiah - which was the Jews' and Samaritans' hope - Christ revealed Himself to her: ***"I Who speak to you am He."***

+ *Christ is the sole Person capable of eliminating all barriers and enmities - all become united in Him. Many problems and disputes - especially marital ones - evade any solution due to insistence of both parties on eliminating Christ from their lives. However, if Christ entered, there would be no "Samaria and Judaea." Rather, there would be humility and submission, acknowledgement of the Lord's presence, and obedience to the Lord's will. Dear Lord, may You be present in every home.*

4. **The Samaritan woman evangelizes - verses 27 - 30:**

"And at this point His disciples came, and they marveled that He talked with a woman; yet no one said, "What do You seek?" or, "Why are You talking with her?" The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men, "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" Then they went out of the city and came to Him." (John 4:27 - 30)

Verse 27:

Why were the disciples amazed? They were amazed because Jewish custom in those days was such that a man would not talk to a woman publicly, even if she were his wife. They had failed to appreciate Christ's care to preach and save souls.

"Yet no one said" - This indicates the disciples' respect for their Teacher - that was one of the Christian principles which Christ mentioned: ***"A disciple is not above his teacher"*** (Matthew 10:24) and ***"A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher."*** (Luke 6:40)

+ *Our Church applies this instruction in what is labelled "the life of discipleship." This requires a sincerely humble heart before the Church's teachers - priests and other servants.*

Verses 28 - 30:

The Samaritan woman believed. She expressed her belief positively by hastening to evangelize throughout her village. She used the word ***"could"*** merely to emphasize her enthusiasm, and motivate people to go and see for themselves.

"The woman then left her waterpot" - This is an indication that a soul which accepts Christ feels motivated to spread the news over and above any other task - including love of money or love of stature....

5. **The significance of service - verses 31 - 38:**

"In the meantime His disciples urged Him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." But He said to them, "I have food to eat of which you do not know." Therefore the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought Him anything to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work. Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for

eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this the saying is true: 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors.'" (John 4:31 - 38)

Verses 31 - 33:

Here, again, is a discussion about food; the disciples followed the same train of thought of the Samaritan woman. Our Lord Christ was speaking of spiritual food "***which you do not know.***" But the disciples thought that Christ had had something to eat. Of course, being a perfect human like us, means that Christ needed to eat; however, it was a matter of priorities: thirsting to save a human soul has a higher priority.

Verses 34 & 35:

Despite Christ's extreme fatigue after His arduous journey, and His physical need for food and water, He considered that His real food consisted of fulfilling His Father's will for mankind's salvation, and completing His redeeming work on the Cross - indeed, that constituted His heart's desire. Thus, He offered further proof of His love and desire to save the human soul.

Christ then shifted to a physical reality - hence, "***lift up your eyes and look at the fields***" - although the harvest season was still four months away, a different type of harvest was at hand. After the Samaritan woman's witnessing, all the Sychar villagers had come out filling the surrounding fields - Christ considered that to be a spiritual harvest, ready for reaping by Faith's sickle.

Verses 36 - 38:

God is fair - He will never forget man's toil. Whoever gathers souls for the kingdom of God, will be rewarded on earth and in heaven with joy, and fellowship with all who had preceded him. Christ, in all faithfulness, will remember the labour of all who had toiled to prepare that harvest - even though, He is/was the true sower, nurturing growth of His word.

However, in this instance, Christ was referring to the labour of Old Testament prophets, and their toil in preparing the nation over a four thousand-year period. It was also a lesson for the disciples to maintain their humility, given that what they would harvest as fruit of their evangelizing, would be the result of others' labour. It should be noted that, in this context, it is impossible to differentiate between sower and harvester. Whoever reaps today what yesterday's sower had sowed, will be sowing today for tomorrow's harvesters. That is what our Lord meant

in Verse 37, using a well-known Jewish analogy: it is not imperative for the servant to see the fruit of his service, since Christ Himself, despite His redemption and painstaking service, ascended before the fruits of Christianity had ripened.

+ *Dearly beloved, do you not feel tempted to join the celebrations? The celebrations of service's labour.....the celebrations of harvest.....the celebrations of calling others to the kingdom of God....you will then be a sower and harvester with a heavenly reward....blessed are you indeed, if such is your intent.*

6. The Samaritans' belief - verses 39 - 42:

"And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all that I ever did." So when the Samaritans had come to Him, they urged Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. And many more believed because of His own word. Then they said to the woman, "Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world."" (John 4:39 - 42)

These verses expound the manner in which the Samaritans believed - setting the example for all would-be believers. First, a person needs someone to talk to him about, and witness for, Christ - such is the task of a servant, represented by the Samaritan woman. The next step is direct communication between that person and Christ in His Church. Finally, the person nurtures his spiritual growth - not through others' witnessing or experience, rather, through his own lifestyle and spiritual devotions.

It should be noted that our Lord Christ did not reject the Samaritans' invitation to spend some time with them - regardless of their degenerate lifestyle or misguided worship. Consequently, Christ will not reject an invitation from any of His children - He waits outside the door, knocking,,,,

+ *Dearly beloved, arise, open your heart for His words, and open your mouth to receive His holy body and blood; He will come in, and abide with you - He will not leave you, as long as you do not leave Him. We thus see that the faith was established and grew only within two days; the depth of faith needs a strong will and a struggle, rather than any length of time.*

7. Christ's ministry's debut in Galilee - verses 43 - 54:

"Now after the two days He departed from there and went to Galilee. For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country. So when He came to Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things He did in Jerusalem at the feast; for they

also had gone to the feast. So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe." The nobleman said to Him, "Sir, come down before my child dies!" Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your son lives." So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way. And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, "Your son lives!" Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better. And they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." So the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, "Your son lives." And he himself believed, and his whole household. This again is the second sign Jesus did when He had come out of Judea into Galilee." (John 4:43 - 54)

Verses 43 - 45:

After His pause in Samaria, our Lord resumed His journey towards Galilee; He did not stay in Nazareth, the site of His early years, and the town which had rejected His ministry - hence, **"For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country."** The Galileans, on the other hand, welcomed Christ - they had seen Him during their visit to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast....

Verses 46 - 49:

"A certain nobleman" - Most likely he was in the service of Herod Antipas, who had been appointed by the Romans to govern Galilee - the Jews labelled him "king." The distance covered by that nobleman - Capernaum to Galilee - was around 25 kilometres; this indicates how keen he was to have his son cured, hence, knocking on all possible doors.

+ Our Lord's response (verse 48) merits some contemplation; Christ directs our thinking towards the true faith, which does not require any miracles to prove - it is more profound than any miracle, and is in no need of material proof.

Verse 50:

However, Christ did not disappoint the man - since it is Christ Who said, **"....the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out."** (John 6:37) Thus, Christ's response bore the Divine authority to heal - and even to raise from the dead. The man believed on the power of Christ's word, and did not insist on His accompanying him to Capernaum.

Verses 51 - 54:

The fulfillment of the miracle is proclaimed herein - hence, the moment the boy was cured, was precisely the moment when Christ had pronounced His word.

"The second sign" - This indicates that the first miracle (sign) was that of turning the water to wine in Cana of Galilee.

+ Dear reader, faith is the focal point of the miracle mentioned above. The nobleman's faith and hope had motivated him to travel 25 kilometres to meet our Lord, and to ask Him to cure his son. His confidence in Christ's authority earned him his son's cure.



*"Interpretation of the holy Bible - the New Testament"
taken from the series: "Patristic expositions and meditations"*

*An exegetical study of
the Gospel according to St. John*

Chapter 5

the sick man of Bethesda - Christ's authority

1. The pool of Bethesda - verses 1 - 4:

"After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had." (John 5:1 - 4)

Verse 1:

"After this" - This means "after the miracle of healing the nobleman's son." Our Lord went up to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast for the second time. The name of the feast was not mentioned, since Christ's focus was on preaching and saving souls. Furthermore, that was not yet the time of the Passover Feast when Christ would offer Himself on the Cross.

Verses 2 - 4:

"The sheep gate" - That was the closest gate to the temple. It was the gate used to bring sacrifices for slaughter.

"Bethesda" - That was a pool measuring about 110, 40 and 20 metres in length, breadth and depth respectively. The Hebrew name for ***"Bethesda"*** means ***"house of mercy"*** or ***"house of grace."*** Columns on the pool's sides designated five porches or five waiting areas, for visitors waiting to be healed, when an angel stirred the water.

In the Old Testament, the pool offered temporary physical cure; however, in the New Testament, permanent cure for body and soul are acquired through the sacrament of baptism.

2. Healing the sick man of Bethesda - verses 5 - 9:

"Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, "Do you want to be

made well?" The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me." Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath. (John 5:5 - 9)



The pool of Bethesda

Verses 5 - 8:

This miracle was mentioned not merely to narrate how the afflicted man was cured, but, more significantly, to accentuate Christ's unsurpassable power. For this reason, St. John took care to mention the duration of that person's infirmity - thus, highlighting further, Christ's outreach to humanity with His mercies.

In this miracle we note the following:

- a- Christ is the One Who spotted the afflicted man, and started talking to him; God is consistently the initiator, Who searches for all the wretched souls, never forgetting anyone.
- b- Although it was Christ Who initiated the discussion, desiring salvation for all, the grace of salvation does require a person's will to save his own soul. For this reason, Christ asked the man what appeared to be a strange question: ***"Do you want to be made well?"***
- c- God's unlimited mercy and power can crush all barriers of hopelessness. Although the man had been bed-ridden for 38 years, Christ ordered him: ***"Rise, take up your bed and walk."*** The man was cured instantly.

Verse 9:

The word "***immediately***" reflects the miracle's power and Christ's authority on earth. In order for the man to rise and walk away carrying his bed, without any supplementary medical care, simply accentuates the power of the hand of God.

+ *My Beloved God, You sought after the afflicted bed-ridden man; however, I am still shackled by my sins - I desire to be made whole, but my will is weak. Come to me, Dearly Beloved, and say a single word to strengthen my will, and to enable me to cast away all the years of laziness and weakness, abandoning my despair and clinging to my hope in You.*

3. Identifying Christ - verses 10 - 15:

"The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, "It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed." He answered them, "He who made me well said to me, 'Take up your bed and walk.'" Then they asked him, "Who is the Man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk'?" But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being in that place. Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you." The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well." (John 5:10 - 15)

Verses 10 - 12:

The prophet Jeremiah said: ***"Hear this now, O foolish people, without understanding, who have eyes and see not, and who have ears and hear not...."*** (Jeremiah 5:21)

St. Cyril the Great said that this verse applies to the Jews vis-a-vis that miracle....They ignored the power of the Healer, as well as the Divine act of mercy - rather, they clung to the letter of the commandment, devoid of the Spirit of God.

+ *Dearly beloved, similarly, in our obstinacy, we fail to perceive God's good will. Dear God, may You open our eyes, hearts and perception, so that we may understand and appreciate your deeds and wisdom, and abandon our wickedness and condemnation of others.*

Verse 13:

Our Lord did not habitually reveal Himself. He rejected men's praise.

+ *Let us also learn from our Lord to be humble, and not to be boastful before others; let us not seek men's praise, remembering that our God Who sees in secret will reward us openly.*

Verse 14:

The man encountered Christ a second time in the temple. In his dialogue with Christ, we note the following:

- a- His disease was the result of previous sins. "***Sin no more***" means "Do not sin a second time." Christ, through His Divinity, knew about that sin.
- b- It is up to us to remember, at all times, God's work for us and His favours - inducing us to thank Him. More importantly, we should never forget and fall back into what we had abandoned.
- c- A person who repeatedly ignores God's bounties, exposes himself to more severe penalties, and will incur a harsher punishment.

Verse 15:

The man told the Jews that it was Jesus Who had healed him, fearing that they might blame him for carrying the bed - they could have killed him according to Mosaic law. This could indicate a weakness in the man's faith, since he seemed to adhere more to the Jews' teaching rather than to Christ's.

4. The Son's Divinity - verse 16 - 23:

"For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God. Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will. For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him."" (John 5:16 - 23)

Verses 16 - 18:

In these verses St. John accentuates the extent of the Jews' hatred of Christ - hence, they sought to kill Him. That intense hatred was motivated by two factors: Christ broke the Sabbath (the Jews ignored the significant miracle), and the way Christ referred to God as His Father. On the other hand, Christ changed God's fatherhood to all; Christ focused on the

Father's natural fatherhood to the Son, and to the Son only - thus He equated Himself to the Father in essence, and to the continuity of Their identical work. Put differently, the Jews understood perfectly Christ's intent, but they rejected Him, accused Him of blasphemy, and sought to kill Him.

Verse 17:

"My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." In this verse, Christ clarifies to the Jews that the Father works even on the Sabbath, never pausing in shepherding His flock. Consequently the Son, being One in essence with the Father, shares the Father's work.

+ *Given that such is God's modus operandi, it is incumbent on us to serve God and His creation unceasingly every day. Consequently the meaning of "Sabbath" would shift from a literal application, to its spiritual intent.*

Verses 19 & 20:

In His response to the Jews, Christ gradually takes us into a profound theological domain, clarifying the mystery of the oneness of Father and Son in essence; thus Christ proved His Divinity as follows:

a- The oneness of will:

The Son's will cannot be different from the Father's, since They are One in essence.

b- Inseparability:

The Son appeared in the flesh - but through the Divine essence, He was in constant communication with the Father, observing everything He did - since They are One.

c- The oneness of capability:

Everything that the Father does, can also be done by the Son - He is not inferior to the Father in any aspect, since They are One and inseparable.

d- The oneness of love:

The Father's love for the Son is infinite. Hence, the Son knows all the Father's mysteries, work and intentions - this provides further proof of the Son's Divinity.

"He will show Him greater works than these" - Christ foretold future wonders and miracles. These will be addressed in subsequent verses and chapters. It should be noted that, despite the Jews' amazement, they failed to believe.

+ *Dearly Beloved God and Saviour, You have always been One with the Father in His perfect love, will and inseparability. We, Your congregation, yearn to submit, with all our hearts and minds, to Your voice throughout our lives. Dear God, grant us to be one with You, to abandon everything, and follow You with all our hearts.*

Verses 21 & 22:

Here is yet another direct proof of Christ's Divinity in His power, equal to the Father's, in raising the dead; such a feat is beyond the capability of any human.

"The Son gives life to whom He will" - In this statement, Christ was referring to Himself; He thus distinguished Himself from prophets, such as Elijah and Elisha, who did raise people from the dead, but only after prayers to God. Christ alone, on the other hand, has His own Divine power and will. Christ, being the Judge, thus offers another proof of His Divinity; this attribute is uniquely God's - He Who knows men's thoughts deeds.

Verse 23:

Here is another proof of Christ's Divinity: He equated honouring the Father with honouring the Son. The Father and Son are thus equal in glorification, worship and Divinity. It should be noted that honouring God, and God's honour, transcend, by far, any honour due to any human being.

5. The Son's authority - verses 24 - 30:

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth--those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me." (John 5:24 - 30)

Verse 24:

Once more, our Lord confirms oneness of the Father and Son: in listening to the Son, and belief on God the Father. The Son's words are the commandments of God the Father. There can be no eternal life for anyone failing to believe on God the Father, and failing to obey God the Son - such a person cannot escape condemnation. Conversely, a transition from spiritual death to life in Christ awaits those who believe and obey the commandments - hence, belief, repentance and obedience.

+ *My dear brother, God's love has led Him to prepare eternal life for you; let us submit to His commandment, enjoy peace in this life, and eternal life in heaven.*

Verse 25:

"The hour is coming, and now is" - Our Lord used the word **"now"** as a prelude to verse 28. The word **"now"** means "spiritual resurrection through repentance" to all who heed the word of the Son of God. Those who reject repentance and ignore Christ's calling will die in their sins and are destined for eternal perdition. This verse reminds us of what Divine inspiration had said in the Old Testament through Isaiah the prophet: **"Thus says the Lord: "In an acceptable time I have heard You, and in the day of salvation I have helped You.....""** (Isaiah 49:8)

The New Testament emphasizes that the time for repentance is now - not tomorrow - it must never be postponed. St. Paul thus says: **"For He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."** (2 Corinthians 6:2)

+ Since God has opened His merciful arms to accept you through repentance and confession, why would you not approach Him - why would you choose death, rather than life, by responding to Christ's calling??

Verse 26:

This verse presents new proof of Christ's Divinity, namely, the attribute **"to have life in Himself."** He was not created - that characteristic belongs to God alone. God alone is the source of life, and He is the sole granter of life. Since the Son is God, He also has this attribute. Thus:

a- The Son is not created.

b- The Son has the same authority, as the Father, to grant life to whoever He desires. The Son is the source of life as St. John said, **"In Him was life."** (John 1:4)

Verse 27:

The Divine Being granted the Son the right to judge - which is also the Father's right (verse 22), and the Holy Spirit's right (see also Chapter 16:8). This is because Divine nature is one in essence. The right to judge was given to the Son Who, through His incarnation, led a human lifestyle, suffered, and was tempted in all aspects of life except sin. Divine justice and mercy, alone, rendered the incarnate Christ a Judge for all mankind. He is the Judge, and He is also our Mediator, defending us through His redemption, and rules for our innocence.

Verses 28 & 29:

"Do not marvel at this" - This means "do not be amazed at what I said earlier and what I will say." Christ is fully aware of the human mind's difficulties in absorbing Divine truths.

However, the time to which our Lord is referring, is His Second Coming and judgment day, when everyone - righteous and wicked - will hear His voice; they will then proceed either to eternal life or eternal perdition.

+ Dear reader, you should not ignore the very significant clarity of this verse, hence, the reward or condemnation awaiting each person in accordance with their deeds - good or evil - throughout their lives. Thus, we marvel at those who teach that deeds and judgment are unrelated (see also Matthew 25:31 - 46).

Dear God, may I seize the opportunity throughout my life to do good, as You did (see Acts 10:38), rather than wasting my time fruitlessly.

Dear God, may my heart never be devoid of the thought of judgement day, so that I consistently yearn eternity, thus strengthening my weak will.

Verse 30:

Our Lord repeats what He had said in verse 19, concerning the oneness of will and deed between Father and Son - separation can never exist even for a moment. Consequently, everything the Son does constitutes the will of the Father, thus confirming perfect congruence between them. Thus, in this context, "***I can....do nothing***" means "I have no desire to do....." Similarly, "***As I hear,***" as given in verse 19, means that the Son does what the Father does. This confirms the previously expounded meaning, namely, the inseparability of Father and Son.

6. Witnessing for the Son - verses 31 - 40:

"If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true. There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which He witnesses of Me is true. You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. Yet I do not receive testimony from man, but I say these things that you may be saved. He was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light. But I have a greater witness than John's; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish--the very works that I do--bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me. And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form. But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe. You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life." (John 5:31 - 40)

Verses 31 - 35:

These verses address the Father's witness for the Son, as well as John the Baptist's witness. Our Lord proclaimed the purpose of this testimony. Our Lord does/did not need this testimony - but He mentioned it for the sake of the Jews' salvation (verse 34).

Verses 31 & 32:

Christ starts His discourse here, fully aware of the Jews' train of thought, and of their law, which stipulated that a man's witness of himself is invalid. That was a prelude to introducing the ultimate Witness, namely, God the Father Himself ("***There is another Witness....***") It is well-known that the power and worth of a testimony depends on the witness's stature. For this reason, our Lord offered the Father's indisputable testimony, although the Son's testimony about Himself is also perfectly true (Chapter 8:14).

Verses 33 & 34:

Christ switches over to John the Baptist's testimony - a well-respected, second, witness among the Jews; in fact the Jews had hastened to question him. John had responded that Christ is the Truth. Not accepting Christ on the basis of John's testimony does not mean rejecting his testimony, rather, it is implicit reference to Christ's Divinity. Despite the distinguished witness, it is unacceptable for God's truth to rely on human testimony. Our Lord merely added John's testimony to the Father's in order for the Jews to believe. Belief on Christ is the first condition for salvation; Christ's sole desire is the salvation of souls.

Verse 35:

Our Lord testified that John the Baptist "***....was the burning and shining lamp...***" - after having said that he was the greatest one ever born to women. Christ made this statement for two reasons: He gives each person his dues, never forgetting anyone's labour, and He reproached the Jews for having followed John for only six months and, after his imprisonment, they returned to their old ways.

+ *Dear Lord and God, the Baptist was faithful in his mission, he witnessed and was martyred for the Divine truth. He was praised by Your all-holy lips. Dear Lord, grant me the Baptist's spirit and some of his power, so that I may witness for You through my deeds, as he did with words and deeds. Then I would become a shining lamp for the world, to fulfill Your righteous will in my life.*

Verse 36:

Our Lord offered a third testimony, greater than any person's and more readily believable, namely, the miracles He had wrought such as healing the sick, opening the blinds' eyes and raising the dead.

The greatness, number, power and variety of those wonders testified to Christ's Divinity, and had never before been done or witnessed by anyone.

"The works which the Father has given Me to finish" - This means that the Son executes the Father's will, as mentioned in Chapter 1:18, ***"No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him."*** (John 1:18)

Verses 37 - 40:

The Father Himself witnessed for the Son, through Old Testament prophecies and the law's symbolisms. The words of the Father represent His voice and Being. Nevertheless, the Jews strayed and, instead of accepting eternal life, they rejected it by rejecting the Person of Christ.

7. Reasons for unbelief - verses 41 - 47:

"I do not receive honor from men. But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you. I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive. How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God? Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you--Moses, in whom you trust. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"

(John 5:41 - 47)

Verse 41:

Christ had rejected people's testimony for Him; instead, He offered other testimonies uninfluenced by any human input. Similarly, Christ also rejects any praise/glory offered by humans. Rather, He focuses on attracting people to believe on Him and, consequently, saving their souls.

Verses 42 & 43:

The disappearance of God's love from the Jews' hearts was the primary cause of their rejecting Christ. Without the love of God, man would be incapable of knowing the Son. The Jews rejected Christ, although He came in the name of the Father, Whom they claimed to have loved. Our Lord found the Jews' reaction to be truly amazing: they accepted false teachers, seeking their own glorification and testifying for their own selves!!

Verse 44:

The second reason for the Jews' rejection was their perversion, coupled with their quest for worldly glory, instead of the glory bestowed by God on His humble children. The sin of vainglory steers the heart away from God

resulting in that person rejecting God, and becoming self-centered. The truth is therefore quite plain: we either seek worldly glorification instead of God's, or seek God's exaltation at the expense of our own pride.

+ *My God and Saviour - You have humbled Yourself, and you did not seek Your own glorification, even though You are the source of all glory. I, the wretch, am still seeking worldly praise; Dear God, help me renounce this miserable self which impedes my enjoyment of Your perfect love, growth in Your knowledge, and knowledge of all Your mysteries.*

Verses 45 - 47:

Moses the prophet, whom you believe is your mediator before God is, in fact, your accuser. Everything that Moses wrote points to Christ. Rejecting Christ means rejecting Mosaic law. If the Jews failed to believe their greatest prophet, how would they believe on Christ??



*"Interpretation of the holy Bible - the New Testament"
taken from the series: "Patristic expositions and meditations"*

*An exegetical study of
the Gospel according to St. John*

Chapter 6

***feeding the multitude - walking on water - the sacrament of
communing from the holy body and blood of Christ***

1. The miracle of feeding the multitude - verses 1 - 15:

"After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. Then a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased. And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples. Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near. Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do. Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little." One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?" Then Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted. So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost." Therefore they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world." Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone." (John 6:1 - 15)

Verses 1 - 3:

"After these things" - This means "after what had transpired in Jerusalem." Christ proceeded towards Galilee, and crossed the lake (sea) from west to east.

"Tiberias" - This was a town founded by Herod Antipas in 18 A.D. named after the Roman emperor Tiberius. The multitude followed Christ, having been motivated by the countless miracles He had performed. He went up a hill, accompanied by His disciples, and the multitudes followed Him.

Verse 4:

St. John deliberately states that **"the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near."** That is because the discussion in this chapter will cover physical satiation of the multitude on the one hand, and spiritual salvational satiation of mankind, through the body of Christ - the bread of life - on the other. St. John intended to prepare our minds for the salvational satiation: **"For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us."** (1 Corinthians 5:7)

Verses 5 - 7:

Philip represents the typical logical mode of thinking. It was Christ Who had called him - Philip had not gone to Christ of his own volition (see Ch.1:43). It was also Philip who had interrupted Christ saying, **"Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us."** (John 14:8) For this reason, Christ addressed him in particular not only to test his faith, but also to have him witness that faith surpasses material considerations and human intellect. Due to Philip's naturally limited, typical, human reasoning, he failed to offer a solution to our Lord's question, namely, where they should buy bread - he even complicated matters by wondering how much that would cost! Put differently, assuming they could find a place to buy bread, where would they obtain the money to buy it??

+ *In many instances, due to its limited scope, the human brain impedes God's work in our life; let not your brain hinder a life of faith. Rather, make your brain receptive to, and thankful for, God's work in your life. From thence, meditate on God's work in your life.*

Verses 8 - 9:

"There is a lad here who has five barley loaves....." - St. John draws our attention to a significant aspect, namely, God's work with paucity. Hence, the solution to the problem came through a young boy, rather than a rich executive. Furthermore, barley, as opposed to wheat, was usually the poor man's, rather than the rich man's, food.

+ *Consequently, we should neither belittle scarcity, nor extol abundance; we should only boast in our Lord, Who is capable of transforming paucity into abundance. Such should be our faith: surrender the little we have to God, and let Him transform it into plenty.*

Verses 10 & 11:



Christ fed the multitude

"Make the people sit down" - Christ delegated this organizational issue to His disciples. This facilitated food distribution. Furthermore, organization is a Christian behavioural virtue to which God alerts us - hence, **"Let all things be done decently and in order."** (1 Corinthians 14:40) As St. Matthew indicated, the total number was much greater - **"....five thousand men, besides women and children."** (Matthew 14:21) We note the statement **"as much as they wanted"**....This accentuates perfection of Divine work, which exceeds satiation. Such is God's work vis-a-vis His entire creation - especially His children who lead a life of total submission to Him: **"The blessing of the Lord makes one rich, and He adds no sorrow with it."** (Proverbs 10:22)

Verses 12 & 13:

"Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost."

The direct implication of this instruction, is that the Lord wanted to leave His disciples an unforgettable impression of this miracle: each disciples had picked one basketfull of fragments - that was a testimony they would never forget, since each one of them had a basketfull.

+ *The Lord also wanted to teach us not to squander our food. We should keep and consume leftovers so as not to be extravagant, or frivolous with God's gifts.*

Picking up the fragments also has a second, symbolic, meaning. The bread refers to the body of Christ - hence, He gave thanks, He blessed, and he gave; those were the same steps He followed when He instituted the Sacrament of the holy Eucharist (thanksgiving). For this reason it was unacceptable to leave fragments to be trodden underfoot. Therefore, He asked His disciples - who represent the New Testament priesthood - to pick up all that symbolized His body, that He had blessed and given to all.

+ *Dearly beloved, note that, in the rite of the Coptic Orthodox Divine liturgy, the celebrant does not leave any fragments in the paten - he picks up all fragments, similarly to what the disciples had done. Let us learn from our Lord, namely, to pray, give thanks, and bless with the sign of the cross, before meals - then we can distribute the food to all present, and pick up all leftovers, either to consume later, or to give the needy. We can thus appreciate God's grace granted to us - which many lack.*

Verses 14 & 15:

The multitude's reaction to this miracle was quite limited - they were fixated on Christ being the prophet about whom Moses had spoken (see Deuteronomy 18:15 - 18); consequently they sought to make Christ an earthly king over them - which is what our Lord had rejected earlier. Christ therefore departed alone, rejecting worldly praise, which was not the purpose of His incarnation.

+ *My Beloved God, let me be satiated with Your body, the true bread of life. Strengthen my weakness and limited capability. I do not measure up even to the loaf of barley; but, in Your hand, I desire to be the source of satiation for others: speaking to them of You, calling them to Your Church - then they will savour the true satiation which the world fails to offer.*

2. The miracle of walking on water - verse 16 - 24:

"Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea, got into the boat, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was already dark, and Jesus had not come to them. Then the sea arose because a great wind was blowing. So when they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near the boat; and they were afraid. But He said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." Then they willingly received Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going. On the following day, when the people who were standing on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other boat there, except that one which His disciples had entered, and that Jesus had not entered the

boat with His disciples, but His disciples had gone away alone-- however, other boats came from Tiberias, near the place where they ate bread after the Lord had given thanks-- when the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they also got into boats and came to Capernaum, seeking Jesus." (John 6:16 - 24)

Verse 16 - 21:



Christ walked on water

During the evening of the day when Christ had fed the multitude, the disciples boarded their boat to cross over to Capernaum - Christ was not with them.

We note the expressions which St. John had carefully chosen: "***darkJesus had not come to them....the sea arose...***" This is as though the evangelist were meticulously painting a scene: hence, moments of extreme weakness (darkness) in a person's life, represent moments of Christ's absence from that person's life; this, in turn, constitutes an invitation to Satan and tribulations (the sea arose) to pummel him, thus tormenting his soul, leading him to fall prey to fear, replacing tranquility and serenity.

Rowing against the storm finally exhausted the disciples (analogous to a person giving up trying to solve his problems); Christ then came, authoritatively proclaiming His presence: ***"It is I; do not be afraid."*** Peace then immediately replaces anguish, and all stress relieved, as the soul finds solace with its Saviour.

+ *My Beloved God, never abandon me, and do not permit my ignorance to lead me away from You. The winds are strong, and the storms violent - my sole solace lies in Your calm strong voice saying "It is I; do not be afraid." Let these words be my support throughout my life, and let me pray with Your Church unceasingly, "O King of peace, grant us Your peace."*

Verses 22 - 24:

These three verses record the miracle, as well as the multitude's appreciation of it. They knew that Christ was alone in Galilee, and that the disciples had taken the only boat available - how, then, did Christ manage to join them?? They were expecting to see Christ in Galilee - but, lo and behold He was with His disciples in Capernaum! For this reason, the multitude went to Capernaum, seeking Him.

3. The perishing bread versus the lasting bread - verses 25 - 34:

"And when they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, "Rabbi, when did You come here?" Jesus answered them and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him." Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." Therefore they said to Him, "What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do? Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' " Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." Then they said to Him, "Lord, give us this bread always.""
(John 6:25 - 34)

Verses 25 - 27:

The Jews seeking Christ started by asking Him how He had managed to be in Capernaum. Knowing their thoughts, Christ responded by saying that they sought Him merely because of the free food He had provided -

not because of their belief on Him for the miracles He had wrought. Indeed, they deserved Christ's reproach. Christ then advised them that another kind of food existed, of which they were unaware; He would grant that food only to His followers - no one but Christ can grant that spiritual food, given as a prelude to eternal life.

This discussion serves as an introduction to the rest of the chapter, where Christ would tell us that He, Himself, is the living spiritual food. The expression "**God the Father has set His seal on Him**" refers to Christ not the food. The Father has appointed Christ, since eternity, to grant eternal life. At Christ's baptism, the Father audibly testified for Him - that testimony confirmed the Son's work in accordance with the Father's will.

+ *My Beloved God, I continue to seek the perishing food - I seek material gains and worldly success, forgetting that all this perishes. Dear Lord, raise my heart so that I may seek You, and so that You may be all my spiritual desires, revolving around You, O bread of life, O eternal food.*

Verses 28 & 29:

In Verse 27, our Lord said, "**Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for....**" Therefore the Jews asked Him, "**What shall we do...**" It would seem that their hearts had started to warm up to our Lord's spiritual aphorisms, urging God's work, as a prerequisite for access to that lasting food. Our Lord responded saying that it all hinged on their believing on Him. Our Coptic Orthodox Church teaches that the first condition for salvation is belief on our Lord Jesus Christ. Good deeds and spiritual struggles are only acceptable on the basis of belief on the Son, the Saviour, Whom the Father had sent.

Verses 30 & 31:

Upon Christ's request from the Jews to believe on Him, they asked Him a direct question: "Manna from heaven was the sign that God gave Moses in our forefathers' days; it was the greatest miracle and gift, since it supported the Israelites for forty years. Can You perform a greater miracle, so that we may believe on You, as our fathers believed on Moses?"

Verses 32 & 33:

As usual, our Lord tried once more to elevate the Jews' frame of mind to a more sublime, profound, level, in order to introduce them to the Divine mysteries, hitherto concealed from them. He corrected the notion that the manna was a gift from Moses to his people - rather, it was a gift from God the Father. The Father Himself was giving them the greater, true, bread.

The manna merely symbolized the true bread; Christ Himself, Who descended from heaven and was incarnate, granting life to the world, was/is the true bread of life.

Verse 34:

The Jews failed to grasp the precise meaning of Christ's response - but, appreciating the significance of the gift, they asked for it. That was analogous to the Samaritan woman who had asked for the living water, without knowing Christ's more profound meaning.

For this reason, as of verse 35, a clear explanation is given of the "**bread of life**," which is over and above all material bounties.

Dear Lord, we continue to seek, and be preoccupied with, material issues. However, You told us to seek the kingdom of God first - then You will shower us with all Your bounties. Nevertheless, we continue to stumble. We need Your strong arms to lift us up, and extract us from our current state - we would then shift our focus towards on high - towards You, Dear God. Your presence will then satiate the soul, shielding it from seeking terrestrial issues.

4. The bread of life - verses 35 - 40:

"And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."
(John 6:35 - 40)

Verse 35:

Our Lord presented Himself using the same approach as He did with the Samaritan woman: He is the living water and the bread of life - in other words, He satisfies all life's needs. Without Christ there can only be hunger and thirst, which the world can never satisfy. Our Lord Christ used the expression "**I am....**" on many occasions; hence:

"I am the light of the world."

"I am the door."

"I am the way."

"I am the truth."

"I am the Good Shepherd."

"I am the vine."

"I am the resurrection."

"I am the life."

Christ reaffirmed that only He can satisfy each and every need of a human soul. Christ's expression **"by no means"** is similar to what He had said to the Samaritan woman (hence, **"will never...."**). Satiation through Christ is unlimited, and independent of the nature of one's needs - whether physical, psychological or spiritual.

Christ clearly spelled out man's responsibility - the prerequisites to acquire such satiation - hence, **"the one who comes to Me."** Put differently, Christ will never force Himself upon anyone, He stands at the door knocking, offering His gifts; we have the significant responsibility of choosing to open the door - or not - letting Christ into our lives. Whoever rejects Christ, will perish of unquenchable thirst and unsatiable hunger.

Verses 36 & 37:

"You have seen Me and yet do not believe" - In other words, although Christ continued to manifest Himself through various means, the Jews continued to experience "spiritual blindness," since they only sought Christ because he had given them bread satiating them physically (verse 26) - not for the sake of Christ's Person.

Generalizing this concept, God will not consider anyone to be a believer, if their relationship with God aimed solely to satisfy their material needs.

"All that the Father gives Me" - Our Lord attributed all giving and sending to the Father, and all acceptance to the Son. Thus, the Son accepts all who come to Him, granting them redemption through, a priori, belief on Him. This verse seems to suggest that Gentiles would also be accepted into this freely-given redemption - since the Jews did see Him, but failed to believe. Christ will not cast out anyone coming to Him. Christ, our philanthropic God, incarnate and crucified for us all, accepts the entire world through His love; great indeed is that hope, granted to all sinners who come to His welcoming arms!

+ *I thank You, Dear God, for strengthening our souls with Your words of encouragement; whenever our confessor gives us absolution following confession of our sins, we remember Your promise not to cast out anyone coming to You, nurturing him to be more fruitful.*

Verses 38 & 39:

Christ continues the message given in previous verses, namely, He confirms that the reason for His descent from heaven, hence, incarnation, was fulfillment of God's will, embodied in the Father's will to save all mankind, and the Son's will to please the Father and fulfill the Father's will, through His death and redemption. Everything the Father gave to the Son is maintained in Christ's name till His Second Coming, and the resurrection from the dead.

Verse 40:

Christ continues explaining and clarifying the Father's will, namely, salvation for all mankind. The first necessary but insufficient condition is belief on the Son, Jesus Christ, without Whose name there can be no salvation. The second condition is a number of prerequisites, without which, belief would be annulled. The next few verses will expound the conditions for salvation. For this reason, the Coptic Orthodox Church consistently relies on the collective meaning of relevant verses addressing the same context.

5. The Jews' failure to understand - verses 41 - 51:

"The Jews then complained about Him, because He said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven." And they said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, 'I have come down from heaven'?" Jesus therefore answered and said to them, "Do not murmur among yourselves. No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me. Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father. Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world." (John 6:41 - 51)

Verses 41 & 42:

Christ's physical ancestry constituted a stumbling block impeding the Jews' acceptance of His Divinity. They rejected what the Lord had said in three preceding verses (33, 35 & 35), namely, He was the bread coming down from heaven. They murmured against Him, scorned Him, and could not grasp the notion of incarnation.

"Jesus, the son of Joseph" - That was the extent of the Jews' knowledge - they regarded Christ purely from the biological standpoint. St. Luke referred to this ancestry precisely as **"being (as was supposed)"** - Luke 3:23. This meant "that was the prevailing, though incorrect, belief."

Verses 43 - 45:

Our Lord explains the limitations of the human mind, acting on its own, vis-a-vis faith and following Christ. The Father has to attract man through the Divine gift of faith, and teach man by Divine inspiration. Our Lord used the expression **"And they shall all be taught by God"** that was used by two prophets: Isaiah 54:13 and Jeremiah 31:33 - 34. That is a clear indication of the Divine role in teaching man the mysteries of faith, without which, we cannot approach Christ.

Verses 46 & 47:

It is impossible for any person to see God, at any time, since God Himself said, **"...no man shall see Me, and live."** (Exodus 33:20) However, Christ, the eternal Son, One with the Father (Ch. 10:30), and being **"in the bosom of the Father"** (Ch. 1:18) is the only One Who has seen the Father, and Who can proclaim Him to us.

"Most assuredly, I say to you" - Our Lord used this expression countless times to emphasize the truthfulness of His teaching, namely, there can be no salvation, or eternal life, for anyone who does not believe on Christ, Who is One in essence with the Father.

Verse 48:

"I am the bread of life" - Christ repeats what He had said in verse 35, which the Jews had failed to understand, leading them to murmur against Him. This verse may be considered to be an introduction to the Divine mysteries that the Lord would proclaim, concerning that bread.

+ Dear brother, let us learn from our Lord Christ the necessity of adhering to the sound faith; our Lord very patiently explained, at great length, sound teaching - He neither relented, nor backed down under pressure. The Coptic Orthodox Church has followed His example over the years, traversing the eras of the holy apostles, Sts. Athanasius and Cyril, and others, up till today. The Faith was maintained pure and sound as our Lord handed it to us.

Verse 49:

The Jews boasted manna as having been the greatest Divine gift. However, Christ pointed out that it was merely food for the body, which was destined to perdition in any case. This verse is a prelude to a long discourse about the true living bread.

Verses 50 & 51:

Our Lord Christ reveals the New Testament's greatest gift and mystery, namely, Himself being the bread coming down from heaven - hence, a clear reference to His incarnation. He is the source of eternal life for all who eat Him. The Old Testament's manna gave life to the body; but whoever eats the bread of life - Christ - lives forever, since He is the spirit's sustenance. That was contrary to the Jews' understanding. The expression "**he will live forever**" means that the person cannot be harmed by physical death.

Put differently, Christ is the living God Who grants life; He offers His body and blood as the bread of life. Whoever eats and drinks of this body and blood is a partaker of the Granter of life - how, then, can he possibly die?? Rather, death which is inherent within us, becomes life, through our partaking of this heavenly bread.

+ Dear brother, now you can appreciate our Church's consistent practise of the rite for the Sacrament of the holy Eucharist, and our Church's constant call to her children to partake of the body and blood of Christ, since the holy Eucharist is eternal life, it is union with Christ, and it is the forgiveness of sins.

6. Impact of the body and blood of Christ - verses 52 - 59:

***"The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?" Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven--not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever." These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum.*" (John 6:52 - 59)**

Verse 52:

"The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves" - The Jews were divided into opponents and proponents, vis-a-vis what Christ had said, proclaiming Himself as the bread of life, and that His body was being sacrificed for the salvation of the world. The Jews' lack of understanding is similar to Nicodemus' (Ch. 3) and the Samaritan woman's (Ch. 4). The clause "**How can this Man...**" scorns what Christ had said.

Verse 53:

Our Lord responded with a more complex aphorism, namely, it was not a matter of merely eating the body, but also drinking the blood; He used the term "***the Son of Man***" in reference to His incarnation and death, sacrificing Himself for the life of the world. Sacrificing the Passover lamb was associated with the Israelites' deliverance; similarly, the sacrificed body of Christ imparts salvation. Rejecting this living sacrifice leads to spiritual death both in this life and the next.

+ *Dearly beloved, come hither and enjoy the greatest Divine gift. Do not deprive yourself of life with, and in, Christ. You are His heart's desire, and the object of His love. Do not deprive yourself of Him, and do not leave Him waiting....*

Verse 54:

Christ's sacrifice, His body, blood and salvation, was granted to the entire world. However, enjoyment of eternal life is reserved only for those who partake of this sacrifice. Put differently, partaking of the Lord's body and blood is a prerequisite for salvation and eternal inheritance.

Verse 55:

"For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed." This is an unequivocal statement that this is true, and there is no symbolism implied whatsoever - this verse is a clear rebuttal to all claims that communion of Christ's body and blood is purely symbolic, thus ignoring Christ's emphatic confirmation. What else do they need to believe?

Verse 56:

Additionally, partaking of the body and blood of Christ imparts the gift of edification. A branch will yield fruit if, and only if, it remains attached to the main vine - otherwise it would be worthless and lifeless. Christ Himself said, ***"....without Me you can do nothing."*** (Ch. 15:5) As the life-giving sap flows from the vine to its branches, so does Christ's blood flow through our veins granting us edification, continuity and growth.

Verse 57:

My Father is the source of life, and I am life itself (analogously, we can say that the Father is the mind and the Son His thoughts.) I will grant eternal spiritual life to all who partake of the sacrifice of My body.

Verse 58:

Our Lord concludes His discourse about His body and blood by reiterating what He had said earlier (verses 32 & 33) about the difference between food for the body (manna) and the much greater gift, namely, His body sacrificed for the life of the world. This verse summarizes the entire issue.

+ *My Dear God, we worship You, giving thanks for all Your bounties, surpassing our imagination, and comprehensible only to those reborn through baptism and the Holy Spirit. This is reiterated in the Divine Liturgy of St. Gregory: "You have granted me this service, enveloped in mystery.... You have granted me the sacrifice of Your body in bread and wine." We thank You, Dear God, because Your body offers eternal life (verse 51), the second resurrection (verse 54), edification in You (verse 56), and union with You and the Father through life (verse 57).*

Accord us inseparability from Your holy altar of life, from whence the gift of Your holy body is offered.

Verse 59:

St. John took care to mention that that discussion took place in the synagogue, emphasizing in the end that the discussion was not levelled solely at the Lord's disciples; rather, it was a proclamation to the priests and the congregation, of faith-related truths.

7. Christ's followers' offence - verses 60 - 63:

"Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, "Does this offend you? What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life." (John 6:60 - 63)

Verses 60 & 61:

The expression "***His disciples***" could encompass not only the twelve disciples and seventy apostles, but also many others who considered themselves followers of Christ from one place to another. They were offended by two aphorisms Christ had mentioned: that He was the bread of life descending from on high, and that it was necessary to eat His body and drink His blood. They understood Christ's affirmations literally. Through His Divinity, Christ was aware that His wrds had offended them - and He said that.

Verse 62:

"What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before?" Christ, up till that moment, had not solved their initial problem of eating His body and drinking His blood; He added yet another problem, namely, His immortality/timelessness, hence, His ascension to the bosom of His Father - His initial place prior to His incarnation (Mark 16:19, Luke 24:51 and Acts 1:9).

Verse 63:

Simply put, Christ offered the solution to those who had been offended, namely, it was imperative for them to believe, spiritually - hence, neither in the intellectual, nor material sense - what He had said. ***"The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life."***

Sts. Augustine and Cyril the Great consistently interpreted Christ's words ***"the flesh profits nothing"*** to mean: *"If you were thinking of eating My body in the material sense, like eating any other flesh, then that will be absolutely useless for eternal life. What is profitable is consuming My true body united with My Divinity."* Christ subsequently explained this to His disciples during the last supper on Covenant Thursday. He gave them His body and blood, sacramentally transformed from bread and wine. Such is the spiritual faith granted for eternal life. See institution of the Sacrament of the holy Eucharist in Matthew 26:26, Mark 14:22 and Luke 22:17 & 19).

8. The disciples' belief - verses 64 - 71:

"But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. And He said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father." From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" He spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, for it was he who would betray Him, being one of the twelve." (John 6:64 - 71)

Verse 64:

This constitutes a powerful reference to the Son's Divinity. He knew everything the Father knew. He knew, a priori, that some of His audience would not believe Him. St. John used the words ***"from the beginning"*** to make sure we do not infer that Christ's assertion was merely derived from their facial expressions. This also confirms that Christ's knowledge, through His Divinity, not only covered those who disbelieved Him, but also extended to His future betrayer.

Verse 65:

Christ reminds them of what He had said earlier (verses 44 & 45), namely, no one can approach Christ if, a priori, he lacked the faith planted by the Father in his heart. This is the true and only motive. On the other hand, Christ will be a stumbling block to all who attempt to approach Him for material or personal gain, or for political reasons such as liberating the

Jews. That is what Simeon elder had said, "**Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel....**" (Luke 2:34)

Verse 66:

This is in reference to those who rejected His saying that His body is food indeed and His blood is drink indeed.

+ *My Beloved God, we offer You this prayer for those in regression, leaving You daily, and abandonning Your path. They abandon the living fountain of life, and Your loving embrace....to what alternative...? They choose materialism and preoccupations, from which man's only gain is anguish. My God, do not allow our abject selves to depart from You; keep us in Your Church, partaking of Your love and bounties, and serving Your holy name all our life. Amen.*

Verses 67 & 68:

Christ knows/knew everything from the beginning - the intent here, therefore, is not that Christ wanted to know if they wanted to go away. Rather, Christ's question aimed to test their faith; therefore, Peter's response was perfectly congruent with Christ's question. It bore a strong faith, and expressed the other disciples' belief. The expression "**to whom shall we go**" means "we have none but You - we do not wish to regress like others." Furthermore, the expression "**You have the words of eternal life**" confirms what Christ had said earlier about eternal life - hence, He is its source and He grants it through His holy body and bread.

Verse 69:

St. Peter continues his response, declaring the disciples' agreement with his position, that the faith granted to them by the Father was their underpinning for following Christ. They fully believed that Christ was the Saviour, and that He was the Son of the living God. Their belief was irreversible, and they would never leave Christ. Leaving Christ was like choosing death over life, or choosing perdition over eternity.

Verses 70 & 71:

Christ corrected Peter's declaration, continuing to manifest His Divine knowledge. He told Peter that what he said represented his and the other disciples' sound faith; nevertheless, one of them was an unbeliever, and Satan had filled his heart....he would betray Christ....

Christ's statement should be emphasized: "**Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?**" This means that God may choose

and call a person, but the person has the freedom of choice whether to follow or leave God.

Consequently, the teaching that a believer will never perish is a strange teaching indeed. God had chosen Judas - but Judas chose perdition.



*"Interpretation of the holy Bible - the New Testament"
taken from the series: "Patristic expositions and meditations"*

*An exegetical study of
the Gospel according to St. John*

Chapter 7

***Christ's discourse about Himself and the Holy Spirit - the
multitude's belief and the leaders' rejection***

1. Residing in Galilee - verses 1 - 9:

"After these things Jesus walked in Galilee; for He did not want to walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill Him. Now the Jews' Feast of Tabernacles was at hand. His brothers therefore said to Him, "Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing. For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world." For even His brothers did not believe in Him. Then Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready. The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil. "You go up to this feast. I am not yet going up to this feast, for My time has not yet fully come." When He had said these things to them, He remained in Galilee."" (John 7:1 - 9)

Verse 1:

"After these things" - This means "after the miracle of feeding the multitude, and His lengthy discourse about His body and blood." Our Lord Christ resided in Galilee for a certain period, distancing Himself from Judaea, to the south, because of the Jews' envy, and quest to kill Him, for His failure to observe the Sabbath. It is believed that St. John Chrysostom said: *"In these verses, Christ teaches us an important principle: shunning danger and fleeing persecutors, whenever necessary, is a form of wisdom and craftiness; in many instances, confrontation is unnecessary...."*

God forbid, Christ was not afraid - He knew that He would sacrifice Himself - but there is an opportune time for everything.

Verse 2:

"The Jews' Feast of tabernacles" - That was one of the Jews' three major feasts. Labelled "harvest season," it was celebrated in Jerusalem, with an eight-day duration. This feast, decreed by God (Exodus 23:14), had the following spiritual connotations:

1. A reminder of estrangement:

They had all left their homes and lived in tents - God desired to remind them of the forty years they had spent wandering in the wilderness, and how God had granted them the land on which they were living.

2. Thanksgiving and joy:

Harvest started with the first feast, namely, Passover; but its end coincides perfectly with the Feast of Tabernacles. Therefore, they give thanks and rejoice for the blessings of the entire year.

+ *My Beloved God....grant me always the remembrance that I am lost here, where I am estranged; but my true and permanent repose is with You, where I will find the lasting, true, inheritance. Let not anything distract me from You or from that inheritance. Help me spend the rest of my estrangement peacefully.....*

Verses 3 - 5:

"His brothers" - They are mentioned in Matthew 13:55, **"Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas?"** They were Christ's brothers, but not from the holy virgin St. Mary - rather, they were His cousins, commonly referred to as "brothers" in the Levant. Similarly, although Abraham was Lot's uncle, both were referred to as "brothers" in the Old Testament.

Christ's brothers advised Him to go where there would be crowds celebrating the feast, and where He could perform miracles witnessed by many more people than in small villages where nobody knew Him. However, St. John reveals to us a secret explaining the real motive behind this advice - namely (see verse 5), His brothers did not believe in Him, consequently, they wanted Christ to go to Jerusalem so that the priests and scribes might examine Him, whereupon they would ascertain if He were the Messiah or not.

Verse 6:

"My time has not yet come" - This statement could have two interpretations:

Our Lord could have said this in reference to His crucifixion, redemption, and sacrificing Himself for the life of the world. On the other hand, our Lord could have meant that the time had not yet come for His ascension. Publicly awaiting Christ's ascension could have inflamed the leaders' envy, leading them to seek His death prior to God's appointed time. This latter interpretation is corroborated in verses 10 & 14 when He went up to

Jerusalem inconspicuously and taught in the synagogue.

"Your time is always ready" - This means "you can go to the feast anytime."

Verse 7:

Our Lord refers to the reason behind the Jews' and rejection, namely, the world in general rejects reproach, and suffers from the sin of selfishness. Consequently, the world would go as far as killing anyone who utters reproaches. Those who love darkness hate light. Thus, when Christ confronted them with their sins, they sought to kill Him, instead of listening to Him and repenting.

+ May our hearts humbly confess their sins, and may we heed Your words, our Saviour. May we reproach ourselves instead of rebelling against You, in many instances, blaming You, instead of accepting chastisement.

Verses 8 & 9:

Our Lord continues His discussion with His brothers - He told them to continue their way to the feast, while He remained behind in Galilee, pointing out what He had said earlier (verse 6), that His appointed time had not yet arrived. We can also deduce from verse 14 that He spent about four days in Galilee. Thus, He went up to Jerusalem about halfway through the feast.

2. Christ's going up to Jerusalem - He teaches in the temple - verses 10 - 24:

"But when His brothers had gone up, then He also went up to the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret. Then the Jews sought Him at the feast, and said, "Where is He?" And there was much complaining among the people concerning Him. Some said, "He is good"; others said, "No, on the contrary, He deceives the people." However, no one spoke openly of Him for fear of the Jews. Now about the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught. And the Jews marveled, saying, "How does this Man know letters, having never studied?" Jesus answered them and said, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority. He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him. Did not Moses give you the law, yet none of you keeps the law? Why do you seek to kill Me?" The people answered and said, "You have a demon. Who is

seeking to kill You?" Jesus answered and said to them, "I did one work, and you all marvel. Moses therefore gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath? Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."" (John 7:10 - 24)



Christ teaching in the temple

Verses 10 & 11:

Our Lord Christ went to Jerusalem ***"as it were in secret."*** That was a very wise course of action. If He had gone with the multitude, they would have hailed Him as king, as was the case during His earlier visit, contrary to the Divine economy, since His hour had not yet come.

+ *May we learn, throughout our prayers, to wait for God's response, in His own time. We will never attain the level of comprehension of Divine economy. We must always be fully cognizant of the fact that there is a time for everything under the sun.*

St. John gives us an insight into the Jews' perspective who were watching for the Messiah's appearance since the beginning of the feast - they were asking, ***"Where is he?"*** This imparts an impression of scorn and envy, more than eager anticipation - which leads to the impression that they were lying in wait for Him, thus confirming Christ's wisdom in choosing the right time to go.

Verses 12 & 13:

Opinions differed concerning the Person of Christ. Some felt, "**He is good,**" in other words, some felt that Christ was upright and blameless, while others said, "**No, on the contrary, He deceives the people.**" According to saints' collective opinion, the latter group encompassed the envious scribes and Pharisees, whom Christ had rebuked. However, none of them dared express that opinion openly. Thus, due to fear of the priests and Pharisees, discussions were held secretly in small groups.

Verses 14 & 15:

Four days later, Christ revealed Himself, authoritatively appearing, teaching the multitudes, and surprising the leaders, in the temple. According to Matthew 21:46 and 26:5, despite the leaders' outrage against Him, they feared resisting Him "lest there be an uproar among the people."

On the other hand, the Jews were amazed at the beauty and precision of His sublime teaching. They expressed their amazement by saying, "**How does this Man know letters** [meaning the law and prophets and all their interpretations], **having never studied?**"

Verse 16:

This is a recurring scenario. Hence, rebellion, amazement, or murmuring, that Christ could see on His audience's faces, or feel through His Divinity - without directly questioning anyone. Christ responded to their perplexity saying that the source of His knowledge was the Father Who had sent Him into the world. Although the Father and Son are One, Christ was sure that the Jews would have never accepted His teaching if he had said that He was the source of all that knowledge - therefore He attributed it to the Father, as He had said previously in Ch. 5:37, "**And the Father Himself, Who sent Me, has testified of Me...**"

Verse 17:

In His discourse, Christ added a means for verifying the truthfulness of His teaching; it was not discipleship under the guidance of the Jewish leaders - rather, the only means is having a lifestyle in accordance with God's will. This means is the only way to knowing the truth. The voice of God can only be discerned by doing His will.

Verse 18:

Our Lord Christ reaffirms His link to the Source. Unlike the Pharisees, He did not seek self glorification. That was proof of His teachings' truthfulness.

+ *My Dear God, you taught us how to be selfless, and Yours is all glory and reverence. However, You took the form of a bondservant, and attributed everything to the Father - while You are both equal. As for me, I continue to steal glory, and boast of everything You have granted me, attributing all to myself. How despicable is my sin! God the Creator humbles Himself, and the created exalts himself! Forgive me, teach me Your humility, and help me acknowledge Your unmerited favour.*

Verses 19 & 20:

Christ shifts His remarks to confront the Pharisees, in order to expose their hypocrisy and double standards in their judgments. Furthermore, Christ intended that they bear witness to their own transgressions against the law, which they purported to uphold. Christ revealed their purely superficial relationship with the law, devoid of genuine knowledge and application. If they sincerely applied the law's provisions, they would not have sought to kill Christ. Thus, Christ surprised them, knowing their innermost feelings. However, they denied what Christ had revealed, insisting that they had not accused Him of being demon-possessed. They compounded their hypocrisy by another sin, namely, blasphemy against God Himself.

Verse 21:

Christ was referring to His miracle of healing the afflicted of Bethesda (see Ch. 5), which He had performed on the Sabbath. That miracle had enraged the Jews, who had perceived it as a transgression of the Sabbath, thereby deserving death. This verse is a prelude to verses 22 - 24.

Verses 22 - 24:

In these verses, Christ invokes a logical problem, namely, timing of circumcision; by raising that problem, Christ desired a just and logical ruling, unaffected by appearances. The problem can be outlined as follows:

1. Circumcision was a covenant, dating back to Abraham, preceding the Mosaic law.
2. Mosaic law subsequently prohibited any work on the Sabbath.
3. Circumcision was to be performed on the eighth day following a male child's birth. If that day happened to be a Sabbath, then circumcision was permitted.
4. Our Lord then posed the final question: *"Since the Jews permitted breaking the Sabbath for circumcision - which could be postponed by one day, and which was a sign God requested of humans - would healing a person, giving them full freedom of movement, be considered*

transgressing the Sabbath?? Since God permitted breaking the Sabbath for circumcision, surely the Sabbath may be broken for man's well-being?"

5. In verse 24 Christ concludes His discourse by a piece of advice to the Jews, as well as to all of us: let us not judge superficially solely relying on appearances - rather, let us fully understand the Divine intent.

+ *For this reason, dearly beloved, we note that the Church's saints never judged in haste; rather, they refrained from judging others, and scrutinized each situation in the fear of God, fully understanding the Holy Spirit. Which one of us knows everything in the world in order to pass judgement on others??*

3. The Jews' perplexity at Christ's teaching - verses 25 - 31:

"Now some of them from Jerusalem said, "Is this not He whom they seek to kill? But look! He speaks boldly, and they say nothing to Him. Do the rulers know indeed that this is truly the Christ? However, we know where this Man is from; but when the Christ comes, no one knows where He is from." Then Jesus cried out, as He taught in the temple, saying, "You both know Me, and you know where I am from; and I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know. But I know Him, for I am from Him, and He sent Me." Therefore they sought to take Him; but no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come. And many of the people believed in Him, and said, "When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these which this Man has done?"" (John 7:25 - 31)

Verses 25 - 27:

"Some....from Jerusalem...." - This refers to the Jerusalemites, not to the influx of Jews from other regions. The former had better knowledge, were closer to the leaders, and were aware of the leaders' intent towards Christ. The following perplexed the Jerusalemites:

1. None of the priests or Pharisees (the leaders) interrupted Christ, as He taught and spoke openly, and no one stopped Him.
2. The likely reason was that the leaders themselves had believed that Christ was indeed the awaited Messiah - thus they did not resist Him, although they had decided earlier to kill Him.
3. Nevertheless, the primary cause of their perplexity was promulgated by the Jewish leaders' prevailing, erroneous, teaching, namely, no one knew where the Messiah would come from - He would just appear suddenly in the temple. On the other hand, they knew where Jesus had come from, and they knew His family - despite all the miracles and teachings they had witnessed.

Verses 28 & 29:

"Then Jesus cried out" - Our Lord raised His voice, responding to them, saying that what they knew about Him was precisely what the prophecies had foretold, namely, that Christ would be born in Bethlehem. As recorded in St. Matthew's gospel, that is what the chief priests had told Herod: **"When Herod the king heard this....he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea...."** (Matthew 2:3 - 5) Our Lord went beyond the physical proof that He was the awaited Christ, by adding a theological dimension to His discourse, saying that He was sent by God the Father - the truth - from Whom they had strayed due to their erroneous tradition. On the other hand, Christ knew His Father, since He was of the same essence, nature, and eternal Divinity. It was God the Father (see verse 29) Who had sent Christ, as He had said repeatedly.

Verse 30:

Christ's assertion that they did not know God, provoked them - given that they considered themselves to be God's chosen people. Therefore, although they tried to arrest Him, they could not, because that was against the will of God. That was what St. John meant by saying, **"His hour had not yet come."**

+ From the preceding, we learn the following:

1. Christ confirmed His unique Divine omnipotence, by saying that He, alone, had the authority to lay down His soul and raise.
2. There is a lesson for everyone - hence, evildoers can only adversely affect God's children to the extent that God permits. Therefore, in all our prayers we address God, the Keeper of His Church, as "Omnipotent (Almighty)." This attribute instills comfort and tranquility in the congregation's hearts, knowing that everything is in the hands of our philanthropic God.

Verse 31:

"And many of the people believed in Him..." - Those were the simple members of the population - not the leaders. They expressed their faith in a simple question addressed to the leaders who had rejected Christ: **"When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these which this Man has done?"**

4. Christ foretells His ascension and the effectiveness of the Holy Spirit - verses 32 - 44:

"The Pharisees heard the crowd murmuring these things concerning Him, and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take Him. Then Jesus said to them, "I shall be with you a little while longer, and then I go to Him who sent Me. You will seek Me and not

find Me, and where I am you cannot come." Then the Jews said among themselves, "Where does He intend to go that we shall not find Him? Does He intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? What is this thing that He said, 'You will seek Me and not find Me, and where I am you cannot come'?" On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. Therefore many from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said, "Truly this is the Prophet." Others said, "This is the Christ." But some said, "Will the Christ come out of Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?" So there was a division among the people because of Him. Now some of them wanted to take Him, but no one laid hands on Him."
(John 7:32 - 44)

Verse 32:

Having heard of the multitude's belief on Christ, the Pharisees sent their servants to arrest Him. The first time, it was members of the public who had sought to arrest Christ; this time, though, it was servants of the leaders, empowered by law, who sought to arrest Him. The leaders - chief priests and Pharisees - were among the seventy-member Sanhedrin Council of Jerusalem. Labelled "Council of the Seventy," it was the highest council, having several subsidiaries reporting to it. Also encompassing many of the scribes, it was the highest Jewish authority with regards to Jewish religious issues. The Roman authorities were above it.

Verses 33 & 34:

In His response, Christ referred to the short time left for His ministry on earth, which was about six months, from the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot) to Passover. Then He would be crucified, He would die, rise and ascend. They would then fail to find Him, since He would be in the bosom of His Father - from whence He had descended (see Ch.1:18).

"You will seek Me and not find Me" - This is also mentioned in St. Luke's gospel: ***"The days will come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it....."*** (Luke 17:22) Our Lord meant that those who rejected Him are the same people who would regret His departure, following His manifestation of His glory, at His resurrection and ascension.

"Where I am you cannot come" - Our Lord meant that, when He is in His glory, in the bosom of the Father, no one who had rejected the Son of Man would be permitted into the holies, and enjoy eternal life there with Him - this is reserved solely for those who had believed on Him and followed His commandments. Hence, although the leaders' servants had been empowered by law to arrest Christ, He had the unique authority of determining the timing of His arrest (as was mentioned in verse 30).

Verses 35 & 36:

This is a recurring scenario in St. John's gospel in particular; namely, the multitude interpreted our Lord's statements differently from what he had meant. Everything He said in verses 33 & 34 was understood by some to mean that, since Christ had not convinced the Jews that He was indeed the awaited Messiah, He would proceed to Greece and preach to, and try to convince, the Jews in diaspora.

Verse 37:

"On the last day" - That was the eighth and final day of the Feast of Tabernacles. It was a day, attended by large multitudes, when no work was permitted. A certain religious rite was practised during that feast:

"In ancient times during the Festival of Tabernacles, an officiating priest would go to the Pool of Siloam carrying with him a golden pitcher. There, he would fill the pitcher with water and return to the Temple, where he would proceed to pour the water from the pitcher into one of the silver basins situated by the altar. This was accompanied by much rejoicing and fanfare from the people."

This commemorates the water coming out of the rock in the wilderness - the water symbolizing life. Thus, Christ mentioned spiritual water on the feast's final day, saying that He Himself was/is the true rock, inviting all to drink of Him and acquire true life. That was also reiterated in the Book of Revelation: **"And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely."** (Revelation 22:17)

+ *Indeed, Dearly Beloved, You are the sole Source for quenching our thirst; all the world's allures are mere illusions. You are the only true Source, as Isaiah said, "You shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail." (Isaiah 58:11)*

You are the Creator, You know the needs of the soul that You created, and You are capable of satiating it. Everything away from You is vanity and a quest for lusts that leave nothing but barrenness. Drench me, O Source of love, with the water of Your love. Make me grow in Your grace acting through me - and let me renew the baptism's vows, O Water of life.

Verses 38 7 39:

Our Lord reconfirms that grace and bounties can only be acquired through belief on Him. St. John took care to emphasize this principle throughout his gospel. In this instance, the gift of faith is acquired through Christ's work - by the Holy Spirit - in the soul of a believer. The soul, in turn, acquires the fruit of life, plus an abundance of spiritual gifts. Christ is the Source, and the soul following Him draws from Him - then Christ becomes the soul's limitless, indwelling Source (see Christ's discussion with the Samaritan woman Ch. 4:14.)

In verse 39, St. John links belief on Christ to accepting the gift of the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father would send in Christ's name to whoever believes on Him. St. John also refers to futuristic events he had experienced, namely, the Holy Spirit would only descend upon believers after Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension.

+ *It should be pointed out that when the Church speaks of "faith," she means "practical faith," not merely theoretical faith as did the scribes and Pharisees, and as shown by demons (see James 2:19). Our Lord emphasized "Whoever believes on Me and keeps My commandments..."*

Verses 40 - 43:

Three opinions were voiced from Christ's audience:

1. The first group felt that Christ was the great prophet foretold by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15. However, the Jews expected that prophet to liberate them politically from the Romans. After a long period of absence of any prophets, they had failed to understand that Christ was the Saviour from sins.

2. The second group felt that He was indeed the Messiah, because of His miracles, teachings and spiritual aphorisms, which were quite unlike what the scribes and Pharisees taught.

3. The third group rejected all the above, stating that Jesus was known to have come from Nazareth, whereas the scriptures said that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem; they ignored the fact that Jesus had indeed been born in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1 - 6).

+ *Our great God, we stumble often, and participate in debates which appear to revolve around You, when, in fact, they lead us away from You. However, You are the God of the simple, and Your gifts and bounties remain unchangeable. Let us not be preoccupied with issues that steer us away from You. We are all akin to parched fields yearning for Your living water, and for the gift of Your Holy Spirit, leading us to flourish and live in Your Spirit.*

Verse 44:

Discussion about the leaders' servants (verse 32) who had intended to arrest Christ, will follow.

5. The Jewish leaders reject Christ - verses 45 - 53:

"Then the officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why have you not brought Him?" The officers answered, "No man ever spoke like this Man!" Then the Pharisees answered them, "Are you also deceived? Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him? But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed." Nicodemus (he who came to Jesus by night, being one of them) said to them, "Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?" They answered and said to him, "Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee." And everyone went to his own house." (John 7:45 - 53)

Verses 45 - 47:

All the servants whom the Sanhedrin had dispatched to arrest Christ (see verse 32), returned empty-handed for the following reasons:

1. They were affected by Christ's unique teachings.
2. Most of the multitude had sided with Christ - whether they thought He was a prophet or the awaited Messiah. They testified faithfully to what they had seen: **"No man ever spoke like this Man!"** This meant that the servants felt that Christ was not a mere human being. This honest answer provoked and enraged the leaders, who felt their servants were misleading them.

Verses 48 & 49:

The Pharisees were speaking on behalf of the Sanhedrin Council; the question intended to mock the servants for their shameful, unexpected, account. They meant to say that the last thing they expected was for some of them to believe that deceitful person. They blamed the multitude, saying that they were predominantly simple, ignorant people who had no knowledge of the law, and who could be deceived easily. St. John reveals to us the extent of the leaders' cruelty, since, they described their own people, whom they shepherd, as **"accursed."**

Verses 50 & 51:

This is the same Nicodemus whom St. John had introduced in Chapter 3. He had discussed the concept of "baptism" with Christ and had said, **"Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God."** (John 3:2) Nicodemus trod the middle ground - hence, while he believed on Christ,

he feared the rest of the leaders. Thus, we find in verse 51, he defends Christ, while trying to calm the leaders' rage, by invoking an article of the law in Christ's favour, namely, "***Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?***" Put differently, Christ was innocent until proven guilty.

Verse 52:

The Pharisees' response to Nicodemus was evasive. They underhandedly mocked him, knowing that he did not hail from Galilee. They implicitly accused him of defending someone who was not even from the same hometown. Attempting to justify their stance, they said, "***....no prophet has arisen out of Galilee.***"

It should be pointed out that their statement was completely false, since Jonah, Elijah, Elisha, Nahum and Hosea were all from Galilee.

Verse 53:

Finally, they all went home with mixed feelings of rage and impotence, since the multitudes were conglomerating around Christ, and since their own servants had refused to arrest Christ. Thus, God's will was realized by Christ not being arrested, because, "***His hour had not yet come.***"



*"Interpretation of the holy Bible - the New Testament"
taken from the series: "Patristic expositions and meditations"*

*An exegetical study of
the Gospel according to St. John*

Chapter 8

the woman caught in the act of adultery - belief on Christ



Woman caught in the act of adultery

1. The woman caught in the act of adultery - verses 1 - 11:

"But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?" This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear. So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." And again He stooped down

and wrote on the ground. Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."
(John 8:1 - 11)

Verse 1:

"But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives." St. John makes no mention of the reason for our Lord's going to the Mount of Olives (east of Jerusalem). However, according to St. Luke's gospel (Ch.6:12) it may be inferred that our Lord used to spend the entire night praying on the Mount of Olives.

Verse 2:

"Now early in the morning..." - That was the second day after the feast. Our Lord went to the temple to resume His teachings to the multitudes. He sat, like the Jews' senior teachers, and spoke to them about the kingdom.

+ *My dear brother....do you not share my observation concerning, our Lord Christ's lifestyle? He never wasted any time. After four days of intense service during the feast, with the multitudes, He spent a very long time praying, then He resumed His teaching...Such is the kind of proactive work that we all lack throughout our lives. We waste too much time in fruitless endeavours, whereas we spend significantly insufficient time labouring for our salvation....*

Dearly beloved - let us never forget that we will be held accountable for each and every moment of our life....

Verses 3 - 5:

St. John carefully elaborated the famous story of the adulterous woman. The key to this incident is given in verse 6 - hence, the purpose was to ensnare our Lord, and find something to hold against Him, regardless of the woman and her story. That incident can be summed up as follows:

1. They did not need to ask Christ - since the law was clear (Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22): both adulterous man and woman must be stoned to death. In this case, the woman was even caught in the act.

2. They reiterated to Christ what Moses had said: if Christ contravened the law, He would be exposed to the multitude as a transgressor; if He ordered her stoning, while having no civil authority, He would be transgressing Caesar's authority - such was their paradoxical trap.

3. Finally, they cunningly attempted to lure Christ by addressing Him as "**Teacher**" - a significant title, reserved solely for the Jewish rabbis - and again, not used out of sincere respect, rather, to entrap our Lord.

Verse 6:

"But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear."

+ *Our Lord's calmness, as though He did not hear, teaches us a lesson; we should not react to evil with hasty, agitated, responses. Christ desired to dissipate their anger, and reduce their rage against Him. Let us learn how to confront crises calmly and prayerfully - before formulating any decision...*

St. John did not mention what Christ had written on the ground with His finger. Our forefathers proposed various interpretations:

1. He may have written, "*He who breaks one commandment, has broken them all.*" That would have been a prelude to what He was about to tell them, namely, they had no right to judge others.

2. He may have written some of the commandments that most of them had broken, purposing to reproach their hardened hearts.

3. He may have written what He had said in His sermon on the mount - hence, "*Do not judge so that you be not judged....*"

The Coptic Orthodox Church accepts all those meditations and views. There is not a decisive viewpoint that could override all others.

Verse 7:

At the crowd's insistence, Christ interrupted His writing, stood up, and gave a response reflecting His Divine profound wisdom - thus crushing Satan's williness. Our Lord neither condemned nor justified the woman; rather, He supplemented the law with the profoundness of the commandment's spirit: a transgressor of the law has no right to use that law in judging others - thus, "***He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.***"

St. Paul echoed the same sentiment: "**Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.**" (Romans 2:1)

+ Behold, yet another beautiful lesson for us to learn from the Lord, namely, how wisdom saves from trouble. First, we must pray asking the Holy Spirit to grant us such wisdom, then, we may respond calmly after reflection.

Verse 8:

"And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground." This time, our Lord stooped down in order to give the crowd a chance to disperse, and to ponder what He had said, without another confrontation. What He wrote on the ground is addressed in the meditations on verse 6, above.

Verse 9:

St. John demonstrates the effectiveness of Christ's few words on hearts and consciences. This is not surprising, since the word of God's effectiveness pierces the soul, joints and bones....

The elders, having a higher spiritual perception, were the first to respond; they were followed by the youth, who threw down their stones, remembering their sins. Everyone left, and Christ was left alone with the adulterous woman.

Verses 10 & 11:

Christ started His discussion with the woman. Earlier, her state of shame and apprehension had not permitted her to talk to Him.

+ Indeed, such is the heart of Christ, to Whom we pray in the litany of the sick, saying, "You are the hope of the hopeless, the help of the helpless, and the solace of the faint-hearted."

Christ's is the heart of love and forgiveness. His hand will always be outstretched to the broken-hearted.

Christ questioned her about her plaintiffs who had just left; despite His knowledge of everything, Christ sought to comfort her - hence, those who had sought to kill her were no longer around. Having answered Him, He told her, "I, God the sinless Judge, do not condemn you. Sin no more."

It should be pointed out that forgiveness does not constitute an invitation to continue sinning. Rather, it means that God's compassion opens the door to repentance for the sinner willing to seize that opportunity.

+ My dear brother, we learn an important lesson from this incident, namely, we should not judge others. Christ's saying should always be before our eyes - hence, **"He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first."** Therefore, let us throw away the stones of condemnation we are holding, since we are under the same condemnation. Instead of judging our brothers and sisters, let us pray for them - may God have mercy upon us and upon them.

2. Christ is the light of the world - verses 12 - 20:

"Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." The Pharisees therefore said to Him, "You bear witness of Yourself; Your witness is not true." Jesus answered and said to them, "Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from and where I am going. You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. And yet if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone, but I am with the Father who sent Me. It is also written in your law that the testimony of two men is true. I am One who bears witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me." Then they said to Him, "Where is Your Father?" Jesus answered, "You know neither Me nor My Father. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also." These words Jesus spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one laid hands on Him, for His hour had not yet come." (John 8:12 - 20)

Introduction:

The discussion here continues to be related to the conclusion of the Feast of Tabernacles. On the last day, Christ used water, one of the feast's rites, as the symbol. He stated that He was the source of living water. St. John mentions some transient events - hence, division among the Jews, an attempt to arrest Christ, the adulterous woman and, finally, the discourse given below the second day after the Feast of Tabernacles. The feast was still quite vivid in the minds of His audience, who had been hearing His teachings.

Verse 12:

Our Lord links His discourse with what He had said earlier, namely, that He was the living water (Ch.7:38). This time He used the feast's "rite of light," and said, **"I am the light of the world."** There were four tall columns in the temple's outer porch, each bearing a large wick - much light was given by burning those wicks during the Feast of Tabernacles. That rite referred to God, the light of the world, in addition to being

commemorative of the pillar of light which guided the Israelites through the Sinai wilderness by night.

It should be noted, dear reader, that when the discussion was about manna, Christ presented Himself as being the true, living, bread of life (see Ch.6: 32, 45, 48 and 51). Now, since the discussion is about the light of the feast, Christ presents Himself as the true light of the world.

This is as though Christ was saying that all previous symbolisms have faded away, and have become a clear reality through the Son of Man, through Whose incarnation all symbols have materialized. Since Christ is the light of the world, the following spiritual meanings may be inferred:

1. Darkness will always prevail in the absence of Christ.
2. Christ is the sole source of guidance to the soul lost in sin.
3. Christ granted His children a living light within them enabling their faculty of discernment, and reflecting His light to all around them.
4. Christ has given man the freedom of choosing to follow Him or not.

+ *Dearly beloved, the Church painstakingly and constantly reminds her children of all those meanings. Thus, in the Matins canonical hour, the first chapter of St. John's gospel is read, portraying Christ as the light that shines in the darkness. Furthermore, in the morning lauds we say, "O true light, You shine for each person coming into the world." May you constantly remember this attribute in Your God; then your soul will shine through His Divine light....*

Verse 13:

The Pharisees quoted Mosaic law which stipulated that two witnesses are required to confirm a testimony, and that a testimony from someone about himself is unacceptable. They used this argument to refute Christ's saying that He is the light of the world.

Verse 14:

In Chapter 5, Christ is quoted to have said: ***"If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true. There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which He witnesses of Me is true.....And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me."*** (John 5:31 - 37)

On this occasion, Christ's crucifixion was fast approaching; therefore, He became more forceful and explicit in proclaiming Himself. He affirmed that His testimony about Himself was truthful, since He Himself was the truth, and darkness cannot/could dominate light. John the Baptist had testified earlier for Christ, and the Father also testifies for Him - in addition to His

deeds. Furthermore, He told them, ***"Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from and where I am going*** [meaning, His eternal presence in the bosom of the Father and His ascension]." That was because they failed to understand the mystery of incarnation.

Verse 15:

"You judge according to the flesh" - This statement bears two meanings:

1. You judge according to your carnal tendencies. Christ said this because they had judged Him, and considered Him a liar, by saying that they rejected His testimony.
2. Their judgment was in accordance with their limited, outward, physical perception of Christ. They knew His parents and His hometown. They had no spiritual vision of Christ's true Divine identity.

"I judge no one" - That was because Christ did not come to judge, rather to save, the world (Ch. 3:17), as He had demonstrated when dealing with the woman who had been caught in adultery.

Verse 16:

Although our Lord was not judging anyone at that time, and although His mission was salvation for all, just judgment always constituted one of His Divine attributes. Christ then reaffirms the link between Him and the Father, through the oneness of Divinity. Judgment is God's right; the Father gave that right to the Son (Ch. 5:22) Who would condemn all who reject His salvational work, and all who disregard His commandments.

Verses 17 & 18:

Christ responds to the Pharisees' objections to His testimony (verse 13). He said that, not only was His testimony true, but it was also corroborated by the heavenly Father Who sent Him for the salvation of the world.

Verse 19:

The Jews' wily question was intended to entrap Christ, when He spoke of His heavenly Father (Ch. 5:18) - and they sought to kill Him. However, Christ did not answer their question; rather, He exposed their ignorance of Whom He was, as the cause of their failure to know the Father. Christ was the visible image of the invisible Father. Christ affirmed this in: ***"If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have no sin; but now they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father."*** (John 15:24 & 25)

Verse 20:

The treasury was located in the women's porch within the temple. Our Lord chose this place since it was the most crowded - some were fulfilling their vows, among other things. Despite Christ's stern discourse with the Jews, no one was able to arrest Him, since no human could change His Divinely-determined time.

+ Dear God, the Jews may have been justified for their spiritual blindness, and for their failure to know You. However, I have no excuse for leaving You - the true light - and for wallowing in the darkness of sin; my transgression is ugly indeed, having been anointed with the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, I do thank You for having established in Your Church those who can support and raise me up, and grant me absolution. My eyes will then re-open to perceive the splendour of Your boundless light...

Dear God, let not my knowledge of You be limited to intellectual theories; rather, I seek perfect enlightenment, O true light for all who come into this world.

3. Rejecting Christ leads to condemnation - verses 21 - 29:

"Then Jesus said to them again, "I am going away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin. Where I go you cannot come." So the Jews said, "Will He kill Himself, because He says, 'Where I go you cannot come'?" And He said to them, "You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins." Then they said to Him, "Who are You?" And Jesus said to them, "Just what I have been saying to you from the beginning. I have many things to say and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I heard from Him." They did not understand that He spoke to them of the Father. Then Jesus said to them, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. And He Who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him."" (John 8:21 - 29)

Verses 21 & 22:

This recurring debate revolves around the Jews' misunderstanding of Christ's intended meaning. Verse 21 is congruent with Ch. 7:33 & 34. The intended meaning was that the Jews would die in the sin of persistent disbelief on the Son. They would seek and await a terrestrial Messiah conforming to their whims - and they would not find him. Their disbelief

would prohibit their access to the kingdom of heaven (verse 22). The Jews, continuing their sarcastic attitude and spiritual blindness, failed to understand the Divine intent, and expressed their ignorance and hatred of Christ by interpreting His words to mean that He intended to kill Himself, and that the only place where they could not follow Him was "hades."

Verses 23 & 24:

Our Lord clarifies the difference between "I" and "you" in the previous verse; it is the difference between "heavenly - spiritual," and "earthly - temporal," linked to worldly glories that He did not seek. He affirmed the meaning of verse 23 in verse 14 by saying, "***I know where I came from and where I am going.***" Both verses are clear indications of Christ's incarnation, His descent from heaven, and His eternal, Divine nature. Once more, Christ said that their perdition would be their disbelief on Him.

+ *Dear Lord, Your discourse with the Jews has raised within me a perplexing, terrifying question: Am I terrestrial or celestial?? Can I be with You in Your Father's house, or that is impossible?? You have granted me, free of charge, the grace of the heavenly birth in the Sacrament of Baptism. However, I continue to feel being directed downwards, towards this world's fake glories, forgetting the greatness of Your invitation to be heavenly like You. Dear God, I fear for my soul - let me not slide downwards, rather, draw me upwards as You promised, "**And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.**" (John 12:32) Let my heart desire You, and only You.*

Verse 25:

When the Pharisees asked Christ "**Who are You?**" They were not sincerely seeking an explanation - rather, again, they wanted to entrap Him. Jesus answered, "**Just what I have been saying to you from the beginning.**" Put differently, Jesus said that He had already proclaimed Who He was: "I am the bread descending from heaven....I am the living water....I am the light of the world....My deeds bear witness for Me....My Father testifies for Me...." Put differently, Christ is the Saviour of the world. But....who understands, who believes,...who comes to Him??

Verses 26 & 27:

"I have many things" - Christ proclaims that He alone is the omniscient Judge. Everything He said was true, because He knew everything in their hearts, and His judgment was true and just. Nevertheless, He did not speak spontaneously, rather, He said what the Father told Him, since He and the Father are One, and the Father had sent Him. St. John adds a clarification in verse 27 that Christ was referring to the Father, but the Jews failed to understand Him.

Verse 28:

Christ negates any chance that the Jews might know Him prior to their crucifying Him. He used the expression, ***"When you lift up the Son of Man"*** to emphasize that His own who had rejected Him, would be responsible for His crucifixion. Some of them would understand at His crucifixion, upon their seeing the accompanying signs and events, such as the prevailing darkness and the appearance of many who had been buried. The words ***"lift up"*** also bear the Cross's shame and suffering, plus the glory fulfilled through redemption. This corresponds to the bronze serpent that Moses had raised: ***"So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived."*** (Numbers 21:9)

Christ again reiterated the nature of His very close, unique, relationship with the Father, in terms of knowledge and communication. Our Lord had mentioned this several times earlier.

Verse 29:

"He Who sent me" - This refers to the Father. Hence, ***He Who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone.*** This reveals to us the mystery of the constant communication between Father and Son, at the level of the single essence. The Son, through His incarnation, never left the Father's bosom and was never separated from Him - the same may be said concerning the Father. Christ concludes His discourse by adding a new Divine reality, namely, oneness at the level of the Father's and Son's will - everything the Son does is in accordance with the Father's will, and everything the Father desires is executed by the Son.

4. Abraham's seed and the perception of liberty - verses 30 - 41:

"As He spoke these words, many believed in Him. Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can you say, 'You will be made free'?" Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed. "I know that you are Abraham's descendants, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father." They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of

Abraham. But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this. You do the deeds of your father." Then they said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father--God."" (John 8:30 - 41)

Verses 30 - 32:

"Many believed in Him" - However, their belief was insufficient, since it was mere acceptance; that is why our Lord urged them in verse 31 to be edified in His words. The following verses will show their fast, subsequent, rebellion against Christ.

"And you shall know the truth" - You will realize Whom I am, since **"I am the way, the truth and the life."** (Ch. 14:6) This truth - Me - is the sole liberator from the carnal and evil bondage. I am the sole Saviour from the wages of sin...

+ Our Beloved Saviour, sweet indeed are Your titles. You are the truth, and all but You is vanity. You are the freedom, and all but You is imprisonment - even though having golden walls. How splendid it is for You to liberate us from our selfishness and perishing desires. You call us to enjoy living freely with You, where everything pales significantly, even disappears, by comparison. Nothing, then, will remain to torture or captivate, or distance, us from You.

Verse 33:

The Jews meant that they were children of the free Abraham, who had never been enslaved by anyone; consequently, they were free....

We note the following:

1. They failed to grasp the spiritual meaning of what Christ had said. Rather, they interpreted His words in the political sense, believing they were slaves to no one. Their physical sonship to Abraham was always the source of their pride before the Gentiles.
2. Even at the level of their political/material understanding, they fell into a historical fallacy, since they had been enslaved by several kingdoms: Babylon, Assyria, Greece, and Rome. This erroneous, short-sighted conviction led them to decry Christ's call to freedom - thus completely failing to appreciate His call to salvation!

Verse 34:

"Most assuredly" - Christ uses this affirmative expression frequently to accentuate His statements. In this context, He was telling them that they

had failed to comprehend His meaning, namely, **"the truth shall make you free."** Christ then went on to clarify His intent further, hence, an unrepentant person leading a sinful lifestyle is sin's slave, regardless of his ancestry or political affiliation. God's regard of baptism and freedom is different from man's: with God, it is either sin or repentance. Consequently, many saints were exiled or imprisoned - but their life of righteousness and repentance liberated them.

"A slave of sin" - Sin's extreme authority is portrayed in those words. It is akin to an evil master manipulating a person's will; that person would have no free will whatsoever vis-a-vis that master. The sole escape route from the yoke of this sin is through sincere repentance and the return to the Father's bosom.

Verse 35:

The upshot is that a slave to that wicked master cannot remain in the house as long as he is dominated by sin - since there is no place for slaves among the children of the house. The Son, however - that is Christ - will remain, naturally, since He is the Heir to the entirety of His Father's house....

Verses 36 & 37:

"If the Son makes you free" - Christ expressed this in a conditional format, although He is the sole source of true freedom. This condition is not a reflection of Christ's desire to grant freedom - rather, it depends on the Jews' acceptance of that salvation. Put differently, **"Will you accept the true freedom granted by the Son, or not??"**

Physically speaking (verse 37), Christ said that He was aware they were of Abraham's seed. However, that physical sonship was quite limited, and of no significance to God - since they were refusing to accept Christ or believe on Him. Knowing their thoughts, Christ knew that they sought to kill Him. Christ repeated the message given in Ch. 7:19, concerning their desire to kill Him. The clause, **"My word has no place in you,"** is consistent with verse 31: **"If you abide in My word."** This means that Christ knew that they did not, and would not, abide in His word.

Verse 38:

"I speak what I have seen with My Father" - See Ch. 5:19 - 20 **"and you do what you have seen"** - Here, Christ denies their sonship to Abraham, attributing it to Satan, since their quest to kill Him was Satan's desire. Consequently, they had no right to claim sonship to Abraham, as long as their work is in accordance with Satan's will.

Verses 39 & 40:

Our Lord draws our attention to a significant principle: a person is not evaluated on the basis of what he claims, rather, on the basis of his deeds. For instance, it is insufficient for us to say that our Church harbours a treasury of saints; rather, we should question ourselves whether we follow our forefathers' - the saints' - footsteps, in deeds and spiritual struggle. For this reason, our Lord denied the Jews' claim of sonship to Abraham, simply because their deeds did not conform to Abraham's. Abraham was a believer, he trusted the word of God, and he whole-heartedly followed God. On the other hand, those claiming sonship to Abraham, rejected the words of truth and life, coming through the very lips of God - indeed they sought to kill Him!

Verse 41:

Christ's audience was enraged by His rejection of their proud claim of sonship to Abraham; they responded saying:

1. They "***were not born of fornication,***" their ancestry could certainly be traced back to Abraham - even to Adam - they never intermarried with Gentiles, and they were perfectly familiar with their ancestry.
2. Their Father was God, Who is greater than Abraham, and Who is the Father of all.

NOTE:

Despite this boastfulness of false sonship, and this denial of fornication, biblical history records that they had strayed frequently, and intermarried, with the Gentiles' women, and that they had fornicated spiritually by straying away from God, worshipping, and offering incense on the mountains to, the Gentile idols (see Nehemiah 13:23 and Jeremiah 3:6 - 10). The wrath of God was thus incurred upon them, the most significant punishment being their captivity and dispersal.

+ *My beloved God, I fear claiming false sonship to You, as the Jews had claimed for themselves. I have lived a life steeped in sin, up till this moment; I entreat You, do not quench within me the Holy Spirit, or the gift of life through baptism. Though my sonship to You may have significant shortcomings, let Your lasting fatherhood be perfect. Do not leave me alone....*

5. Satan's children and their attributes - verses 42 - 47:

"Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. You are of your father the devil,

and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God." (John 8:42 - 47)

Verses 42 & 43:

Our Lord not only rejected their claim of sonship to Abraham, but He also rejected their claim of spiritual sonship to God, the proof being their refusal to accept Christ Himself. As He had presented Himself earlier, Christ presented Himself here as the incarnate Word of God - He proceeds from God, the incarnate, and through the Father, for the salvation of mankind. By rejecting Christ, the Jews rejected God Himself. Christ mentioned another reason for the Jews' rejection, namely, they listened to Him through their physical ears - rather than through their hearts. Thus, they failed to understand His meaning, since the word of God is accepted through faith - not through the intellect.

Verse 44:

This verse constitutes a strong confrontational statement Christ levelled at the Jews. Christ did not intend to hurt their feelings, rather, He desired to exonerate God and Abraham from that hard-hearted people. By ***"the desires of your father*** [Satan], " He was referring to their intent to kill Him. Usually, the wicked cluster around Satan, with a common intent, thus becoming his will's offspring. Christ then attributes the following to Satan:

1. ***"A murderer"*** - This means that, ever since evil filled his heart, Satan's goal was to deceive and ruin people, ultimately, for the destruction of their souls. Satan is the sole source of all wars and strife, while inciting many to kill their brothers and fellow humans. Satan's only goal is people's perdition.

2. ***"Does not stand in the truth"*** - God created Satan, as an archangel, in light and truth. However, of his own free will, Satan strayed from the truth, and wallowed in wickedness through his separation from God - see the story of Satan's fall in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28:12 - 19.

3. ***"He is a liar"*** - This is one of Satan's primary attributes, through which he deceives people - just as he had deceived humanity's first parents. This attribute is transferred to Satan's children who bear his characteristics.

+ *This accentuates the risk associated with the sin of lying, which is overlooked by many - who even consider it to be quite minor, and part of day-to-day necessities. Let us re-examine ourselves in the light of Christ's frightful words in this regard.*

Verse 45:

Our Lord reiterates the reason for the Jews' disbelief, namely, He speaks the truth but, being Satan's children, they neither understood nor believed His words.

+ *Here, we learn a new lesson from Christ; hence, a Christian will only speak the truth, regardless of the state of belief or disbelief of his audience. Such was the case of the prophets whom the Jews had murdered. Such was also the case with our forefathers the saints and martyrs, who sacrificed their souls in defence of the truth.*

Verse 46:

In this verse Christ offers unequivocal proof of what He had said earlier - His proceeding from the Father and His incarnation. He offered this evidence in the form of a question posed to the Jews: "**Which of you convicts Me of sin?**" This covers both the law plus any other type of sin.

+ *This is proof of our Lord's purity, righteousness and meekness throughout His life. This is a lesson for us to self-examine and scrutinize our lives constantly. A person is not evaluated on the basis of what he claims, rather, on the basis of his conduct and the extent of its conformance with the truth he proclaims - as previously explained in verses 39 & 40.*

Verse 47:

Christ concluded His discourse with the Jews, responding to their assertion: "**We have one Father--God**" - having negated their sonship to Abraham because of their deeds, and because of their lies and wicked decision to kill Him promulgated by their choice to follow Satan. Christ therefore fully rejects their claim of sonship to God His Father, saying, "**therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God.**"

6. Christ is accused of being possessed - verses 48 - 59:

"Then the Jews answered and said to Him, "Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?" Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me. And I do not seek My own glory; there is One who seeks and judges. Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see

death." Then the Jews said to Him, "Now we know that You have a demon! Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, 'If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death.' Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Whom do You make Yourself out to be?" Jesus answered, "If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing. It is My Father who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your God. Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him. And if I say, 'I do not know Him,' I shall be a liar like you; but I do know Him and keep His word. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." Then the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by." (John 8:48 - 59)

Verse 48:

Given the significant enmity between Samaritans and Jews (see Ch. 4), the strongest accusation the Jews could find against Christ was **"You are a Samaritan and have a demon."** That was in retaliation to what He had said against them earlier. However, they had no evidence whatsoever, since they knew quite well that He was Jewish, and that He was sinless. Thus, everything they said about Him amounted to verbal abuse.

Verse 49:

Our Lord never bothered to defend Himself or His Jewish ancestry - rather, He focused on the second accusation (His having a demon), since it was directed against the essence of His Divinity and the holiness of His Father. He said that their claim of His being possessed was a totally unacceptable insult, which cannot be ignored, to the honour of His heavenly Father. That is because the Father is in the Son - how, then, can they say that the Father is a demon??

Verse 50:

"I do not seek My own glory" - Christ said that His task was to accept shame and humiliation; He would neither glorify, nor defend, Himself - that was the task of His Father Who sees and scrutinizes everything - the Father is the One Who zealously seeks Christ's glory, and condemns all who abuse the Only Begotten Son's glory.

+ *What Christ said in this verse constitutes a source of comfort for all who suffer persecution or abuse for His name's sake. By enduring abuse for Christ's sake, we amass treasure glory for ourselves. Furthermore, our*

just God will condemn the wicked according to His righteousness and just judgment.

Verse 51:

Our Lord emphasizes a factual tenet of our faith, namely, the second death will not affect those who heed Christ's commandments, rather, they will have eternal life. That meaning was also conveyed in Ch.5:24.

Verses 52 & 53:

Once more, St. John accentuates the Jews' persisting material, literal - rather than the spiritual - interpretation of Christ's words. They used their erroneous understanding to re-state their accusation that He was demon-possessed. The words "**we know**" are intended to confirm, similarly to what the chief priests said: "**What further need do we have of witnesses?**" (Matthew 26:65) They continued to reaffirm their opinion, namely, since Abraham and all the prophets had died, how could Christ possibly grant life and immortality? They failed to perceive that He was referring to deliverance from eternal, not physical, death.

Verses 54 & 55:

The intent of verse 54 is congruent with Ch.5:31. Christ said that feigning sonship to God did not impart to the Jews a true knowledge of God, Whom Christ knew intimately, through the oneness of nature and essence. Christ emphasized the fact that if He were feigning lack of knowledge of the Father, He would be like the Jews who feigned His knowledge. The proof that our Lord offered of His knowledge of the Father was submission to the Father's will, which is a basic tenet of the faith which the Jews failed to realize - even with God. That was the cause of their condemnation and their lack of acceptance of Christ.

+ It should be noted, dear reader, that our Lord repeatedly states that true faith is not inherited - akin to what the Jews were boasting. Belief in God means keeping His commandments and submitting to His will throughout our life. Many indeed are those who claim belief, yet deny it through their deeds!!

Verse 56:

This verse responds to the Jews' mockery, when they said, "**Are You greater than our father Abraham...**" The intended meaning was that Christ was certainly greater than Abraham; despite Abraham's significant status among the Jews, he was merely a witness to God's covenants. However, unlike the Jews, he believed those covenants and, desiring to witness the events of incarnation and redemption, he saw them through

his faith, and rejoiced, as St. Paul said: ***"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."*** (Hebrews 11:13)

Verses 57 & 58:

As usual, the Jews failed to understand Christ's meaning - they thought He meant that He had seen Abraham in the flesh. Therefore, they ridiculed Christ a second time, saying, ***"You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham*** [who died two thousand years ago]?" On the other hand, Christ's response leaned more towards the theological aspect of proclaiming Himself, thus confirming Ch.1:1 ***"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."*** The intent behind Christ's response was that given the Jews' ridiculing the notion that Abraham and Christ were contemporary, they would not have accepted an even greater fact, namely, Christ existed before Abraham.

Our Lord quoted from Exodus 3:14 ***"I AM WHO I AM."*** ***And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.' "*** Thus, Christ used the same name of God with which the Jews were familiar.

"Before Abraham was" is a clear indication of Christ's eternal Divinity.

Verse 59:

The Jews considered what Christ had said was blasphemous, punishable by death. However, since His time had not yet come, He exited the temple and disappeared from their eyes, before they could carry out their intent to stone Him.

+ *Thus, Christ reminds us once more that, on many occasions, it is wise to flee, rather than confront, anger....*

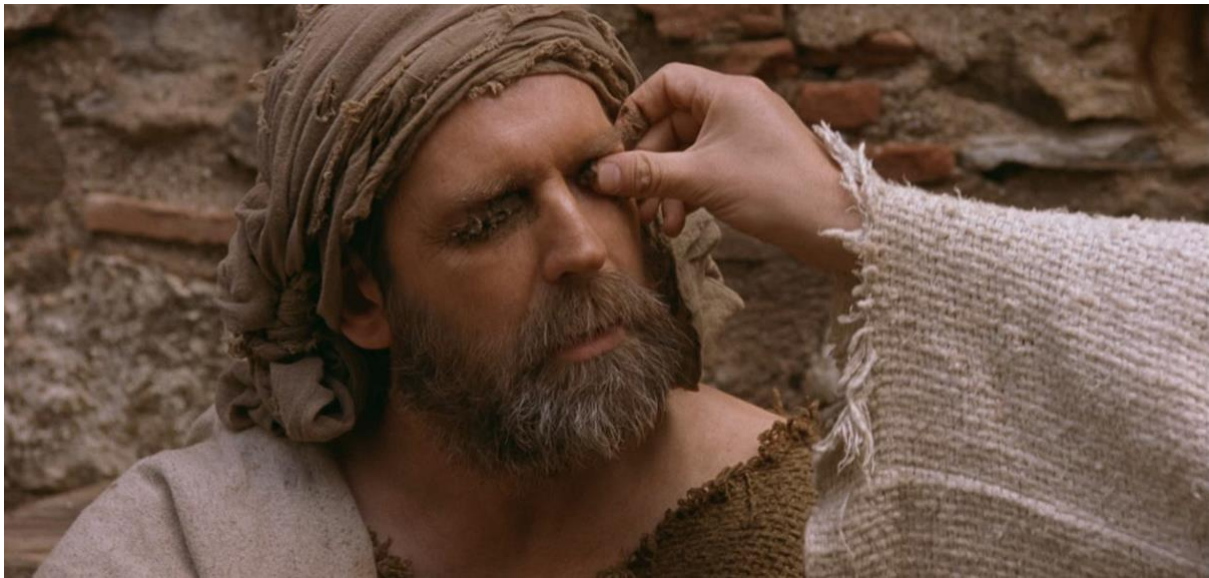


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Chapter 9

the man who was born blind



Christ gave sight to the man who was born blind

1. Healing the man who was born blind - verses 1 - 7:

"Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." When He had said these things, He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. And He said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). So he went and washed, and came back seeing." (John 9:1 - 7)

Introduction:

Events of the ninth and tenth chapters occurred during the winter, three months after the feast of Tabernacles - hence during another Jewish feast.

The location was Solomon's temple, in one of the porches were leaders were assembled.

Verses 1 & 2:

"Blind from birth" - This means that he had no eyes. Consequently, this constitutes a miracle of creation, rather than healing. The question which the disciples posed, **"Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"** reflected prevailing Jewish beliefs at that time which, in turn, were rooted in Mosaic law; God made children pay for their parents' sins, and disease was a direct consequence of sin. However, God may permit hardships to befall His children, so that virtues such as endurance and thanksgiving may emerge. Sinners may also experience hardships intended to induce their repentance.

Verses 3 - 5:

"Neither this man nor his parents sinned" - Christ's response aimed to divert His disciples' attention from seeking the cause(s) for the man's blindness since birth, and refocus them on the Divine act of creation that they would witness, which would be performed by the incarnate Word of God. This miracle of creation underscores God's love and tenderness for His frail creation: it should be noted that in the cases of the paralytic, the blind and the Samaritan woman, none of them came to Christ - rather, He went to them. The Son finally proclaims the relationship between Him and the Father, both in will and in deeds (verse 4). The grandeur of this miracle also induces those who witnessed it to believe on Christ.

"While it is day" - This refers to Christ's life in the flesh on earth - "night" represents the end of life, hence, death.

+ *Dearly beloved, this message concerns all of us. Our Lord Christ is telling us that your and my life are represented by the "day;" we are called to utilize this daylight in doing good deeds, before life passes away. It is a great chance for us to do God's deeds - because death is final and presents no opportunities to make up for lost time. Rather, regret will take over, for our having wasted our life preoccupied with fruitless worldly desires. Let us, therefore, seize this priceless opportunity in doing positive deeds, and in serving the Lord.*

"I am the light of the world" - This means that Christ is the sole source of light, and the only Saviour, for all who live in the blindness and gloom of sin. This was also discussed in Chapter 8. This light can only be enjoyed through a life of repentance, and fellowshiping with Christ in His Church.

Verses 6 & 7:

Amazingly, our Lord used clay which, normally, would ruin the eye! St. John Chrysostom says that Christ manifested that His healing powers surpassed the powers of nature. Our Lord also demonstrated that His miracles were not limited to one method; hence, sometimes He uses clay, at other times He heals by touching the afflicted, while sometimes He heals simply by His word of mouth....

"Go, wash..." - This means that the healing process starts with washing, which refers to repentance. In our Faith, we believe that baptism washes away our sins: **"....that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word..."** (Ephesians 5:26) For this reason, baptism is the gateway to Christianity - hence, the gateway to salvation. A second source of spiritual washing, and soul cleansing, is the word of God given on the holy Bible. Finally, repentance and the Sacrament of Penance constitute "daily baptism" and the third avenue for cleansing our sins, leading to the gift of healing and the soul's salvation.

The expressions **"go"** and **"he went and washed"** are clear references to the human role (the man was blind!) Our Lord could have healed him, instead of requiring a blind man to feel his way to the pool - then return seeing! Christ is telling us that, given that the gifts of healing (baptism) and salvation are free, it is incumbent on us to go, and return - this process is labelled "the spiritual struggle of life with God." The blessings of obedience, faith, baptism and the person's struggle, will be crowned with seeing and enlightenment.

+ *This is available to each one of us, when we accept what that man did, and follow his example: obedience to Christ. We should adhere to the avenues of grace offered by our Church.*

2. The multitude's amazement - verses 8 - 12:

"Therefore the neighbors and those who previously had seen that he was blind said, 'Is not this he who sat and begged?' Some said, 'This is he.' Others said, 'He is like him.' He said, 'I am he.' Therefore they said to him, 'How were your eyes opened?' He answered and said, 'A Man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to the pool of Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed, and I received sight. Then they said to him, 'Where is He?' He said, 'I do not know.'" (John 9:8 - 12)

That miracle amazed the multitude - and rightfully so. They could not believe that it was the same person who had been born blind. No one had ever heard of a man, born with no eyes, to receive eyes suddenly, as an adult! Furthermore, the existence of eyes on a person's face would tend

to change his appearance, hence, could create doubts with respect to that person's identity. However, the man emphasized "**I am he**" and explained his encounter with Christ, and how Christ had healed him.

"He who sat and begged"

+ Dear brother, is not this precisely the state of each person wallowing in sin's gloom, sitting and begging, in order to satisfy his unquenchable thirst for carnal desires? On the other hand, whoever was enlightened by the knowledge of Christ the Saviour, and baptism's cleansing, is transformed into a different person, labouring in Christ's vineyard, giving more than taking, and ever increasing in his spiritual perception. People will see him and praise God, the source of splendour, light and enlightenment for all His children.

3. The Pharisees investigate the healing event - verses 13 - 23:

"They brought him who formerly was blind to the Pharisees. Now it was a Sabbath when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also asked him again how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." Therefore some of the Pharisees said, "This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath." Others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them. They said to the blind man again, "What do you say about Him because He opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet." But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind and received his sight, until they called the parents of him who had received his sight. And they asked them, saying, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" His parents answered them and said, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but by what means he now sees we do not know, or who opened his eyes we do not know. He is of age; ask him. He will speak for himself." His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him.""
(John 9:13 - 23)

Verses 13 - 15:

Seeking an explanation for this unique wonder, the multitude brought the man who was born blind to the Pharisees, considered the most knowledgeable with respect to the law's provisions. St. John mentions that Christ performed this miracle on the Sabbath, for two reasons: a prelude to the Pharisees' reaction (verse 16), plus confirmation of Christ's consistent teaching, that the Sabbath does not prohibit deeds of mercy.

"Then the Pharisees also asked him again" - This implies that the Pharisees had already heard the story; nevertheless, they asked the man once more to clarify/confirm what they they had heard. Furthermore, they were motivated by envy and spite against Christ, in their relentless quest to find something against Him; they had no intention of believing on, and following, Christ.

+ *Dearly beloved, prejudging others leads us, frequently, to deviations from the obvious truth, because of preconceived ungodly emotions harboured against them.*

Verse 16:

The Pharisees were divided: most closed their eyes to the powerful miracle, blindly desiring to condemn Christ for violating the Sabbath's commandment. A smaller group disagreed with the former, arguing for the impossibility for a sinner to perform a miracle that only God could do....

Thus, the Pharisees failed to formulate a unified opinion....

Verse 17:

Despite their division, the Pharisees sought the man's personal opinion about the miracle - again, perchance, they could accuse Christ of sorcery, or at least cast some doubt on the miracle. However, the man disappointed them, declaring his belief that the man Who had cured him was a prophet; thus, it took courage for him to witness for the truth before those, most of whom he knew were against Christ.

Verses 18 - 20:

Seeing that the blind man's testimony failed to satisfy them, the Pharisees summoned his parents, as a last resort for them to refute that miracle. They worded their question in a way that invited the parents to deny their son's testimony. The parents' response, though, was quite decisive: **"We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind..."**

Verses 21 - 23:

The parents also denied any knowledge of the miracle, hence, **"....but by what means he now sees we do not know..."** One likely reason is that they did not witness it. The more likely reason is that they feared expulsion from the synagogue which would not only have deprived them of the rites of worship, but also was sometimes a prelude to punishment, such as the death sentence. Thus, they continued saying, **"He is of age [meaning that he was over thirty years old]; ask him. He will speak for himself."**

4. The man who was born blind witnesses for Christ - verses 24 - 34:

"So they again called the man who was blind, and said to him, "Give God the glory! We know that this Man is a sinner." He answered and said, "Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see." Then they said to him again, "What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?" He answered them, "I told you already, and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become His disciples?" Then they reviled him and said, "You are His disciple, but we are Moses' disciples. We know that God spoke to Moses; as for this fellow, we do not know where He is from." The man answered and said to them, "Why, this is a marvelous thing, that you do not know where He is from; yet He has opened my eyes! Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him. Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing." They answered and said to him, "You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?" And they cast him out." (John 9:24 - 34)

Verses 24 & 25:

"Give God the glory" - That was both a religious and legal formality - akin to today's oath taken in court - obliging the person to tell the truth. For the Jews, that was a terrifying prelude, since it heralded expulsion from the synagogue or even a death conviction (see the story of Achan, Joshua 7:19). The Pharisees had no intention of knowing the truth through the man's answer - rather, they continued to seek means for condemning Christ, as is evident from their remark, ***"We know that this Man is a sinner."***

The man's response, on the other hand, was simple and frank: he had no interest in their views concerning Christ - however, he experienced an undeniable reality, ***"One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see."***

+ *Indeed, those are beautiful, resounding words, echoing within a tormented soul. Frequently, God opens our eyes, minds and hearts to errors we commit - like a blind man enveloped in darkness. However, after our soul is flooded with Divine enlightenment and Christ's love, we become incapable of accepting sin's gloom anymore. Growth in a godly life, while discovering the extent of Divine love, lead us to repeat continually, "though I was blind, now I see."*

Verses 26 - 28:

The Pharisees questioned him again, hoping to find something contradicting his testimony. The man, though, responded with impatient sarcasm - hence, ***"Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become His disciples?"*** The Pharisees' rebuttal was both arrogant and sinful; they were arrogantly proud to declare discipleship to Moses, and considered it insulting to be suspected of being Christ's disciples.

Verses 29 - 33:

The man expressed amazement with renewed sarcasm, mocking their stated significant knowledge. They stated that Moses spoke to God - yet he never performed such miracles; on the other hand, this Man Who performed such an incredible miracle - would He not be greater than Moses??

The man continued with his discourse, saying that God does not respond to sinners' petitions. Consequently, Whoever does such miracles, and to Whom God listens, must be a righteous, godly Person.

He concluded by saying ***"Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing."***

It was as though the Holy Spirit had planted this testimony on his lips.

Verse 34:

The man was cast out of the synagogue, which was the penalty for witnessing for the truth.

+ *We learn from the man who was born blind that witnessing for the truth may entail a huge price, that can only be borne by a firm believer in the power of God and in the Holy Spirit's support. Such was the case with many of the Church's martyrs, who had no fear of testifying for the truth, even at the expense of sacrificing their lives.*

5. The difference between spiritual and physical blindness - verses 35 - 41:

"Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, "Do you believe in the Son of God?" He answered and said, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" And Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him and it is He Who is talking with you." Then he said, "Lord, I believe!" And he worshiped

Him. And Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind." Then some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, "Are we blind also?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, 'We see.' Therefore your sin remains." (John 9:35 - 41)

Verses 35 - 38:

We can infer from these verses that it was our Lord Christ Who had looked for the man: "...and when He had found him..." The man had suffered expulsion from the synagogue and, even though he had witnessed for Christ, his perception was incomplete. The utmost view he had of Christ was that He was a prophet. Thus, Christ sought to enlighten his heart in addition to his eyes. The man confirmed his belief on Christ by worshipping Him. Thus, his heart was opened, and he could see God with his heart in addition to his eyes.

Verse 39:

"For judgment I have come into this world..." - This means that Christ came to reveal what people harboured in their hearts - those who believed in Him were enlightened, and those who rejected Him remained in darkness. The Pharisees were the most knowledgeable of the Mosaic law - but they rejected the Redeemer and the promises mentioned in the law. On the other hand, the simple-minded who had no knowledge of the law and the prophets, enjoyed a high spiritual perception - higher than the physical one - through their faith. This was mentioned earlier in Chapter 3: **"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."** (John 3:19)

Verses 40 & 41:

The Pharisees understood perfectly well Christ's implied meaning; so they asked Him directly, **"Are we [scholars and teachers of the law] blind also?"** Here, again, they intended to entrap Christ. However, Christ's response was much more powerful than what they had expected: if your blindness were due to lack of knowledge of the law, and your inability to differentiate between right or wrong, and between someone sent from God versus another, then you would have had an excuse, and no sin would have been imputed to you. However, you are judged because you feign knowledge; you persisted in your disbelief, despite the prophecies that were fulfilled through Me, and despite the deeds that only the Creator could perform. For this reason, you will not be absolved.

+ Dear God, grant me this enlightened spiritual perception; I do not want my mind, knowledge or self to constitute an impediment hindering my perception of Your deeds and voice throughout my life. I do not want to be a Pharisee feigning perception. Rather, I wish to be a blind man seeking to perceive, and trusting His God, the sole light of the world.



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Chapter 10

***parable of the good shepherd - relationship between the
Son and the Father - Christ accused of blasphemy***



Christ the good shepherd

1. I am the door of the sheepfold - verses 1 - 10:

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand

the things which He spoke to them. Then Jesus said to them again, "Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. (John 10:1 - 10)

Introduction:

In this chapter, our Lord Christ presents Himself to the Jews, and to mankind at large, using an analogy characterizing His salvational mission in His children's lives. He used "**shepherd**" in His analogy, which was the primary occupation for the Jewish community - ahead of farming, fishing or carpentry; it was also close to their hearts, since their forefathers were shepherds, hence, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Moses the prophet..... Furthermore, God referred to Himself as the "**good shepherd**" in Psalm 23 and Isaiah 40:11.

Verses 1 & 2:

Our Lord Christ emphasizes that He is the legitimate owner, and the sole shepherd, of His congregation. The "**sheepfold**" is the Church, the "**sheep**" are His congregation, and the "**door**" is Christ, Who cares for the repentance and salvation of His congregation's souls. This contrasts starkly with the Jewish priests and Pharisees, whom Christ considered to be robbers harming, rather than caring for, the congregation, by focusing solely on their own interests (see Ezekiel 34).

+ *This applies to all unfaithful servants in the Church of God, who rob Christ's congregation to serve their own interests. Such robbery could be through unsound teaching, thus stealing from Christ's flock.*

Verse 3:

"The doorkeeper" - This refers to the Holy Spirit, Who opens hearts to receive the words and voice of the Shepherd; this is the Holy Spirit's continual work. It could also be surmised that the doorkeeper is the faithful servant, who does not feign to be the shepherd, rather, the doorkeeper whose only task is opening the door for the Shepherd - put differently, he seeks to present Christ to people, without feigning any greater role. The sheep can discern the voice of their faithful Shepherd due to their daily friendship and fellowshiping with Him; they trust His leadership throughout their lives, as He calls each one by name, indicating His constant care, love and special shepherding. Thus, the sheep will follow Him, enjoying the sun of spiritual knowledge, and the air of liberty of God's children's glory.

+ *Dearly beloved, can you discern Christ's voice throughout your life? He consistently calls out to you. He desires you to talk to Him, and embark with Him on His spiritual pastures - for your enjoyment and satiation. Do not be preoccupied with this world's disturbances - let them not be an impediment to hearing the voice of your Good Shepherd.*

Verses 4 & 5:

Having discerned the voice of their Shepherd, the sheep follow Him in perfect trust and submission. They follow His footsteps to the perfect pastures, and to the waters of eternal repose. Captivated by His love, they follow His example of meekness, humility, struggle and suffering. The stranger is akin to a deceiving teacher who robs and steals. The intelligent and wary sheep will remain within the Church's fold, and discern between the strange, unsound, teaching, and that of the Church and her Messiah - thus, they reject unsound teaching.

+ *For this reason, dearly beloved, our presence within the Church's environment provides for us untainted spiritual nutrition, and protects us against strange teachers who infiltrate homes in Christ's name; those are thieves and robbers whose sole quest is tearing apart Christ's body, hence, His Church. Pay no attention to them - flee them....*

Verse 6:

The Jews failed to understand Christ's intended meaning, especially His dichotomy between the Good Shepherd and the stranger. For this reason, our Lord patiently explained it to them - in the following verses.

Verses 7 & 8:

"The door of the sheep" - This means that Christ is the only entrance to the path of salvation - there can be no salvation without His body and blood. Similarly, Christ provides the only exit from pain and hardships. Christ will always lead to joyous fellowship with God.

"All who ever came" - Clearly, Christ was not referring to the Divinely-sent prophets who had preceded Him; rather, He meant those who had come before Him claiming to be teachers and shepherds - this applies to the scribes and Pharisees, to whom God's flock did not respond. St. Mark accentuates the difference between the voice of the true Shepherd and a robber: **"....He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes."** (Mark 1:22) Christ also referred to the Pharisees as robbers, when He told them, **"....you devour widows' houses...."** (Matthew 23:14) Put differently, they seemed like shepherds but they were thieves. For this reason, God's people did not respond to their falsehoods. Christ's congregation responds to its Supreme Shepherd, just as a child discerns his father's voice.

Verses 9 & 10:

"If anyone enters by Me" - Christ's invitation still stands - however, God respects man's freedom of choice. Salvation is offered to all - but man has the choice of either accepting Christ's offer, or proudly, stubbornly, rejecting it. Free salvation is conditional on believing on the Shepherd, following Him, and struggling with Him.

"...will go in and out and find pasture..." - Christ was referring to the sheepfold, hence, the Church. The Church provides for her children the following:

1. Union with Christ through the holy communion.
2. Spritual satiation through sound teaching.
3. Comfort with respect to fathers' guidance.
4. The freedom of growth and true knowledge of God.

This means that life is absent without Christ and His Church.

+ *My dear friend, Christ granted us life - He paid for it, for us, with His death on the Cross. He offered it to us free of charge. Christ's only desire is that we enjoy it, and that we have a better life - hence, "For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." (John 1:17) All the antecedent Old Testament proclamations and prophets pale by comparison to what has been declared to us through the Person of Christ - through His incarnation, and the salvation He offered us. But what is even greater, my friend, is our being indwelt by the Holy Spirit. God has indwelt you, and you became His temple, the day you were anointed by the holy Chrism. Do you really appreciate this much better life, or are you still enticed by the perishing life, which steers you away from your Christ??*

2. I am the Good Shepherd - verses 11 - 16:

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd." (John 10:11 - 16)

Verse 11:

"The Good Shepherd" - The significance of the "shepherd" in the then Jewish community was explained in verse 1. The following paragraphs expound the difference between Christ and all the other shepherds, such as Moses and David, who preceded Him; in addition to profound spiritual meanings associated with **"the Good Shepherd,"** Christ is:

1. The Shepherd, who shepherded all the earlier shepherds.
2. The omnipotent and sole Shepherd of shepherds.
3. Above any limited human shepherding.
4. The faithful Shepherd, who gives His life for the redemption and salvation of His sheep - unlike any other shepherd.

+ Christ prepares all our needs. He is the tender caretaker throughout all our hardships. He defends us against evil and danger. Given that He is our Shepherd, why would we fret and worry daily?? Dearly beloved, trust your loving Shepherd Who gave up His life for you....

Verses 12 & 13:

Our Lord presents a comparison, to accentuate the extent of His loving care for the flock He owns and redeems. Regardless of the extent of care that a hireling may offer, it will never compare to that of the flock's owner. A hireling's life is worth much more than that of the sheep - he will flee before danger. However, the flock owner will bear His Cross, and will accept crucifixion, for the sake of granting life to His congregation.

+ This discussion applies equally to servants in Christ's Church. A hired servant's only link to those whom he serves is his wages - hence, praise and self satisfaction. On the other hand, a faithful servant works for Christ's sake, and expends all his efforts - even his own life - to care for Christ's flock, which was entrusted to him. The Church is rife with lives of such faithful saints, who sacrificed their lives for their congregation; an example is Pope St. Peter, the seal of martyrs, who willingly gave up his life, asking Christ that his blood be the conclusion of the age of martyrdom, from which the Coptic nation had suffered at the hands of the Romans.

Verse 14:

After having explained the difference between the hireling and the flock's owner, Christ re-emphasized the importance of His shepherding work, characterized by His being **"the Good Shepherd."** Christ then adds another feature for His flock, namely, He knows His sheep, each one by name (see verse 3), and they know Him. He also knows the needs and hardships of each, and suffers with them.

+ All Christ's children enjoy this attribute - unlike those who reject presence within the Church (Christ's sheepfold), to whom the Shepherd will say, "I never knew you." (Matthew 7:23)

"I know My sheep, and am known by My own" - The sheep's knowledge of their tender Shepherd embodies thanksgiving, love and appreciation, plus experience with His powerful arm, and the work of His grace in their life. There is no substitute for Christ, for each soul that followed Him, enjoying His friendship and shepherding - satiation is uniquely through Him. Blessed are you St. Paul, as you express the depth of this knowledge: **".....I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him...."** (2 Timothy 1:12)

Verse 15:

Our Lord draws an analogy between His knowledge of His own, versus His knowledge of the Father. As the Father and Son are in constant communication, so is the inseparable link between Christ and His own. Christ's flock, in turn, maintains communications with their Lord, their source of sustenance. The more our love for Christ increases, the more our knowledge of Him, and our contact with Him.

+ Thus, dearly beloved, the knowledge of God is available for all - such is the desire of His heart, and His righteous will. It is incumbent on us to grow in the satiating knowledge of God; in turn, this means that we must set aside more time to spend with God, regardless of our preoccupations - none of them constitutes an acceptable excuse before God. All the time we spend with God, in prayers and reading, is an investment for our life, comfort and true peace.

Verse 15:

"I lay down my life" - This reflects the utmost measure of love from Christ to His flock - hence, selflessness and redemption, as a natural outcome for this faithful flock. Redemption, referred here, was the purpose of Christ's incarnation - there is no stronger proof of Christ's love for His congregation than giving up His life for their sake (see Chapters 1:13 and 15:13).

Verse 16:

Christ proclaimed the mystery of redemption to His flock. He clarifies that redemption is not meant uniquely for the Jews - rather, it is for Christ's true flock which encompasses all who believe in Him throughout the world. Redemption is not limited to the Jewish flock - redemption and the Cross

were offered to the entire world, as Caiaphas the high priest prophesied: **".....and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad."** (John 11:52)

"Them also I must bring"

+ By virtue of this statement, it is incumbent on us to search for all souls that have strayed away from Christ. A true Christian, or servant, cannot rest, knowing that many are still far from Christ and the Church. Akin to his Christ, the ultimate Shepherd, he feels a responsibility towards them. Upon recognizing the voice of their Shepherd, the stray sheep will follow Him and become part of His flock.

3. Christ's authority over our lives - verses 17 - 21:

"Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father." Therefore there was a division again among the Jews because of these sayings. And many of them said, "He has a demon and is mad. Why do you listen to Him?" Others said, "These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?" (John 10:17 - 21)

Verse 17:

"Therefore My Father loves Me" - The love between Father and Son is eternal, unceasing, and independent of any circumstances. Here, Christ directs our attention to His giving Himself up as a Sacrifice to redeem the entire world. The Father is pleased to accept this Sacrifice with love.

Verses 17 & 18:

The Son's obedience to the Father neither decreases His stature in any way, nor His equality in essence to the Father. Christ concludes His discourse, expounding His absolute authority and will over death and redemption. The Father and Son have a single will with respect to mankind's redemption. The Son executes the Father's economy. For this reason, Christ focuses on His authority, namely, He lay down His life, and He proceeds to death in order to crush it - death has no authority over Christ.

"That I may take it again" - This refers to Christ's resurrection; Christ will regain the spirit which had suffered death in the flesh - Satan has no authority over Christ's human spirit, which is subject solely to the will of the Son.

"This command I have received from My Father." - The **"command"** here refers to the Father's economy for mankind's salvation. Christ accepted that economy of His own free will - He was not forced to accept it.

+ *Dearly beloved, the heavenly Son, Who is equal to the Father in essence, has meekly and lovingly offered Himself to purchase you with His revered blood - do you not feel that this merits your consideration?? Why, then, do pride and selfishness continue to haunt us, and why do we continue to be fooled by outward appearances? Do we still ignore our true God??*

Verses 19 - 21:

As usual (see Ch.7:43 and 9:16), a division arose among the Jews for the following reasons:

- a- failure to understand what Christ had said, and failure to appreciate His spiritual intent, and
- b- enmity against Christ because of the positive effect He had on others - it was easier for them to accuse Him of blasphemy and of being under Satan's influence.

However, some never forgot the miracle of healing the man who had been born blind - they considered that miracle to be proof that Christ had no relationship with Satan's kingdom.

4. Relationship between the Son and the Father - verses 22 - 30:

"Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon's porch. Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, "How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me. But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, Who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one." (John 10:22 - 30)

Verses 22 & 23:

St. John inserted a detail about the time and place when Jesus walked into the temple. It was during a Jewish spiritual, national feast, called the "Feast of Dedication" or the "Festival of Lights" or "Chanukah." It commemorated the ousting of the Greek occupiers and the rededication

of the temple, led by Judah Maccabee (Judas Maccabeus), one of the leaders of the Jewish guerilla freedom fighters who drove the Seleucid Greek occupiers out of Judea in 139 B.C.

It was during winter, about mid-December; Solomon's porch was the only sheltered porch - hence the warmest.

Verses 24 & 25:

Forefathers and commentators have agreed that the question's intent was another attempt at ensnaring Christ - they had no intention of believing on Him, rather, they sought some means whereby they could accuse Him of blasphemy. They asked Him to make a public proclamation, which have then enabled them to justify their accusations before the Jewish Council, as well as before the Roman authorities since, being the "King of the Jews" would have implied defiance to the Roman occupation. Therefore, Christ responded indirectly, referring to the miracles He had performed, while not denying the truth about Himself. On other occasions, our Lord used the same response, mentioning His miracles - Ch.5:36, 9:4, 10:37 & 38, and 14:10).

Verse 26:

Our Lord states that the Jews' failure to believe either on His deeds or words, was that they were not part of His flock. Man's pride is an impediment to heeding the word of God; that was the affliction plaguing the scribes and Pharisees. On the other hand, the simple people accepted Christ's words and believed on Him. The expression ***"as I said to you"*** was in reference to what Christ had said in verses 4 & 14, and Ch.8:47.

Verse 27:

This is a repeat of verses 4 & 14. It emphasizes the same spiritual meanings of God's knowledge of His own, and of His own discerning His voice.

Verse 28:

"And I give them eternal life" - Christ's flock uniquely enjoys this special gift - the gift of inheriting eternal life. The preceding answers the question: How does Christ grant this eternal life? It is granted through:

- a- birth from baptism and the Holy Spirit, during Christ's discussion with Nicodemus (Ch.3:5),
- b- belief on the only Son (Ch.3:16 & 36 and Ch.6:47),
- c- partaking of Christ's holy body and blood (Ch.6:54), and
- d- constantly following Christ, struggling, and accepting hardships (Ch.12:25).

"They shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand."

+ *These words are indeed beautiful and soothing for the soul. They allay all doubts concerning our soul's salvation. Dear God, we believe that through You alone we have eternal life - You keep and protect us. How, then, can we not be saved, after having been granted free salvation through the Sacrament of Baptism, forgiveness of sins through the Sacraments of Penance and the holy Eucharist? Dear Lord, we rest assured. We entreat You to grant us the spirit of struggle against sins, in order to fulfill salvation of our souls....*

Verses 29 & 30:

In verse 28 our Lord says ***"neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand;"*** and in these verses He says, ***"no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand."*** This proves that the Father and the Son have the same will, power and authority; hence, Christ's consequent proclamation ***"I and My Father are One."*** This is among the most powerful verses proving Christ's Divinity and equality in essence to the Father. The expression ***"My Father, Who has given them to Me"*** means that the entire creation was granted to the Son since eternity, before the foundation of the world. Thus, the Son is the Creator (Ch.1:3), the Redeemer (Ch.10:15) and the Protector (Ch.28).

"My Father...is greater than all," means that God's protection against Satan is infinite, transcending all his attempts to snatch or harm His flock.

+ *Dearly beloved, do we place our trust in God's powerful hand, protecting us and His Church, or do we continue to fret over this, that and the other thing?? Rest assured, we are in the hands of our heavenly Father, enjoying His boundless protection, through which we can vanquish the forces of evil. Let us not belittle the powerful hand of God, that crushes all evil. rather, let us chant with Solomon, saying, "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe." (Proverbs 18:10)*

5. Christ is accused of blasphemy - verses 31 - 42:

"Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, "Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?" The Jews answered Him, saying, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God." Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, "You are gods" '? If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the

Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him Whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him." Therefore they sought again to seize Him, but He escaped out of their hand. And He went away again beyond the Jordan to the place where John was baptizing at first, and there He stayed. Then many came to Him and said, "John performed no sign, but all the things that John spoke about this Man were true." And many believed in Him there." (John 10:31 - 42)

Verses 31 - 33:

Christ made this powerful proclamation about His oneness with the Father. This enraged the Jews, because of their lack of appreciation of all Christ's aphorisms and miracles - through which He intended no evil. They tried to stone Him, alleging that what He had said about His relationship with the Father was blasphemous. Their eyes and hearts were blind to all the good deeds that Christ wrought - refusing to heed and absorb any of them, they persisted in their desire to kill Him.

+ *Dearly beloved, frequently we forget, especially during hardships, all the good things and miracles Christ wrought throughout our lifetime - listening solely to the voice of Satan, who consistently sows doubts in the hearts of God's flock, concerning God's shepherding.*

Do we not, then, falsely accuse God??

Dear God, we entreat You to forgive our transgressions and false accusations. Let us not be likened unto those whose eyes were blind to Your bounties.

Verses 34 - 36:

A person may endure oppression for God's sake, without defending himself. However, the sole crime which no Christian will accept being accused thereof is blasphemy - because accepting it means denying God. Thus, Christ defended Himself against the vain accusation of blasphemy, referring to the law. The law referred to Moses as a "god" to his brother Aaron (see Exodus 4:16). We also have, "***I said, 'You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High.'***" (Psalm 82:6) The law is truthful and indisputable. Thus, since the law referred to some people as "gods," and that was not considered blasphemy, Christ was not blaspheming when He attributed the same for Himself. Furthermore, in verse 36, Christ

proclaimed that He was not a regular human being, rather, **"Him Whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world."** Christ was the all-holy God, the appointed Messiah since eternity, to save mankind, incarnate and sent to the world. All who preceded Christ were labelled "gods," because they were the bearers of the word of God (verse 35). On the other hand, Christ was the Word of God Himself (Ch.1:1). Christ is the Son of God, He is God, He is of one essence with the Father.

Verses 37 & 38:

Christ mentioned His deeds as the third element of proof against allegations of blasphemy; this was discussed in Ch.5:36, 9:3 - 5, 10:35 and 14:10 - 12. All His deeds were Divine, which no other human had ever done - hence, feeding the multitude, and healing the sick and blind. Those deeds alone should have been sufficient for them to believe Him when He said **"I and My Father are One."**

Verse 39:

The events, at that point, ended by the Jews' failure to believe on Christ, despite His words and deeds. Rather, out of spite, they sought to arrest Him and, either present Him to their leaders for trial, or stone Him outside the city. However, since Christ's time had not come yet, **"no one laid hands on Him"** (John 7:44) and **"Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by."** (John 8:59)

Verses 40 - 42:

Many, east of the Jordan, believed on Christ; that was where John the Baptist had baptized Christ. Our Lord spent the last four months of His incarnation in that region - that would have been from December till the Passover preceding the crucifixion. Christ's presence there attracted many of the simple-minded, who believed on Him. The fact that they compared our Lord to John, who had never performed a single miracle, indicates that Christ must have performed many miracles during His sojourn in that region. Those miracles, plus John's testimony, led many to believe on Him.

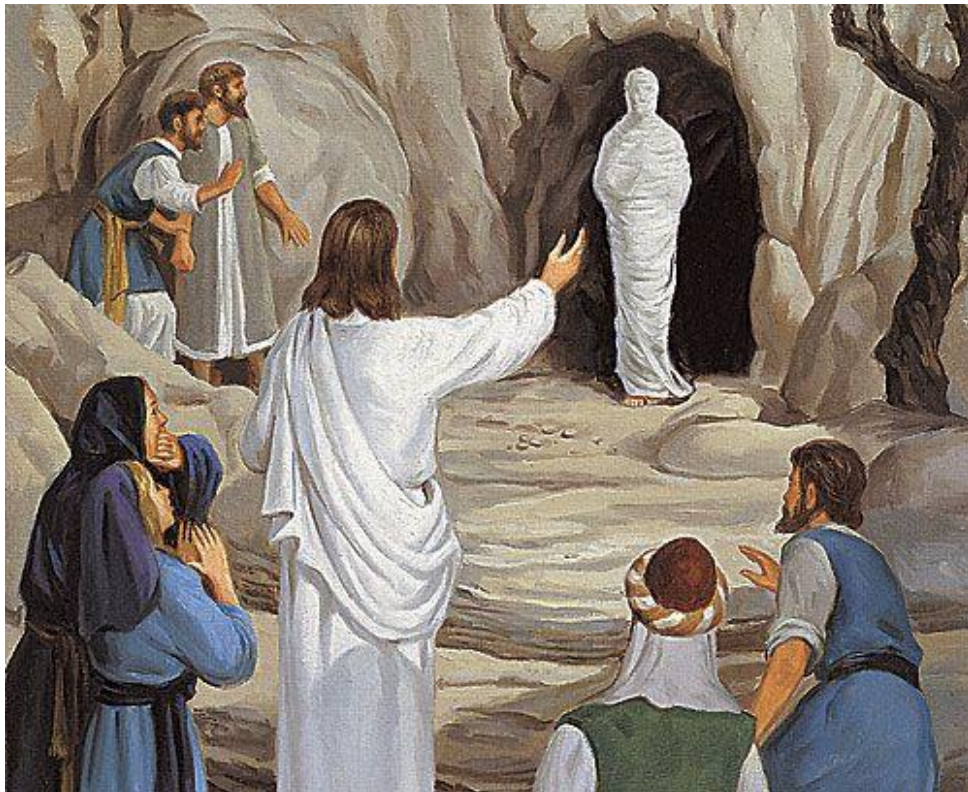


*"Interpretation of the holy Bible - the New Testament"
taken from the series: "Patristic expositions and meditations"*

*An exegetical study of
the Gospel according to St. John*

Chapter 11

Christ raises Lazarus from the dead



Christ raised Lazarus from the dead

1. Lazarus falls sick - verses 1 - 7:

"Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." When Jesus heard that, He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was. Then after this He said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." (John 11:1 - 7)

Introduction:

St. John's gospel uniquely mentions the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead. A likely reason is that since he wrote his gospel about fifty years after the other gospels had been written, he chose events that the others had not mentioned, such as healing the afflicted of Bethsaida and creating eyes for the man who had been born blind. Furthermore, the miracles which St. John chose accentuate Christ's authority and Divine power. One reason for Sts. Matthew, Mark and Luke not mentioning identical events....is simply what St. John said in his gospel's conclusion: ***"And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written...."*** (John 2:25)

Verses 1 & 2:

Lazarus and his two sisters were Christ's close friends. The Hebrew meaning of the name "Lazarus," is "God has helped." The meaning of the name "Bethany" has been interpreted in several ways: "house of happiness," "house of affliction," "house of figs".....Bethany was a small village and biblical site on the eastern slopes of the Mount of Olives about three kilometres outside Jerusalem, situated in the West Bank. Lazarus' sickness is mentioned here by way of introduction to the rest of this chapter. Chapter 12:3 - 8 gives details concerning Mary's anointing Christ with fragrant oil.

Verse 3:

Driven by their love and friendship, the sisters sent a messenger to Christ, asking Him to heal their brother. Of course, our Lord did not need a reminder of His love for Lazarus. However, the sisters' language in their message suggests the urgency of their brother's state, and their need for Christ's immediate attention.

+ *The sisters' sending messengers to Christ teaches us to pray for our afflicted loved ones, as well as for all others.*

Verse 4:

"This sickness is not unto death" - Christ's answer proves His Divinity. His response to the messenger, within earshot of the disciples, also proves His awareness of future events that would transpire. Our Lord repeated what He had said in Ch. 9:3, namely, healing the blind man and raising Lazarus were part of the Divine economy, through which the Divine power of the Son would be manifested.

Verses 5 & 6:

"Now Jesus loved...." - This is a portrayal of Christ's love for all creation - especially for those who are consistently focused upon Him.

+ St. John mentioned this detail to emphasize to readers that Christ loves all, and that He did not neglect His sick friend, Lazarus. It is incumbent on us to appreciate fully God's economy. Our prayers are immediately set before Him, but His response is in accordance with His own timing and economy, hence, "To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven...." (Ecclesiastes 3:1) God may delay His response to offer us something better, or to test our faith....

We also learn that we should not judge others if their outreach to us is delayed; rather, we should find excuses for them, since we are unaware of their preoccupations....

Verse 7:

Christ's loving heart responded at the most appropriate time - two days later He proceeded to Bethany, taking with Him His disciples who would witness His great miracle.

2. The disciples' fear of Judaea - verses 8 - 16:

"The disciples said to Him, "Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." These things He said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up." Then His disciples said, "Lord, if he sleeps he will get well." However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him." Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him." (John 11:8 - 16)

Verse 8:

The disciples continued to remember events of the Feast of Dedication, and how the Jews had threatened to stone or arrest Christ, in Judaea. That was why, fearing for Christ's and their safety, they objected to His intended visit to Judaea.

Verses 9 & 10:

Christ's response to His disciples meant to clarify for them that Christ is the light of day, and that the hours of daylight represent the limited duration of His ministry on earth. Consequently, there was no need for their fear as long as He was with them. Furthermore, Christ clarified this:

"A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going." (John 12:35 & 36) That was akin to His telling them, "Fear not, no one can harm you, for I am with you, and no one has authority over Me. Liken yourselves unto someone travelling by day, fearing nothing, before darkness sets in."

Verse 11:

"Our friend Lazarus" - Here, our Lord is expressing the loving relationship He had with Lazarus, to which He also added His disciples.

+ Spiritually speaking, Christ loves you, me, plus all His children - not only Lazarus. In the "Song of Solomon," He refers to us as "My beloved." In your prayers you may refer to God as "Dear Lord," but do you also hear Him as He calls you "My beloved?" What effect does this have within you? He even calls you "My beloved" before His disciples and all His saints....

"Our friend Lazarus sleeps" - Our Lord chose this expression to teach us that our physical death is merely a slumber to be followed by resurrection and eternal life.

+ For this reason, the "Litany for the Departed," in the Coptic Orthodox Church, incorporates the clause, "there is no death for Your servants, rather, a transition." The term "death" means, for our Lord Christ, "perdition due to lack of belief on Him, rejection of His commandments, pride, or rejection of the Church's sacraments." that is the true death, which is not followed by life, rather, condemnation.

"I go that I may wake him up" - This refers to Christ's Divine work in raising Lazarus from the dead. Despite the disciples' failure to understand at the time, they eventually understood after the miracle.

Verses 12 - 14:

The disciples understood Christ's words in the literal sense, without comprehending His true intent. In the bottom of their hearts they continued to fear visiting Judaea, saying that "sleep" was a good sign that Lazarus' health was improving (normally, sleep accelerates the healing process for several ailments). Faced with His disciples' clear indication of their lack of understanding, Christ told them plainly that Lazarus had died.

Verse 15:

"I am glad for your sakes" - Our Lord did not rejoice at Lazarus' death - rather He rejoiced because He knew what would transpire eventually. Raising Lazarus from the dead would constitute a significant boost to the disciples' belief leading up to the Cross, which was very close. That miracle would also help others, besides the disciples, to believe. Finally,

Christ was glad He had not been there at the earlier stages of Lazarus' sickness, since the miracle would have been less significant, and the disciples had already seen Christ healing sick people. Raising Lazarus, after having been dead for four days was, clearly, quite a significant and unprecedented miracle.

Verse 16:

Thomas, known for his doubts, made this comment as an "aside" to his fellow disciples. His comment was akin to saying that Christ ignored their pleas. Thus, he concluded that the Jews would arrest and kill them all.

+ *Thomas' actions mirror many people's, whose logic supercedes their faith; instead of believing their faith, they create doubt in the minds of the simple by ridiculing miracles, the power of God, or the saints' authority. Dear God, do not permit our minds to create impediments to our faith. Rather, open up our hearts, so that we may inform others of Your great deeds.*

3. Christ is the resurrection and the life - verses 17 - 29:

"So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house. Then Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world." And when she had said these things, she went her way and secretly called Mary her sister, saying, "The Teacher has come and is calling for you." As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly and came to Him." (John 11:17 - 29)

Verses 17 - 19:

"Four days" - That was the period of time between Christ's leaving the Jordan and His telling the disciples that Lazarus was asleep. Bethany was about a forty-five minute walk from Jerusalem. As was, and still is, the custom in most communities, villagers had gathered in Mary's and Martha's home to offer their condolences.

Verse 20:

It may be inferred that Christ did not go into Lazarus' home - rather, a messenger informed Martha, whereupon she hurried to meet Christ, leaving Mary with the visitors. Had Mary been aware of Christ's arrival, she would have gone out to meet Him with Martha. Furthermore, this view is corroborated in verse 28, when Martha told her, "***The Teacher has come.***"

Verses 21 & 22:

Martha candidly expressed her regret at Christ's absence during her brother's illness, prior to his death. She fully believed in Christ's power to heal the sick, and His ability to have prevented her brother's death. Her saying "***even now,***" indicates that she was expecting something from Christ - maybe raising Lazarus - but she remained uncertain.

+ *The most important lesson we learn from Martha, is her openness and simplicity of expression. Too often our prayers lack those two elements. In our prayers we should express all our feelings candidly and simply - whether we are seeking help, experiencing difficulties, or giving thanks for God's bounties. Honesty and frankness are essential for accepted prayers.*

Verses 23 & 24:

As was his wont, St. John presented another dichotomy, underlining the difference between God's intent and man's understanding. Here, Christ explains that Lazarus would indeed rise from the dead - because life and resurrection are uniquely within the purview and authority of the only begotten Son. Martha, on the other hand, had failed to grasp Christ's theological meaning pertaining to His Person. That is the reason why, in Martha's and everybody else's, minds, Lazarus would rise "***at the last day***" - hence the last day of general resurrection for all mankind.

4. Raising Lazarus from the dead - verses 30 - 46:

"Now Jesus had not yet come into the town, but was in the place where Martha met Him. Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and comforting her, when they saw that Mary rose up quickly and went out, followed her, saying, "She is going to the tomb to weep there." Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. And He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept. Then the Jews

said, "See how He loved him!" And some of them said, "Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?" Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me." Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go." Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him. But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did." (John 11:30 - 46)

Verse 25:

Christ's response corrects His audience's understanding, and proclaims the Divinity inherent in His Person. He is the **"resurrection"** and the source of **"life."** Resurrection is possible at any time He wills - it is not restricted to judgment day as people believed. All who die in the flesh - like Lazarus - but having **"believed"** will **"live"**...they will have eternal life. Physical death has no effect whatsoever on the spirit. However, spiritual death, through sin, is a product of unbelief in Christ - consequently, rather than eternal life, it leads to eternal condemnation.

+ Such faith leads us to appreciate our forefathers' fearlessness when confronted with martyrdom. They considered death for Christ's sake to mark the beginning of life, and a deposit for the true resurrection.

"I am the resurrection and the life." This assertion fills with hope, every soul suffering from the death of sin; if it so desires, Christ proclaims to it that He is the mystery behind its resurrection and life.

Let us therefore, offer this Christ, Who resurrects each soul straying away from His Church; we would thus enjoy, daily miracles of resurrection in Christ's Church, **".....for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found."** (Luke 15:32)

Verse 26:

Belief on Christ adds yet another advantage to believers, namely, absence of eternal death; this complements the previous verse's meaning. Put differently, not only will the dead rise, but also, **"whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die."** This expounds the difference between the worldly perspective, and the sense intended by God for His children (see also verse 25).

"Do you believe this?" This is the same question which Christ had asked the man who was born blind (Ch. 9:35). Christ repeated, time and time again, that salvation, cure and bounties can only be acquired through belief on Him; most importantly, they lead to resurrection and absence of death.

Verse 27:

Here we have Martha's proclamation, that Christ was the incarnate Son of God (see Matthew 16:16), Who came for mankind's salvation.

St. John Chrysostom draws an analogy between Martha and Peter, saying that their proclamations were made by the Holy Spirit through their tongues. The unequivocal faith that Jesus Christ was the Saviour, the Son of God, was fulfilled after the resurrection, and proclaimed after the Holy Spirit's descent on the disciples.

Verses 28 & 29:

"She went her way and secretly called Mary her sister" - This means that Martha had returned home to inform her sister about Christ **"secretly"** - maybe she did not want to disturb their guests, or she feared for Christ's safety. Mary's response was immediate.

+ *We, too, need to respond immediately to Christ's calling. Often, we err in delaying our response - this results in losing many opportunities for enjoying time with our beloved Saviour.*

Verses 30 - 32:

Our Lord neither entered the village nor Lazarus' home - His clear intent was raising Lazarus from the dead, rather than offering condolences. The exit of Mary and Martha attracted the attention of their Jewish visitors, who, in turn, followed them to the tomb, thinking that the sisters wanted to mourn (as was the custom) at their brother's tomb. Such was the Divine economy, so that many would observe the miracle. Mary's reaction resembled her sister's (verse 21), and she worshipped Christ, respecting His Person.

Verses 33 - 35:

The scene at the tomb, with everybody weeping, was heartbreaking - especially since it pertained to a dear friend of Christ's. Although Christ was/is God, capable of raising Lazarus from the dead, He was also a full human being, bearing all human emotions. The expressions "**He groaned in the spirit and was troubled**" indicate that Christ was significantly grieved.

+ *This picture clarifies to us the extent of Christ's feelings for us. He is tender, He feels His children's suffering (Isaiah 63:9), and He shares their moments of grief. This, alone, is comforting to anyone experiencing hardships.*

This situation also teaches us to be sympathetic towards people's feelings, hence, "**Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.**" (Romans 12:15) We should never belittle others' feelings. Sharing others' grief is not wrong, as long as it does not affect our belief in resurrection after death. The grief against which God warns us is that which dispels our hope - hence, "**But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.**" (1 Thessalonians 4:13)

"**Jesus wept.**" This is another indication of Christ's tender feelings.

+ *This reminds us of the words of the Church's "Litany of the Sick" - hence, "You are the hope of the desperate, the aid of the helpless, the solace of the faint-hearted, and the safe harbour of the storm-stricken."*

Verses 36 - 38:

St. John continues his description of the unfolding scene....while some were greatly affected by Christ's demonstrated strong feelings, others doubted His power - put differently, they wondered, if Christ had Divine powers, why had He not cured Lazarus as He had healed the blind man....

"**Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself...**" As He approached the tomb, Christ was perturbed - also due to the mixed feelings expressed by the Jews around Him (verses 36 & 37). The tomb was hewn in the rock, as was the custom, and covered by a stone.

Verse 39:

"**Take away the stone.**" Clearly, the Person Who was capable of raising Lazarus from the dead was able to raise the stone!! However, this is

Christ's modus operandi: He allows man to participate in His work. God will not do whatever is within man's purview. Man's participation in God's work is also recorded for filling the water pots during the wedding of Cana of Galilee (Ch.2:7) and collecting the leftover fragments after the miracle of feeding the multitude (Matthew 15:37 and Mark 8:8).

+ By participating in God's work, man becomes a witness for God's work and economy. This is an advantage for those working in the field of God's service - they perceive God's work closely. We also learn that, whereas salvation is Divine, first and foremost, we also have a role to play through our deeds and constant spiritual struggle.

"He has been dead four days." This means that resurrection would be impossible after the body had decayed. Removing the stone would have simply increased people's anguish.....

+ The Church's forefathers said that the biggest spiritual lesson to take home from the Lazarus story, and the thing most worth spending your time thinking on, is the concept of faith and how this is tested in the story. We must understand that deliverance is not always immediate; sometimes God has plans that we cannot realise yet but we must trust He always has our best at heart. We should engage in these tests and strengthen our faith as this story is a demonstration of the power that God has, and while He may not resurrect someone in your life, we simply believe in His omnipotence and limitless power.

Verse 40:

In Verse 4, our Lord said, **"This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it."** The Son vanquished death through the power of that glory - the absolute glory of God - as a prelude to His own resurrection. Christ's expression "If you would believe" links witnessing that glory to having faith, as a necessary prerequisite. This explains St. Matthew's saying, **"Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief."** (Matthew 13:58)

Verses 41 & 42:

Filled with curiosity at what could/would transpire, **"they took away the stone."** People had mixed feelings of doubt and certainty, since Christ's Divinity had not yet been manifested; the crowd was a mix of proponents and opponents. The purpose of Christ's audible discussion with the Father was **"that they may believe that You sent Me."** Christ desired to use that unique miracle in manifesting what He had already proclaimed in St. John's gospel, namely, that He was of the Father, and in the Father; the Father and the Son had/have a single will. He also wanted to rebut their accusations that He performed miracles through Beelzebub (Matthew

12:24, Mark 3:22 and Luke 11:15). Thus, Christ proclaimed that God was the source of all, and that His will was manifested through His Son.

+ We can also learn an important lesson here from Christ, namely, we must pray unceasingly - especially, prior to any undertaking. Christ also underscored the importance of starting any prayer with thanksgiving - such is the practice of our Church at the beginning of all its rites.

"You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me..." This statement accentuates the perfect and continual congruence between the Son's petitions and the Father's responses. The Son petitions initially on behalf of His creation, through His redeeming blood, and the Father, Who is One in essence with the Son, always accepts the Son's petitions. Christ accentuated this intent when He told His disciples, **"And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it."** (John 14:13 & 14)

Verse 43:

"He cried with a loud voice..." Christ's loud, resonating voice shook Hades' foundations, opened its doors, and defeated the death sentence reigning over mankind. Lazarus rose and his soul was released from Hades. Christ did not order Lazarus in the name of the Father, in order to demonstrate that the Son has the power and the authority to perform anything the Father does.

Verse 44:

Great indeed must have been the amazement of the multitude witnessing the resurrection of Lazarus, after having been dead for four days!! Christ followed up by instructing them to **"Loose him, and let him go."**

+ Similarly to Christ's giving man a role to play, by removing the stone, behold, He entrusts the soul resurrected from sin's death, to the Church's care represented by clergy and servants. Through His propitiating work, Christ granted forgiveness of sins and resurrection; but He entrusted part of the work to the Church which follows through on the work of the ultimate Physician. When Christ raised the young girl from the dead (Luke 8:55), He instructed that she be given something to eat. Christ deposited all His spiritual food in His Church. All who repent without partaking, regularly, of the life-giving food, will suffer eternal death (see Ch.6:53).

Verses 45 & 46:

There continues to be a difference between those who accept God's work and believe on Him, versus those who continue to observe and reject. That was Christ's assertion in St. Luke's gospel: **"If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one**

rise from the dead." (Luke 16:31) For the first group, Lazarus' resurrection flowed their bodies, strengthening their faith. As for the second group, their worldly tendencies impeded their faith and belief on such a great miracle.

+ *Dear God, open my heart and perception, so that I may see Your great works. Do not permit my whims to be a hindrance to my belief on Your works.*

5. Plotting against Christ following the miracle - verses 47 - 57:

"Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, "What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation." And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish." Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad. Then, from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death. Therefore Jesus no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there into the country near the wilderness, to a city called Ephraim, and there remained with His disciples. And the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went from the country up to Jerusalem before the Passover, to purify themselves. Then they sought Jesus, and spoke among themselves as they stood in the temple, "What do you think-that He will not come to the feast?" Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a command, that if anyone knew where He was, he should report it, that they might seize Him." (John 11:47 - 57)

Verses 47 & 48:

Clearly, the priests and Pharisees intended to get rid of the Person of Christ, Who had attracted all the multitudes. Because of Christ, their sphere of influence and authority had been significantly reduced. Consequently, this powerful miracle prompted them to convene a meeting, with the preconceived intent of getting rid of Christ (see Ch. 5:18, 7:1, 25, 30 & 44, 8:40 & 59 and 10:31 - 33 & 39).

Their only choice was to fabricate allegations that could support their intent. Thus, they concocted the notion that the multitude's support for Christ would destabilize the Jewish nation. Despite their admission that

the Lord wrought many miracles, they were condemned primarily due to their quest to kill Him, rather than believing on Him.

+ *Akin to the priests and Pharisees, we also fall into the sin of attempting to justify our judgments and actions, while silencing our conscience's prompting, and embellishing our appearance before men, thus forgetting God, the omniscient just Judge. Blessed indeed are those whose conscience is solely justified before God: "Blessed is he whose conscience has not condemned him, and who is not fallen from his hope in the Lord."* (Ecclesiasticus 14:2)

Verses 49 & 50:

Caiaphas, the high priest, was biologically related to Annas who was high priest before him. During his eleven-year tenure, he was contemporaneous with the events transpiring during our Lord's ministry. In Jewish history, he was known to have been both harsh and ignorant.

"You know nothing at all..." Caiaphas made this authoritative opening remark, capitalizing on his distinguished position, and imparting to his audience the notion that what he would say was Divinely inspired. Posing at once as a religious and political figure, he tried to appease consciences by saying, ***"It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish."***

Verses 51 & 52:

Caiaphas was not a prophet. God used him to proclaim unfolding events. Verse 52 lies beyond Caiaphas' assertions - rather, St. John mentions this to proclaim God's intent, namely, Christ's death was not solely for redemption of the Jewish nation, but for redemption of mankind. That is precisely what our Lord had said, ***"....and other sheep I have which are not of this fold...."*** (Ch.10:16)

Verse 53:

That was the conclusion of the priests-Pharisees session. They just had to decide on the means of executing their decision and Christ's arrest.

Verse 54:

The session ended, and news of the council's decision spread. Since Christ's time had not yet come - known uniquely to Him - He refrained from proclaiming Himself, and ***"no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there into the country near the wilderness, to a city called Ephraim."*** That city, known today as "Taybeh," was located in the region of Jordan's wilderness.

Verse 55:

Here, St. John starts transporting the reader to the final chapter of his gospel. Thus, he sets the scene for the last Passover, and for the Jews converging on Jerusalem a few days earlier, in order to offer purification sacrifices in preparation for the Passover, since Mosaic law prohibited unclean people from touching or eating the Passover lamb.

+ *Dearly beloved, the Jews obeyed God meticulously with respect to their purification before approaching the Passover lamb; however, some of us approach our Lord's holy body and blood without prior purification through sincere spiritual repentance, confession and absolution by the Holy Spirit!*

Verses 56 & 57:

In these two verses, we find two distinct groups of people seeking Christ, with two completely different intentions. The first group are the simple, seeking to see that Righteous Person Who had wrought many miracles, especially that of raising Lazarus. The second group's motivation was seeking ways to ensnare Christ, in order to arrest Him, and have Him killed. The last verse clarifies the decision taken by the preists and Pharisees in verse 53.



*"Interpretation of the holy Bible - the New Testament"
taken from the series: "Patristic expositions and meditations"*

*An exegetical study of
the Gospel according to St. John*

Chapter 12

***Pouring fragrant oil - Christ's triumphal entry into
Jerusalem - Christ's discourse about His redemption and
His judgment***



Mary poured fragrant oil on Christ's feet

1. Pouring fragrant oil - verses 1 - 11:

"Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. Then one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said, "Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it. But Jesus said, "Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always." Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for

Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus." (John 12:1 - 11)

Verses 1 & 2:

The Jewish Passover was celebrated on April 14th. Christ's arrival in Bethany (*house of depression*) was on Friday after sunset - thus it was counted as the Sabbath. The supper was given in the house of Simon the Leper (according to Matthew 26:6 and Mark 14:3); Simon had been, likely, healed earlier by our Lord. St. John mentions the presence of Lazarus to accentuate his having been raised from the dead. Martha was also present to help with the supper.

Verse 3:

Mary, Martha's sister, brought a pound of expensive oil (one pound is roughly equal to 0.45 kilograms) and poured it on Christ's feet. It was the custom to anoint dignitaries' heads with expensive oil - but Mary poured it on our Lord's feet - and wiped them with her hair - thus expressing deep love for Him, gratitude for raising her brother, and humility. The aroma filled the house indicating its high value, while reflecting the quantity used.

+ *Dearly beloved, Mary did not merely offer fragrant oil; she offered a humble, loving, heart. God will not accept any offering devoid of love (see 1 Corinthians 13). For this reason, Christ rejected the Pharisee's prayer, yet accepted that of the publican. God, in His richness, is in no need of our offerings. However, given His love for us, He is pleased with our love for Him. Thus, dearly beloved, to secure God's acceptance, ensure that whatever you offer, is offered with a loving heart.*

Verses 4 - 6:

Matthew and Mark mentioned some objections from guests concerning Mary's action (Matthew 26:8 & 9 and Mark 14:4 & 5). However, St. John singled out Judas, and explained that his motive was eventual stealing the 300 denarii from the treasury, as was his wont. In those days, 300 denarii would have roughly constituted a year's wages for a labourer.

Verses 7 & 8:

Christ did not intend to belittle serving the poor. Rather, He was responding to Judas' evil intentions, while upholding Mary's act of love towards Him. Christ was also addressing all guests who had agreed with Judas' objections. Christ mentioned "***the day of My burial***" as a prophetic reference to events that would eventually transpire. Some speculate that Christ was referring to His Passion journey, which started in Bethany and ended in Jerusalem.

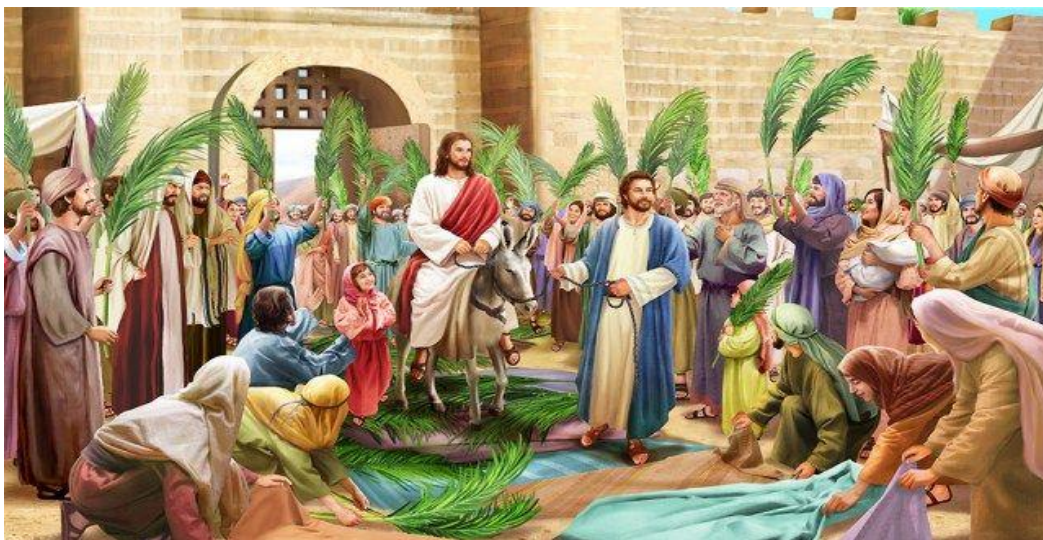
Verses 9 - 11:

The risen Lazarus became the strongest indication that Christ was the awaited Messiah. That is the reason for St. John's singling this live proof as being the primary motivation for Jews to flock to Bethany - they simply wanted to see the person who had been raised from the dead. St. John also accentuates the extent of the priests' wickedness - hence, they wanted to kill an innocent man, Lazarus, to rid themselves of that glaring evidence; that was their preference over believing on Christ Jesus.

+ *Dear God, this is indeed the extreme to which a wicked heart can distort the truth and be driven by its own grudges!! I entreat You, Dear Lord, to distance from us and all Your congregation, Satan's wiles, which cloud people's thoughts, rendering them blind, unjust, stewards.*

2. Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem - verses 12 - 19:

"The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out: "Hosanna! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!' The King of Israel!" Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written: "Fear not, daughter of Zion; Behold, your King is coming, Sitting on a donkey's colt." His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and that they had done these things to Him. Therefore the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of his tomb and raised him from the dead, bore witness. For this reason the people also met Him, because they heard that He had done this sign. The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, "You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!" (John 12:12 - 19)



Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem

Verses 12 & 13:

Details of Christ's triumphal entry are given in Matthew 21:1 - 11 and Mark 11:1 - 11. "***The next day***" refers to Sunday morning. News of Christ's arrival from Bethany spread far and wide, to Jews from Jerusalem, Galilee and the Jordan region, by those who had been present during the supper in Simon the Leper's house.

"Branches of palm trees" - That was the custom for greeting triumphant army generals upon their return. This significant celebration must have accelerated events leading to the crucifixion, while aggravating the chief priests and Pharisees.

"Hosanna" - This is derived from the Hebrew, meaning "save, rescue, saviour." In the present context, it could mean belief by some that Christ was the redeeming Saviour, belief by others that He was a great Teacher and prophet, and belief by a third group that He was the political deliverer from Roman rule.

Verses 14 & 15:

St. John did not discuss, like other evangelists, the details of Christ's entry or how He acquired "***a young donkey.***" In verse 15 he merely referred to the prophecy given in Zacharias 9:9 without elaboration (unlike Matthew 21:5). St. John's focus was more on the Divine salvational aspects. Matthew, on the other hand, addressed his gospel to the Jewish nation; he was thus obliged to dwell on historical facts and prophecies, foretelling the advent of Christ and proving His Messianic, salvational, mission.

Verse 16:

At the time of Christ's entry into Jerusalem, and His riding the donkey, the disciples had not appreciated that the unfolding scene was the one which Zacharias had foretold 500 years earlier. They understood after His glorified resurrection and ascension. Following the Holy Spirit's descent on the disciples, their eyes and hearts were enlightened, and they understood the link between Old Testament prophecies and Christ's salvational work on earth.

Verses 17 - 19:

St. John clarifies the strongest motive behind the multitudes' joy and exuberance in welcoming Christ - namely, it was their having witnessed Christ's raising Lazarus from the dead. On the other hand, St. John accentuates the wickedness and envy churning within the Pharisees' hearts; rather than following the truth, they sought means to stir the multitudes against Christ, fearing loss of their stature as supreme teachers.

3. Death and life - verses 20 - 26:

"Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast. Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip came and told Andrew, and in turn Andrew and Philip told Jesus. But Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor."
(John 12:20 - 26)

Verses 20 - 22:

In this context, the "Greeks" were not pagan Gentiles, rather, they were either Gentile converts, or Jews who had resided in Greece, and had gone to offer sacrifices and celebrate Passover in Jerusalem. They had heard of Christ, then asked Philip, who asked Andrew, to lead them to Him.

Verse 23:

Christ addressed His response not only to His disciples but also to the Greeks and all listeners; it marked the beginning of foretelling Christ's salvational work. Since their thoughts were still fixated on an earthly kingdom and glory, Christ started addressing what they had on their minds, to elevate them to the spiritual level. The expression "**that the Son of Man should be glorified**" means "proclaiming His first, heavenly, glory" concealed by the body. That glory would be manifested through the Cross, resurrection and ascension.

Verse 24:

This verse clarifies the means whereby the Son of man would be glorified. The "**grain of wheat**" refers to the incarnate Christ. That grain's glory and worth are manifested through its death and burial; what people see, as the grain's death, is in fact the very source of life, since it would rise and become the source of satiation and life to all who seek it. Thus, Christ clarified to the multitude the significance of His death, and salvation to all who accept His redemption on the Cross, and who consume His body through the holy Eucharist.

Verse 25:

After having spoken about Himself, Christ delivers a general spiritual aphorism, considered as one of Christianity's tenets. Hence, a quest for a

higher spiritual level necessitates some form of material loss. Such material losses will be, invariably, inferior to the splendour and glory of eternal life, which consequently merits all/any material loss. Material losses include sacrificing various carnal desires which, in turn, attach a person to the world, leading to loss of heaven. It is thus incumbent on to resist, even to sacrifice, all such desires - including life itself. Eternal inheritance is worth such sacrifices. That is what Christ meant by **"He who loves his life will lose it."** That is the faith which motivated our saintly forefathers and martyrs to approach death boldly and nonchalantly, and to be oblivious to rulers' oppression. Positioning eternal life as our goal renders us fearless.

Verse 26:

Put differently, whoever desires to be a true Christian, and a sincere disciple and servant of Christ's commandments, must lead a Christlike lifestyle in all respects. Our Lord sacrificed Himself, and gave Himself up to death, for others' redemption. A sincere servant must follow His example. Christ linked such a lifestyle to its reward: namely, constant presence of a sincere Christian in the bosom of his Master, plus being honoured by his heavenly Father. Such eternal honour and recompense could only be quantified through absolute trust in Christ's words. Whatever we endure for Christ's sake will lead to such rewards.

4. Christ speaks of His death and its effects - verses 27 - 36:

"Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came from heaven, saying, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again." Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to Him." Jesus answered and said, "This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." This He said, signifying by what death He would die. The people answered Him, "We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever; and how can You say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this Son of Man?" Then Jesus said to them, "A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light." These things Jesus spoke, and departed, and was hidden from them." (John 12:27 - 36)

Verse 27:

The word "**soul**" in this context refers to "the centre of emotional reactions." Christ knew that the hour of His crucifixion and death was approaching. However, as a perfect human, He expressed His human feelings emotionally. He was faced with two issues: one would normally be rejected by a human soul, namely, death followed by redemption and salvation for mankind, and the other, submission by His righteous soul to the heavenly Father's will.

Therefore, the second part of this verse, "**What shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour?'**" would indicate that the Spirit knew, and was strengthening the soul, confirming that Christ had come for that very hour.

Verses 28 & 29:

Sts. Augustine and John Chrysostom say that the will of the Son was glorifying the name of the Father, through death, suffering, redemption of the perishing humanity, and leading them to heaven, where they would glorify the name of the Father eternally. The Father responds to the Son saying, "**I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.**" This means that the Son had glorified the Father through His repeated witnessing, His miracles, and His teaching about the intimate relationship between Them. The Father also glorified His only begotten Son by witnessing for Him; the Father glorified the Son:

- a- at His baptism (Matthew 3:17),
- b- during the transfiguration (Matthew 17:5), and
- c- in this particular verse: "**I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.**"

Glory between Father and Son is the same and reciprocal (Ch. 13:31 & 32 and Ch. 14:14). "**And will glorify it again**" refers to Christ's ascension.

Some of those present thought they had heard thunder, while others thought it was an angel speaking.

Verse 30:

To those who thought it was an angel speaking, Christ said, "**This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake.**"

Verse 31:

"**The judgment of this world**" - This does not refer to the final judgment, rather to the judgment due to rejecting Christ, judgment of the pagan world, and judgment of Satan's kingdom gripping worldly affairs. That was a proclamation of judgment of the entire world's iniquities.

"The ruler of this world will be cast out" - Satan will be defeated and cast out as a result of the first judgment and Christ's crucifixion. St. Paul expressed this as: **"Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it."** (Colossians 2:15) Thus, Satan has no authority over Christ's children, who believe on His name and follow His commandments.

Verses 32 & 33:

"If I am lifted up from the earth" - When Christ is hanging on the Cross, He will draw everyone to Him, raising them up. Without Christ, man remains shackled by sin and material life. However, through His Cross, Christ will draw to Him Satan's victims, embracing them, liberating them from everything inferior; they will enjoy eternal life with Him.

+ Let us, with unwavering resolve, extend our hands to Christ, our Sacrifice; let us meet Him in His altar, and derive our strength from Him. Then, and only then, will we be able to trample on Satan and the world.

Verse 34:

The multitudes were faced with a dilemma: on the one hand, was Christ's reference to His death and, on the other, what they had erroneously understood from the law, namely, that the Messiah's reign would be eternal, earthly (see Daniel 7:14, Psalm 110:4 and Isaiah 9:7). All prophecies foretold Christ's eternal - not temporal - spiritual kingdom. That was the reason for Christ telling Pontius Pilate: **"My kingdom is not of this world."** (John 18:36)

"Who is this Son of Man?" - That formulation which Christ used was similar to what Daniel had said in Daniel 7:13. Such a format embodies the choice whether Christ was the eternal One, or He was merely a normal human subject to death.

Verse 35:

Christ answered the question indirectly, referring to His approaching death, and referring to Himself as the **"Light,"** as He had previously said in Ch.8:12. Christ also urged them to seize the opportunity of adhering to that light lest rejection should plunge them into darkness.

+ By walking in the dark we lose our way and our focus. Such is the case when we distance ourselves from Christ and His Church. Outside the Church, our vessel of deliverance, we are embroiled in the world's material and intellectual currents, choking our souls and devouring us away from Christ's voice. This leads to a false sense of security and loss of salvation.

Verse 36:

Christ continued to urge belief on Him, while seizing the opportunity of His brief presence with them. Christ also added that by following Him and obeying His commandments, we become sons of light, bearers of all the attributes of the true light, while reflecting it to all around.

+ People see, in a Christian person, righteousness, purity, honesty plus other virtues. Do we really conform to this image??

"Jesus.....departed, and was hidden from them." - This signals the end of Christ's discourse. As He did on other occasions (see Ch.8:59) during His sojourn on earth, He spent many instances in spiritual seclusion.

5. Reasons for the Jews' unbelief - verses 37 - 43:

"But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him, that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again: "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, Lest they should see with their eyes, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them." These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him. Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." (John 12:37 - 43)

Verse 37:

"So many signs" - St. John accentuates the fact that, despite the number and variety of miracles that our Lord Christ had performed, most of the Jews failed to believe - thus demonstrating the hardness of their hearts. This also expresses amazement at the Jews' negative reaction to all the Lord's deeds.

Verses 38 & 39:

S. John says that we should not be amazed at the Jews' reaction since, antecedently, Isaiah had told them that they had rejected his prophecies, and had rejected the Lord's extended arm for their salvation; hence, **"Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"** (Isaiah 53:1) In verse 40, St. John quotes another Isaiah prophecy about their rejection of Christ.

Verse 40:

In this verse, St. John is paraphrasing Isaiah's prophecy: **"And He said, 'Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' 'Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return and be healed.'"** (Isaiah 6:9 & 10) Other gospels have also mentioned it (Matthew 13:13 - 15, Mark 4:12 and Luke 8:10). Put differently, God was not the cause of their hardened hearts, rather, that was due to their continual rebellion and rejection of God's words - thus, their eyes and hearts were oblivious to God's deeds in Isaiah's days, and to Christ's miracles and teachings. The responsibility thus rested fully on the Jews' shoulders, after all Divine means had been expended.

Verse 41:

"When he saw His glory" - Isaiah was referring to Christ's glory. This verse refers to Isaiah's vision: **"Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!'"** (Isaiah 6:2 & 3) Since the holy Bible tells us that no one has seen God (see Ch.1:18), it follows that Isaiah had seen the Son of God - Jesus Christ.

Verses 42 & 43:

St. John indicates that there are exceptions to every rule. Thus, whereas most of the Jews had failed to believe on Christ, some members of the Council of Seventy - the highest Jewish council - did believe, among whom were Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea; their faith was manifested after the crucifixion but, for fear of the Pharisees might, they had not declared it (see Ch.7:3, Ch.9:22, Ch.19:38 and Ch.20:19).

St. John mentions another reason for failing to declare belief on Christ, namely, a desire to retain praise by others - even at the risk of disowning God. My dear brother, let us not be party to such relationships or debates, out of love for stature or worldly positions - remember what St. Pater said: **"We ought to obey God rather than men."** (Acts 5:29) This is valid regardless of threats or lures.

6. **Condemnation for failure to believe on Christ - verses 44 - 50:**

"Then Jesus cried out and said, 'He who believes in Me, believes not in Me but in Him who sent Me. And he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me. I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness. And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge

the world but to save the world. He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him--the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak." (John 12:44 - 50)

Verses 44 & 45:

"Then Jesus cried out..." - This occurred at another location but on the same day. What the Lord said in these verses reiterates what He had said in Chs. 5, 7, 8 and 10. Briefly, they address the oneness of the Father with the Son, belief on the Son is belief on the Father, denying One is denying the Other, and he who has seen the Son has seen the Father (they are One in Divinity - Ch.14:9) - this is strong evidence of Their equality. Jesus Christ, our glorified Lord, is the only One Who can claim equality with the Father. See also Ch.3 of St. Paul's epistle to the Hebrews.

Verse 46:

Christ had proclaimed this in Ch. 8:12. Briefly, Christ is the sole Light of the world. Straying away from Christ leads to darkness and perdition. All Christ's saintly children experience His light throughout their lives. Discussing Christ's light is quite different from living within it.

Verse 47:

"I did not come to judge the world" - See also Ch.8:15. The purpose of Christ's incarnation was the world's salvation, which is conditional on believing on Him and obeying His commandments. Judgment is reserved for Christ's Second Coming.

Verse 48:

Those who reject Christ's words and teaching, or those who refuse to believe on Him, will be condemned. Each word, aphorism and deed that Christ said or performed will testify against them.

+ *This clarifies to us that Divine judgment is neither based on favouritism nor eliticism; rather, it is based on the application, to the best of our ability, of Christ's teachings in an unwavering spiritual life.*

Verse 49:

See the interpretations given for Ch.5:30 and Ch.7:16 - 18. The Father is the source of everything. The Son is the Father's means for proclamation - both Father and Son are equal in essence.

Verse 20:

"And I know" - Christ's knowledge far transcends the knowledge of all humans. Consequently, what Christ proclaims is the truth, the whole truth. Obeying and living Christ's commandments paves the way to eternity. Theoretical faith does not lead to salvation; it is useless if unconverted to a practical life.

+ *This applies to all of us: Christianity is not a compilation of ordinances; rather, it is loving God through obeying His commandments. Enduring the toil associated with obeying the commandments leads to Christ's reward of eternal life - starting here, on earth, according to the richness of His grace.*



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Chapter 13

***The last supper - washing the disciples' feet - foretelling
Judas' betrayal - Peter's denial***



The last supper



Christ washed the disciples' feet

1. The service of love - washing the disciples' feet - verses 1 - 17:
"Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. Then He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to Him, "Lord, are You washing my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this." Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you." For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, "You are not all clean." So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."
(John 13:1 - 17)

Verse 1:

Through His Divinity, Christ knew that the hour of His betrayal was Thursday evening. It should also be noted that St. John mentioned the Jews' failed attempts to arrest Christ several times, despite His presence in their midst - that was because His time had not yet come. St. John thus primes us for the last stage of Christ's life on earth. He also used a new Divine expression, the clause ***"He should depart from this world,"*** rather than "He should die," explaining that the notion of physical death in the minds of God's children is merely a transition from one life to another. The Coptic Orthodox Church uses this concept in its rites - hence *"there is no death for your servants, rather, a transition."* St. John concludes by revealing the mystery behind what Christ would experience from suffering

to crucifixion, namely, Christ's eternal, limitless, love for His creation, which He was resolved to redeem.

It should also be noted that St. John spoke the most about Divine love - as though he were the only disciple who understood Christ's heart - that was because he was the closest one to our Lord.

+ *This calling is aimed at all of us - let us enjoy this overflowing love, available to each and every one who seeks it.*

Verse 2:

Prior to the Jewish Passover's supper, Satan chose and incited the vulnerable soul of Judas to fulfill his evil act. Everyone is liable to Satan's wiles; our self-control determines whether we fall or resist. St. John presents to us the table around which were Christ's ever-loving heart as well as the evil heart of His betrayer.

Verse 3:

St. John consistently repeats the words "**knew**" and "**knowing.**" Those are strong indications of Christ's Divinity. The expression "**the Father had given all things into His hands**" bears two meanings"

- full authority to Christ plus perfect equality of Christ and the Father, and
- a prelude to the forthcoming Divine action.

Using the very hands bearing the Father's full authority, Christ bent down to wash His disciples' feet.

"He had come from God" - Put differently, He came through His incarnation, while being selfless and divesting Himself of His glory. His "coming out" does not imply that He left Him - They are united in Divinity.

"And was going to God" - Put differently, He was going to His glory in the bosom of the Father. However, He will continue to shepherd us, even though we cannot see Him in the flesh.

Verses 4 & 5:

Subsequently, Christ "**rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself.**" Behold, our Lord and Saviour, humbly laid aside His garments and, far beyond our ability to comprehend, assumed the role of a servant, girded Himself, and proceeded to wash His disciples' feet - a mundane task that people would normally reject.

The dust on our feet could be assumed to symbolize our sins; washing our feet could be akin to repentance and baptism, by the hand of Christ that would be crucified, redeeming us all.

Verses 6 & 7:

The disciples were quite surprised at Christ's action. It is unclear whether He had started by Peter or not - St. Augustine believes that Peter was the first. Peter objected to Christ's attempt at washing his feet. Peter expressed his objection by exclaiming, "***You shall never wash my feet!***" Peter implied that the feet of a sinner like him should never be washed by the all-righteous Christ. This situation is analogous to John the Baptist's objection to baptizing Christ. In both cases, though, Christ's response, aimed at fulfilling His intent, was firm and emphatic, yet tender. At that time, Peter had failed to understand Christ's intent. What exactly had Peter failed to understand??

First lesson - humility:

Given that the Creator, Teacher and Redeemer of the universe, had humbly stooped to wash away others' impurities, thus rectifying the concept of leadership in everyone's minds, then how much more should we do vis-a-vis others?

Second lesson - refraining from judging others:

Removing a person's impurities is akin to ridding that person of his/her sins - thus having a positive impact on their lives. This is quite different from merely pointing out their shortcomings - which is what the Jews had done when they caught the adulterous woman in the act (see Ch.8:1 - 11).

In recognition of the splendour and greatness of what Christ had done with His disciples, the Coptic Orthodox Church instituted the rite of "*Liturgy of the Water,*" practised each Covenant Thursday. In that rite, all clerical members present follow the Lord's example: hence, each uses a towel to wipe sprinkled water off the feet of each congregant. This action also serves as a reminder that God appointed the clergy as shepherds and servants for His congregation.

Verse 8:

Despite Peter's humble recognition of his error in rejecting Christ's action, he failed to understand its spiritual meaning. For this reason, Christ clarified that it was not up to Peter to accept or reject what He was doing. That purification (washing their feet) was a prelude to the purification through the blood of Christ; whoever rejects it has no share with Christ - put differently, there can be no salvation without the blood of Christ.

Verse 9:

Christ's response surprised Peter, and he asked that Christ extend His washing to his entire body, indicating that he wanted nothing to separate him from Christ.

Verses 10 & 11:

"He who is bathed" - This refers to being washed in the baptismal font, which is based on believing that Christ's blood has the power to purify from sins. Washing (purification) through the Sacrament of Baptism is done once in a lifetime - it is not repeated even for an apostate returning to the Christian Faith. This is what the Orthodox Church teaches her children. On the other hand, washing our feet, through repentance and the Sacrament of Penance, should be practised regularly. Feet symbolize the soul existing consistently in worldly turmoils - they need constant washing for purification from sins.

Through Christ's Divine knowledge, He subtly referred to Judas, by saying that one of the disciples was not clean.

Verse 12:

"Do you know what I have done to you?" - Undoubtedly, the disciples failed to understand Christ's actions; they would have likely joined Peter's objections (to have their feet washed by Christ) if the Lord had not responded firmly to him. Thus, our Lord used the questioning approach as a prelude to His instructional aphorism.

Verse 13:

This completes the introduction to Christ's aphorism, namely, He is the true Master, Teacher, to Whom all respect and deference are due.

Verses 14 & 15:

These verses reflect the essence of Christ's teaching. Since the Lord and Teacher Himself washed His disciples' feet, then how much more should a servant do to his brother? A servant, following the Lord's example towards his fellow-servants, would have no credit. Whoever considers himself master and teacher rather than a servant, should buckle under Christ's love and amazing humility, in washing His disciples' feet. "Washing" should not be taken in the literal sense - rather, it bears all Christian virtues such as endurance, and selflessness. Christ's saying, **"You also ought"** means that it is neither a choice nor a good-will gesture, rather, it is a commandment that we must obey, and that requires humility and selflessness.

Verses 16 & 17:

Our Lord re-emphasizes that, since a servant is not greater than his master, then he should neither be ashamed nor hesitant to follow his master's example. Our Lord also accentuates the difference between the dispatcher and the messenger, in clear reference to service in His Church. Christ is the Dispatcher and the One Who calls servants to serve Him. It is thus incumbent on the servant to follow, throughout his service, the example of his Dispatcher, by exercising tolerance and patience.

At this point Christ concludes His teaching by clarifying the difference between understanding a given issue, and applying it throughout one's life. The reward and crown of success are not awarded to those merely aware of the commandments since their youth (see Matthew 19:20), rather, to those who struggle against their desires in order to live those commandments.

2. Foretelling Judas' betrayal - verses 18 - 30:

"I do not speak concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me.' Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He. Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me." When Jesus had said these things, He was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me." Then the disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom He spoke. Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask who it was of whom He spoke. Then, leaning back on Jesus' breast, he said to Him, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it." And having dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, "What you do, do quickly." But no one at the table knew for what reason He said this to him. For some thought, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus had said to him, "Buy those things we need for the feast," or that he should give something to the poor. Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night." (John 13:18 - 30)

Verse 18:

Judas was not excluded from the ministry - all the previous discussion applied to him (see verse 10). Furthermore, although the Lord had chosen

him (the call was/is to everyone), Judas, of his own free will, chose betrayal. Christ, in this respect, quotes the Psalmist: ***"Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me."*** (Psalm 41:9) That was what David had said referring to Ahitophel's betrayal. It was also a prophecy foretelling Judas' betrayal of Christ. Put differently, "whoever ate at my table was preparing to betray me." The direct meaning of ***"lifted up his heel against me"*** is "kicked me."

Verse 19:

"Now I tell you" - Christ said this to alleviate the disciples' offence, when His Passion would start by Judas' betrayal - at which point He would seem powerless like any other human being. At that point, though, they should recall what Christ had told them, namely, He is/was Christ, but prophecies concerning His suffering must be fulfilled.

Verse 20:

This verse addresses the disciples' mission. Christ herein equated a servant's honour to His own; thus, accepting Christ's servant is tantamount to accepting both Father and Son. Conversely, rejecting Christ's servant is equal to rejecting God Himself (see Matthew 10:14, Mark 6:11 and Luke 9:5).

Verse 21:

"He was troubled in spirit" - Christ was visibly perturbed at the prospect of being betrayed by one of His own - Judas. The significant repulsiveness of that sin caused Christ's holy nature to cringe - simply by mentioning it to the disciples. Christ used the expression "most assuredly" to accentuate, to His disciples, His perfect knowledge that they would have difficulty imagining such a betrayal by one of them.

+ *It is worth noting, at this point, the effects of our daily sins on the Person of Jesus Christ, and on the Holy Spirit indwelling us - how many times, daily, do we grieve Him?? How many times, throughout our entire life, do we repent sincerely and refrain from sin??*

Verses 22 - 24:

The disciples were amazed and incredulous. Christ's declaration hit them like an unbelievable thunderbolt - even if betrayal were to occur, surely it would not come from within their own ranks!! This accentuates the extent of Judas' deception, through his arrogance and wiliness. As a result of their perplexity, Peter motioned to John to ask Christ about the identity of that traitor.

"One of His disciples, whom Jesus loved" - St. John used this expression referring to himself, humbly omitting his name, leaving readers to infer his intent. It should be understood that Christ's love was not biased towards one disciple versus the others; rather, Christ gives His love in proportion to the love we give Him. John was closer to Christ than any of the others. Thus, he enjoyed Christ's love more than any of the others.

+ *This is indeed one of Christ's miracles of love for mankind: all who sincerely love Christ feel that Christ is their personal Property - truly, how wonderful You are, Dear Lord!*

Verses 25 & 26:

St. John responded to Peter's request, and asked Christ. In His response, Christ indirectly used a sign, to avoid embarrassing him before the others. The sign that Christ used was giving Judas a piece of bread that Christ had dipped in the dish - a gesture usually reserved to honour close friends or the eldest son. That was as though Christ was offering Judas a final opportunity to recant from that significant sin - without interfering in his choice - being among Christ's close circle.

Verse 27:

"Satan entered him" - This means that Satan had taken control of Judas' will (although he had already agreed on the plot with the chief priests - see verse 2) - he had no hesitation in delivering our Lord. Our Lord, Who searches the depths of souls, was quite aware of this. Christ gave Himself up through that traitor, thus confirming His having sole authority over the soul: whether to lay it down or not.

Verses 28 & 29:

Since Judas was the treasurer, the disciples naturally assumed that Christ's remarks to him concerned buying, without delay, all the Feast's necessities, in order to beat the crowds. They also thought that Christ could have been referring to setting aside some funds for the poor.

+ *This is a lesson for us to remember the poor's needs and necessary services, by assigning to them money that we have as a gift, entrusted to us, by God. Let us never forget the needs of our poor brethren in Christ; let us always be empathetic towards them.*

Verse 30:

"After the piece of bread" - That was a piece of bread from the Passover supper - it was not from the Lord's Last Supper, the Eucharist. Such is our Church's teaching: Judas, with an evil-dominated heart, left the table in haste to fulfill his plot. He did not participate, with the others, in the Eucharist. This is shown in icons depicting the Last Supper.

3. The commandment of love - verses 31 - 35:

"So, when he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately. Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, 'Where I am going, you cannot come,' so now I say to you. A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."" (John 13:31 - 35)

Verses 31 & 32:

At this point, our Lord starts a lengthy discourse, lasting till the end of Chapter 17.

"Now" - this means "the Son's glorification started after Judas' exit." In this context, "glory" refers to the Son's:

- humility,
- love for mankind,
- offering Himself unto death,
- obedience to the Father, unto full selflessness,
- death on the Cross which the world did not understand, and
- resurrection, ascension and return to His true glory of His heavenly throne, temporarily concealed by His incarnation.

"God is glorified in Him" - This means that the Son's and Father's glory are linked. Thus, the Father's economy and will were fulfilled through the Son's redemption. The Father's glory was fulfilled through the Son, Who continually manifested it throughout His incarnation and, especially, during His redemption; the Father, in turn, will proclaim the Son's full glory, hitherto concealed, through the events of the Cross:

- by fulfilling in Him all the awaited prophecies, and
- by the miraculous events - hence, darkening of the sky during the crucifixion, rending of the temple's veil, and emergence of many dead from their tombs.

All the above were miraculous events glorifying the Son.

Verse 33:

"Little children" - As the disciples' difficult time approached, Christ accentuated His fatherly love towards them by addressing them as **"little children."** He then started referring to forthcoming events, to His approaching separation from them, and to the imperativeness of what He would endure, which no one could share.

Verses 34 & 35:

Our Lord highlighted love, to the whole world, as the distinguishing feature for His disciples, and for all His followers - even without any other means of identification. By observing Christians' love, people would know who they are and with Whom they are affiliated. However, what did Christ mean by ***"a new commandment I give to you,"*** given that love was an Old Testament commandment? The new feature in this commandment lies in its depth and breadth. It is no longer a mere requirement or expectation, rather, it is a lifestyle that all Christians received from their God Who loved unto death, gave Himself up, stooped to wash feet, and positioned everybody else's comfort ahead of His own, thus setting a new and unique example, and extending the level of love from close ones to enemies and persecutors (see Matthew 5:44). It is impossible for a normal person to achieve such a level of love; it is only possible for a Christian, steadfast in his God, and actively fellowshiping in the Church's holy sacraments, especially the holy Eucharist.

4. Foretelling Peter's denial - verses 36 - 38:

"Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, where are You going?" Jesus answered him, "Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward." Peter said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow You now? I will lay down my life for Your sake." Jesus answered him, "Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times." (John 13:36 - 38)

Verse 36:

Peter's question pertained to what Christ had said in verse 33, namely, ***"Where I am going, you cannot come."*** Christ re-confirmed what He had said earlier: ***"Where I am going you cannot follow Me now."*** He was referring to the path of suffering and redemption - a path that Christ alone would traverse, and that Peter could/would not share, despite his great love. However, after Christ's resurrection and the descent of the Holy Spirit, Peter and other disciples would follow the arduous path of suffering, endurance, and evangelizing - even unto martyrdom - culminating in heaven, and all its glories, with Christ.

Verse 37:

Peter, overcome by zeal and emotion, impetuously asked for what he would be incapable of offering or doing. He failed to understand God's eternal economy, namely, that Christ, and Christ alone, was capable of mankind's redemption. Furthermore, Peter lacked the level of courage he

thought or assumed he had, proudly stating, **"Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be."** (Mark 14:29)

+ This teaches us not to claim what we do not have; we should offer ourselves humbly to the Lord, with neither boastfulness nor false self-confidence. Christ works with both weak and small, He resists the proud and conceited. Dearly beloved, let us focus on the Divine inspiration expressed through St. Paul's epistle to the Corinthians: "And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Verse 39:

Christ told Peter, **"Will you lay down your life for My sake?** That was tantamount to asking Peter, "Do you really know what you are talking about??" Christ intended to accentuate the huge difference between what would transpire and what Peter had just said.

Christ concluded His discourse by foretelling Peter's denial, mentioning the rooster's crowing as a sign to remind Peter of Christ's prophecy.

+ Let us learn, my dear friend, that without God we would be capable of nothing at all. However, by relying on Him, and on the Holy Spirit indwelling us, we can become "Peter" who, eventually, gladly offered his life for Christ's sake.



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Chapter 14

Christ soothes His disciples and promises them the Holy Spirit

1. Christ soothes His disciples - verses 1 - 4:

"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know." (John 14:1 - 4)

Introduction:

Christ's final discourse with His disciples, presented in Chapters 14, 15 and 16, addresses several topics, notably, the role of the Holy Spirit, and embolding the disciples to traverse the difficult circumstances they were about to experience.

Verse 1:

"Let not your heart be troubled" - Christ's discussion, given in the previous chapter, was quite alarming; it included betrayal, death and denial. The disciples were thus significantly stressed psychologically.

Thus, Christ started soothing and encouraging them, alleviating their anguish with tender words, and accentuating that the sole cure, lay in belief on Him and on His deeds. That belief should not be inferior to their belief in God.

"You believe in God" - Here, Christ presents the primary effective cure for anxiety and anguish, available to all of us - not only for the disciples - namely, it is belief in God, and in all His truthful promises made to us through His disciples.

+ *The first and foremost cure for anxiety is belief in our philanthropic, omnipotent, God. Let us consistently seek refuge in Him in times of trials and hardships.*

Verse 2:

Our Lord presents the bright side of things to His disciples; namely, He would be separated from them for a while, for their and our sake, in order to prepare a place, of unutterable glory, in heaven. The words "**many mansions**" refer to heaven's boundlessness; they also imply a certain ranking, as St. Paul indicated: "**There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory.**" (! Corinthians 15:41) God accepted His believing children in His kingdom through His infinite love; similarly, through His infinite justice, He will reward each person according to their toil and struggle.

Verse 3:

Christ told His disciples that His separation from them would not be forever; rather, He would return, in His infinite glory, to gather them unto Him, so that they would be with Him, enjoying His inseparable presence with them forever.

This promise motivated all saints, across the generations, to disregard their life on earth, and have their hearts entirely focused on Christ's embrace. Joy associated with this spiritual feeling is incomparable with anything the world may offer.

Verse 4:

"And where I go you know, and the way you know." - This is in reference to going to heaven, passing through the way of the Cross.

2. I am the way....I am in the Father - verses 5 - 14:

"Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him." Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father Who dwells in Me

does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves. "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it." (John 14:5 - 14)

Verse 5:

It was as though whatever Christ had said previously had not quite satisfied the inquisitive Thomas - he was even more perplexed. He stated that he did not know where Christ was going and, consequently, he did not know the way; he asked the question in the plural sense, implicating the rest of the disciples with him.

Verse 6:

As was His wont, Christ gave a profound, spiritual, response to a limited temporal question. Thus, Christ is "**the way**," to everyone straying in, and buffeted by, the world's currents; He is "**the truth**," indicating that anything and anyone outside belief in Christ is void and perishing; and He is "**the life**," meaning that all who enjoy living through Him on earth would not be concerned with the world's ups and downs - He is the eternal life awaiting His followers in heaven. Hence, "**Nor is there salvation in any other...**" (Acts 4:12)

+ Let us follow Thomas' example, and ask God, and our godly counsellors, concerning all aspects we fail to understand. God will consequently reveal to us what is beyond, and more profound than, our perception's grasp.

Verses 7 - 9:

Christ links the disciples' knowledge of Him, to their knowledge of the Father - both are consubstantial (One in essence.) Seeing the Son in His authority, miracles and commandments is akin to seeing the Father's essence. Such a difficult discourse was too hard for Philip to understand, especially the clause "**you know Him and have seen Him.**" Thus, Philip requested that they see the Father, if that were within Christ's power; he had forgotten Christ's earlier declaration, "**I and the Father are One.**" (Ch. 10:30) Christ's response was reproachful: "**Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father**"

This verse thus constitutes a clear unequivocal proclamation, in addition to all earlier ones, concerning Christ's Divinity.

Verse 10:

Our Lord follows up His discussion with Philip with a question testing his faith: **"...how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"** Christ then addresses the rest of His question to the disciples: **"Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?"** Hence, Christ declared clearly that He is in the Father and the Father in Him - thus confirming His equality with the Father, and that the Father was the source of all His deeds.

+ *In order for us to understand the Father-Son relationship we can assume its analogy to the mind-thought process; hence, thoughts are conceived in the mind, and the mind is the thoughts' essence. Thus, there can be no thoughts without the mind, and no mind without thoughts.*

Verse 11:

Continuing to address His disciples, Christ stresses the imperativeness of believing that Christ is/was God, and that the Father is/was God. Since Christ knew that His disciples' full belief had not yet matured, He offers them proof of His oneness with the Father, namely, that God, and God alone, could have performed all the miracles and wonders Christ had wrought.

Verse 12:

Christ's promise to do **"greater works,"** through the power of the Holy Spirit granted through Him, is indeed priceless to the disciples and to all whose faith in Christ is sincere. Without Him we are powerless - hence, **"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."** (Acts 1:8)

"...and greater works than these he will do..." It is impossible for a creature to do greater works than his Creator. Christ meant that spiritual miracles such as satiating multitudes with the words of God are more significant than satiating them with bread and fish; furthermore, reviving souls perishing under the yoke of sin is greater than raising physically dead people.

+ *For this reason, dearly beloved, do not belittle what Christ can do through us - His Church - in which He deposited all His power, for the sake of His Holy name and people's salvation, but not for boastfulness.*

Verses 13 & 14:

Our Lord presents the reverence of His all-holy name, and its effectiveness in responding to all who seek it, in sincere belief. The word "**whatever**" refers to the limitless circle of requests granted to His disciples and all believers, who resort to Christ's name. This is reflected in all the rites of the Coptic Orthodox Church, guided by the Holy Spirit - hence, the name of the Lord is invoked in all prayers, lauds and the Lord's prayer.

3. Christ promises the Holy Spirit - verses 15 - 26:

"If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever-- the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. "A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?" Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me. "These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." (John 14:15 - 26)

Verse 15:

Sincere love for Christ is not reflected through spontaneous emotional reactions; rather, it is through obedience, and commitment, to His commandments - the sole evidence of love.

Verse 16:

"I will pray the Father" - Christ would pray the Father after redemption and resurrection. This is akin to the Church's shepherding being delivered, by the Person of the Son, into the hands of the Holy Spirit, as the Church heralds the New Testament. The Son's blood established the Church's New Testament.

The "**Helper**" is a fleeting indication of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives and, in general, in the Church.

"He may abide with you forever" - This means that Christ's promise is not merely applicable in the Church of the apostles' era, rather, the Holy Spirit works in the Church, and the Church's children, unto the end of time. This verse is among the verses where the three hypostases meet: thus, the Son requests, the Father responds, and the Holy Spirit is sent - hence, there is a single will in the Divine essence.

Verse 17:

"The Spirit of truth" - God is the absolute truth. Therefore, He can only be accepted by those reborn through His Spirit of baptism. The world, materialistic and wallowing in vanities, neither knows God, nor accepts Him - the Spirit of truth. Our genuine knowledge of God can only be attained through the Holy Spirit indwelling us.

"He dwells with you and will be in you" - The holy Spirit not only envelops God's children, but He also indwells them. This gift is imparted to us through Chrismation. St. Paul reminds us: **"....do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit Who is in you, Whom you have from God, and you are not your own?"** (1 Corinthians 6:19)

Verses 18 & 19:

Sensing His approaching moment of death, Christ soothed His disciples, telling them that He would not leave them orphaned, rather, they would be seeing Him - a clear reference to His apparitions to them during the forty days following His resurrection, and also in reference to the Holy Spirit Whom He would send to be constantly present with, and in, them.

Verse 20:

"At that day" - This may be interpreted in one of two ways: either following manifestation of His resurrection, or the day of the Holy Spirit's descent.

"You will know" - means that they would be reassured with no lingering doubts whatsoever. Despite the multiple earlier declarations of Christ's oneness with the Father, the words were likely ambiguous and too difficult to understand. However, the day will come when all doubts would be dispelled, and misunderstandings cleared up, either through Christ's discussions with the disciples during the forty days following His resurrection, or through the Holy Spirit Who would instruct them with unutterable mysteries.

Verse 21:

This verse builds on what was discussed in verse 15, namely, a Divine reward awaits God's children who had obeyed His commandments, and manifested them throughout their lives. God loves, and has called, all mankind; those who are committed to His ordinances are treated favourably.

Verses 22 - 24:

"Judas (not Iscariot)" is, in fact, Thaddeus, the brother of James, also known as St. Jude, author of Jude's epistle. He had misunderstood Christ's intent, thinking that Christ would only appear to His disciples and that no one else would see Him. Christ repeated what He had said earlier, namely, our love for God is manifested through our commitment to His commandments; Christ added that, furthermore, both He and His Father would be constantly present and indwelling, through the Holy Spirit, the hearts of His children who obey His commandments. Such a gift, sincere and permanent - not temporal - surpasses all possible gifts to which a spiritual believer could aspire.

Verse 25:

This is tantamount to depositing His words, as a consignment in their hearts, prior to His departure from this world.

Verse 26:

Christ resumes His discourse, which started in verse 16, about the Holy Spirit. He clarifies His role vis-a-vis the disciples, and the Church across the generations. He teaches and guides us towards the path of our salvation, reminding us consistently of His teachings and aphorisms, urging us to apply them throughout our lives, while giving us the necessary power to achieve this.

4. Christ's peace - verses 27 - 31:

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. You have heard Me say to you, 'I am going away and coming back to you.' If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, 'I am going to the Father,' for My Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe. I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me. But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, so I do. Arise, let us go from here." (John 14:27 - 31)

Verse 27:

Although Christ's discussion here is aimed at His disciples, it is applicable to the entire Church at all times. Children's inheritance from parents could be wealth and/or material possessions; but the inheritance and gifts granted by Christ embody peace far beyond the mind's and the world's imagination. The entire world is incapable of offering a fraction of that peace. Christ, on the other hand, grants us this peace freely as a gift from Him, clearly proving His Divinity as Isaiah had foretold: **"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."** (Isaiah 9:6)

The natural corollary of this peace is the heart's steadfastness and fearlessness, regardless of prevailing circumstances. The greatest proof is provided by our forefathers the martyrs, as they endured torture: their demonstrated peace surpassed the understanding of their tormentors.

Verse 28:

"If you loved Me" - This refers to spiritual, rather than emotional, love. Emotional love grieves at separation - but spiritual love transcends such feelings. Spiritual love understands and appreciates the consequences of Christ's physical separation from His disciples: hence, preparing a place (verse 2), sending the Holy Spirit (verse 16), lasting enjoyment of being in the presence of the Father and the Son on earth (verse 23) and in heaven (verse 3). We may experience and understand such feelings during our earthly life, in the event of a loved one's departure: we grieve through our human emotions, yet our spirit rejoices as we acquire another intercessor before the Divine Throne, awaiting eventual reunion in heaven.

"My Father is greater than I" - He is not greater in nature, since They are equal in essence; rather, Christ is referring to His Divine glory, concealed throughout His Passion and crucifixion. On the other hand, the Father's glory cannot be concealed; the perceived image of the Son, during the forthcoming days, would be devoid of all glory from the human perspective. In this regard, St. Paul says of Christ: **".....but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men."** (Philippians 2:7) Put differently, He abandoned all manifestation of His Divine glory, in order to redeem mankind with His body. This verse has been the basis of several heresies, aiming to disprove equality of the Son and Father; behold, dearly beloved, the following is what Christ said, in the same gospel, rebutting/refuting such misconceptions and heresies:

1. **"My Father has been working until now, and I have been working."** (John 5:17)
2. **"....that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father."** (John 5:23)
3. **"I and My Father are one."** (John 10:30)
4. **"He who has seen Me has seen the Father..."** (John 14:9)
5. **"I am in the Father, and the Father in Me..."** (John 14:10)
6. **".....all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine...."** (John 17:10)
7. **"..... You, Father, are in Me, and I in You....."** (John 17:21)

Verse 29:

Christ told His disciples that, once the events of His Passion and crucifixion had started to unfold, they should remember that He had foretold all, remaining steadfast in their faith.

+ *Dearly beloved, it is incumbent on us to remember Christ's promises, His soothing words of comfort, and His care for us during hardships. As much as we adhere to our faith and His presence, as much as our peace and steadfastness in our faith increases during trials.*

Verse 30:

"I will no longer talk much with you" - This meant that only a few hours remained for Christ's physical presence with His disciples, the time for talking and teaching had passed, and the time had come for His crucifixion and redemption.

"...the ruler of this world" - That was in reference to the final battle that Satan intended to wage: hence, inciting the priests and the multitudes, fulfillment of Judas' betrayal, plus realization of all the accompanying trials and plots. That was Christ's declaration given in Luke 22:53, **"...this is your hour, and the power of darkness."**

"...he has nothing in Me" - This means that Satan, with all his might, has no authority whatsoever before Christ's righteousness, splendour, and authority.

+ *Here again, dearly beloved, we find that the same Satan craftily wages warfare and conspiracies against God's children, leading to much of the external wars. However, he is incapable of vanquishing any of God's children who have the sole authority to crush him, if and only if, they do not succumb to the world's surrounding wickedness and carnal desires.*

Verse 31:

This verse is linked to the preceding. Put differently, *"although the ruler of this world has nothing in Me, I will, because of My love for the Father, give Myself up, according to His will, for the salvation of the world."*



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Chapter 15

**Christ likens Himself unto a vine - Christ instructs His
disciples to abide in Him and not to be perturbed by
worldly challenges**

1. Parable of the vine - verses 1 - 8:

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples." (John 15:1 - 8)

Introduction:

In the previous chapter, Christ used words of encouragement, aiming to edify the disciples' faith during the approaching difficult period. In this chapter, Christ resumes His discourse with instructions and teaching.

Verses 1 & 2:

Our Lord likens Himself unto a vine, bearing us - members of His body - as branches. He also accentuates the Father's responsibility in caring for the branches of that vine. The Father discards, as a dead branch, each person in Christ who has no good deeds to his credit. On the other hand, the Father will nurture and embrace those leading a christlike life, chastising them at times, if necessary, aiming to foster their growth in holiness and virtues.

Verse 3:

Christ addressed His disciples, as "good branches;" the reason for their purity was their adherence to, and acceptance of, His ordinances.

+ *This applies to all of us. Reading the holy Bible, and heeding the word of God, impart to us purity, peace and understanding.*

Verses 4 & 5:

Throughout His role of caring for the branches, God does not eliminate the branch's (man's) role in saving himself. Man is required to be fruitful - and the only means towards that end is through steadfastness in Christ (the vine); put differently, it is impossible for the branch to grow if severed from the vine!! Christ is the roots for our growth and advancement, without Whom we can do nothing at all.

The steadfastness intended here by Christ reaffirms what He had said earlier: ***"He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him."*** (John 6:56) Put differently, true steadfastness in Christ can only be achieved through His body and blood.

Verse 6:

Those who ignore and belittle God's grace will be:

- a- deprived from sharing Christ,
- b- gathered, like chaff, along with other evil-doers, and
- c- cast into the fire.

Verses 7 & 8:

"If you abide in Me" - A special gift from Christ - immediate granting of everything asked in His name - awaits those who eat His flesh and blood, who are committed to all His commandments and who lead a christlike lifestyle. That is what St. James asserted in his epistle: ***"The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."*** (James 5:16) Thus, for God's children, a natural corollary of their being edified in Christ, and receiving whatever they ask in prayers, is multiplicity of the branch's fruit through service, and salvation of stray souls. Christ would then be glorified, and the Father praised. Being labelled ***"My disciples"*** by Christ Himself is cause for significant pride for the fruitful branches.

2. The commandment of love - verses 9 -17:

"As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does

not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another." (John 15:9 - 17)

Verses 9 & 10:

The extent of the Father's love for the Son is the strongest analogy that Christ chose to express His love for His disciples and for all of us. Such love is beyond the capability of human expression. In return for this boundless love, Christ expects us to demonstrate our love for Him through full commitment to His commandments - just as He followed the Father's will to fulfill mankind's redemption (see Ch. 14:15 and 21 - 23, Ch. 15:10 & 14).

Verse 11:

"These things I have spoken to you" - Christ was referring to His discussion about steadfastness and commitment to His commandments - then they would have lasting joy through Him.

+ *Christ granted us peace incomprehensible to the world; similarly, all who strive towards obeying His commandments, will acquire incomparable Divine joy, unmatched by anything the world may offer.*

Verses 12 - 14:

Christ repeats what He had said in Ch. 13:34, namely, His children's love for one another should match His love for them (us). Christ's love led Him to humble Himself and wash our feet - He bore our sins and died for us on the Cross - He even forgave His enemies.

+ *None of us can offer that kind of love unless:*

- *we fully humble ourselves at the foot of Christ's Cross,*
- *we meditate constantly on God's love and forgiveness for us, so that we can love and forgive others, and*
- *we obey Christ's commandments.*

Verse 15:

In Ch. 12:26 and 13:16, Christ called His disciples "**servants**;" this is a fact, since no one can be called "lord" before our Lord. However, after having discussed steadfastness in His Person and obedience to His commandments, Christ promotes His disciples from "**servants**" to "**friends**" - since "**a servant does not know what his master is doing,**" but a friend knows all things about his master. This is not our right, rather, proof of God's infinite love for His own.

Verse 16:

Christ emphasizes that choosing His disciples was His initiative, and that He tasked them to **"go and bear fruit."**

+ The Father's positive response to everything for which we ask in Christ's name is conditional upon our yielding fruit resulting from our struggle to attain virtues, and our struggle to call others to share in belief on, and love for, Christ.

Verse 17:

Christ concludes this part of His discourse by emphasizing what He had said in verses 9, 12 and 15, namely, His love for His disciples and their love for one another. Love is the protective shield against what would transpire eventually - discussed in the following verses.

3. The world's resistance to Christ - verses 18 - 27:

"If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates Me hates My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have no sin; but now they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father. But this happened that the word might be fulfilled which is written in their law, 'They hated Me without a cause.' "But when the Helper comes, Whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning." (John 15:18 - 27)

Verses 18 - 20:

Our Lord transported His disciples, and His Church that would follow, into what they would experience from the world, namely, rejection and persecution.

+ This would also be a source of comfort and encouragement for us: hence, the world rejected Christ Himself, and we should acquire endurance and patience, by focusing solely upon this glaring reality. We would consequently consider the world's rejection to us to be quite natural.

Christ also clarified the reason for the world's hatred of God's children; their thoughts, ideas and spirituality are at odds with the world's materialism and carnal desires. Naturally, darkness hates the light which dispels it. Having rejected Christ and His teaching, it is natural that the world reject God's disciples and His Church.

Verses 21 - 24:

Christ presents a new source of comfort, to soothe His disciples when faced with persecutions and rejection; namely, Christ Himself is the reason for the world's rejection, since, due to its darkness, the world neither knew the Father, nor accepted the Son. Rather than finding excuses for the world, Christ is condemning the world for its disbelief on Him, especially after having witnessed His advent, teachings, miracles and good deeds. Disbelief on Christ is a lasting sin. Christ added that rejecting Him means hating the Father, since the Father's and Son's honour is one and the same.

Verse 25:

"They hated Me without a cause." - This is a verse in Psalm 35: ***"Nor let them wink with the eye who hate me without a cause."*** (Psalm 35:19) This is as though the Holy Spirit, through David, was foretelling the Jews' unfounded persecution of Christ - even Pontius Pilate admitted that he could find no fault whatsoever with Christ deserving His death (see Ch. 18:38 and Luke 23:4, 14, 22). Pure spite blinded the leaders and priests.

+ *Today, those who reject Christ's call and His Church - are they not also haters of Christ for no reason??*

Verses 26 & 27:

Christ concludes His discourse by encouraging His disciples, mentioning the Holy Spirit, Whom He had already mentioned in Ch. 7:39 and Ch. 14:26, and stating that the Holy Spirit would witness for Christ, through the disciples, as the entire world witnesses everything they say and do in the name of the Holy Spirit. Servants are pleased and encouraged by witnessing the power of the Holy Spirit's work in Christ's Church.

"But when the Helper comes, Whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me." - This clarifies and accentuates the three Hypostases working harmoniously together. The clause ***"Whom I shall send to you"*** exemplifies Christ's Divinity and authority - equal to the Father's and the Holy Spirit's; this also accentuates the fact that the Holy Spirit would only be sent following Christ's redemption on the Cross. The expression

"proceeds" means continuous, uninterrupted, inseparable, emergence - analogously, we would say "heat proceeds from the fire without separation from it." The incarnate Son was never separated from the Father; similarly, the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father without being separated from either the Father or the Son.



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Chapter 16

***Christ foretells His death, the help of the Holy Spirit, and
His suffering persecution by the world***

1. **Christ foretells His death to His disciples as well as the
persecution awaiting them - verses 1 - 6:**

"These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble. They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me. But these things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them. And these things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you. "But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart." (John 16:1 - 6)

Verse 1:

"These things I have spoken to you" - Christ was referring to His earlier discourse about the world's rejection and persecution of the disciples. He strengthened and edified them, urging them to find comfort through the Holy Spirit.

Verses 2 & 3:

Expulsion from the synagogue constituted the severest punishment to be imposed on a Jew - not only was it a significant social shame, but the victim also incurred the risk of being murdered. In so doing, the Jews were motivated by misguided zeal for God and the law - which was the fate for St. Stephen (see Acts 7:54 - 60). The underpinning for such persecution, though, was their rejection of Christ and the Father.

Verse 4:

This verse reiterates the message given in Verse 1. Christ adds that He had not informed from the start, because they were not ready, psychologically, to accept such a difficult message and, as long as Christ was present among them, He was the source of their comfort, and there was no need to refer to the work of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter.

Verses 5 & 6:

"But now..." - Events leading up to Christ's redemption started after eating the Passover, and after Judas' meeting with the high priests to discuss Christ's arrest.

"Now I go away to Him who sent Me" - This refers to Christ's ascension to the Father, following His crucifixion and ascension.

"None of you asks Me..." - That was an exclamation rather than an instruction; the disciples' hearts were filled with grief promulgated by Christ's discourse about persecution, and by His eventual separation from them. They were quite worried about their future following His departure!

+ Dear God, too often we languish in feelings of grief and anguish, failing to contemplate Your Divine economy, Your salvation, and what You have prepared for us; we entreat You to raise our eyes and hearts towards You, thus edifying our faith, strengthening our resolve, and continuing our lives through faith in Your promises.

2. The work of the Holy Spirit - verses 7 - 16:

"Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you. "A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father."" (John 16:7 - 16)

Verse 7:

Having sensed His words' effect on His disciples and their resulting grief, Christ comforted them by revealing the soothing work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, He rendered His departure a source of gladness, overriding their grief, thus traversing them from a purely physical, terrestrial, perspective, to a celestial vision. They may lose sight of Christ, but gain the soothing, gladdening Holy Spirit, Whom Christ offered - that is the preferable outcome for the disciples and the Church. The Son's incarnation is a temporal mission ending by fulfillment of redemption; the Holy Spirit, on

the other hand, shepherds the Church unto the end of time. Christ referred to the Holy spirit as the "**Helper**," order to soothe His disciples.

Verse 8:

In this verse, Christ summarized the Holy Spirit's work, to be expounded in the next three verses, thus accentuating the significance of sending the Holy Spirit.

Verse 9:

"He will convict the world of sin" - The Holy Spirit's conviction motivates repentance. Regardless of the multiplicity of God's children's sins, the Holy Spirit reveals to them their iniquities, and urges them to repent. The greatest sin is unbelief on Christ. Belief on Christ is impossible without the Holy Spirit - hence: ***"And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me Whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn...."*** (Zechariah 12:10) Put differently, had it not been for the Holy Spirit's descent on Pentecost, many Jews would have not: ***"Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?""*** (Acts 2:37)

Verse 10:

"He will convict....of righteousness" - Put differently, the Holy Spirit convicts the Jews of the righteousness they had rejected - namely, Christ Himself. When Christ came - their sole hope of salvation and deliverance from death - they crucified Him!! An indirect meaning is that all believers profit from the Holy Spirit's presence since, as He works through them, He not only convicts them of sins they had committed, but also of their shortcomings in nurturing virtues which, in turn, would lead to the righteousness through which they would quell their pride.

Verse 11:

"He will convict....of judgment" - The Holy Spirit will testify against, and judge, the world and its ruler - Satan - for Christ's trials. What, initially, had the appearance of Satan's, and his followers', triumph, in getting rid of Christ, became judgment against Satan and the wicked world.

Verses 12 & 13:

Due to the disciples' significant psychological stress, Christ gave them only as much information as they could absorb. However, in their near future, following the Holy Spirit's descent at Pentecost, their eyes would be opened, they would be filled with the Holy Spirit, their awareness of spiritual issues would increase, and the Holy Spirit would lead them and

perfect their understanding. Our Lord also refers to the relationship between the two hypostases, the Father and the Holy Spirit: hence, the Holy Spirit transmits from the Father to the disciples all forthcoming events pertaining to the kingdom of God.

Verse 14:

"He will glorify Me" - This refers to manifesting the glory of Christ's name in His Church as well as in the hearts of His disciples and all believers, after Christ had concealed His glory through His incarnation and His submission to, and endurance of, humiliation.

"He will take of what is Mine" - This means that, even after Christ's ascension and physical disappearance from their sight, the Holy Spirit would transmit to them Christ's intent, thoughts, teachings and guidance.

Verse 15:

"All things that the Father has are Mine" - In this context, the word **"all"** refers to perfect equality between Father and Son. Given that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are One in essence, the Holy Spirit will transmit to the Church everything that Christ desires to transmit to us.

This chapter underscores several tasks undertaken by the Holy Spirit:

1. He convicts the world (verses 8 & 9).
2. He guides all to the truth (verse 13).
3. He glorifies the Son (verse 14).
4. He makes known to the Church the Father's and Son's intent.

Verse 16:

This verse refers to Christ's death and burial, followed by being seen after His resurrection, then His ascension to the Father.

3. The disciples' grief and joy - verses 17 - 24:

"Then some of His disciples said among themselves, 'What is this that He says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'; and, 'because I go to the Father'?" They said therefore, "What is this that He says, 'A little while'? We do not know what He is saying." Now Jesus knew that they desired to ask Him, and He said to them, "Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'? Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born

into the world. Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you. And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full." (John 16:17 - 24)

Verses 17 - 19:

Christ's words were too difficult for the disciples to understand. Thus, they whispered among themselves indicating their lack of understanding of His intent. Appreciating their perplexity, our Lord reiterated what He had said earlier about not seeing, then seeing, Him. That was a prelude to what He was about to expound.

Verse 20:

"You will weep and lament" - This refers to the onset of His Passion, crucifixion and death. ***"The world"*** refers to the Jews and their leaders; they would rejoice in their false belief that they had finally rid themselves of Christ permanently. However, after Christ's resurrection, the disciples' grief would be transformed to joy and glory incomprehensible to the world.

Verses 21 & 22:

Our Lord gave the illustrative example of a woman in labour: following the initial, necessary, labour pains, she rejoices upon delivering a new life, forgetting her earlier pains. Similarly, no one can wrench away the disciples', and God's children's, eventual spiritual joy, surpassing all the temporal happiness which the world may offer. This was demonstrated and fulfilled throughout all the disciples' and martyrs' lives, who embraced death in a manner incomprehensible to the world.

Verse 23:

"And in that day" - This refers to the Holy Spirit's descent, at which point the disciples would not need to ask Christ questions, as was their wont, since the Holy Spirit would endow them with perfect knowledge. It would then suffice them to ask the Father for anything in Christ's name, and the Holy Spirit would grant it.

Verse 24:

Jews used to take pride in seeking, throughout their prayers, the intercessions of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Analogously, in the glorious New Testament, we offer our prayers in the name of Christ Himself - as He taught us. Such is the Father's pleasure: that we offer all our petitions through His Son, Who redeemed all mankind. Response to our petitions, in Christ's name, will perfect our joy.

4. Perfection of the disciples' faith - verses 25 - 33:

"These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father. In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God. I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father." His disciples said to Him, "See, now You are speaking plainly, and using no figure of speech! Now we are sure that You know all things, and have no need that anyone should question You. By this we believe that You came forth from God." Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe? Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."" (John 16:25 - 33)

Verse 25:

"These things I have spoken to you in figurative language" - Christ spoke to them through parables, in order to facilitate their understanding of difficult issues. However, the Holy Spirit would reveal to them the truth, clearly and without the need for parables, concerning Christ's crucifixion, redemption and resurrection. Christ considered that whatever the Holy Spirit would reveal to the disciples and the Church, would be tantamount to revelations by Christ Himself - since Christ and the Holy Spirit are One in essence.

Verses 26 & 27:

"In that day" - That would be after the Holy Spirit's descent and the Church's birth. At that time, they would ask in Christ's name as He had said (verse 23), and the response would be direct from the Father. This is because all who love the Son, and believe on Him, would enter, through Him, into the Father's presence, and receive everything from the Father.

Verse 28:

This is a continuation of the preceding verse. It is a complete and brief Divine interpretation of the stages of Christ's incarnation, redemption, resurrection, ascension, and being seated at the right hand of His Father.

Verses 29 & 30:

In verses 17 & 18, the disciples expressed their perplexity concerning Christ's discourse. Following Christ's explanation (verses 19 - 26), He summarized the Divine truth in verse 28, in simple words, namely, He

came from the Father, and was incarnate, and would leave this world and return to the Father. The disciples, consequently, expressed their full understanding, their belief in everything He had said, and their belief that He came from the Father into the world.

Verses 31 & 32:

"Do you now believe?" - Christ indicates that, although the disciples' belief was always present, it was too weak for them to face forthcoming events, that would start by His arrest, trials, and subsequent crucifixion. For this reason, Christ foretold their fear, their dispersal, and their abandoning Him to face suffering alone. Christ concludes His prophecy by saying that, despite abandonment by His disciples, He would not be alone - rather, He would be with the Father. Christ's discourse asserts the Father's love for His incarnate Son, as well as for all His children.

+ *My dear brother, even though we may be persecuted, abandoned by everyone, and accused by our closest friends or relatives, we have a sole source of hope and comfort in God, Who will never abandon us. That is the faith from which all our saintly martyrs derived their strength throughout their moments of torture.*

Verse 33:

"These things I have spoken to you" - This refers to Christ's discourse throughout the three preceding chapters, clarifying everything He had said. Put differently, the world, being under Satan's influence, would be a source of pain, hardships, and persecutions. Christ, on the other hand, remains a source of peace, regardless of prevailing circumstances. It is incumbent on us to be fully confident that Christ has **"overcome the world,"** and has granted us authority to triumph through Him. Christ crushed Satan on the Cross, annulled death's authority, and vanquished it; similarly, His disciples and all sincere believers on His name, will possess this authority over the world and the entire kingdom of darkness.



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Chapter 17

Christ's intercessory prayer on our behalf



Christ lifted up His eyes to heaven

1. The Father's glory and the Son's glory - verses 1 - 5:

"Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was." (John 17:1 - 5)

Introduction:

Consisting of a discussion between the Father and Son, as though a person were talking to himself, this is considered one of the most powerful chapters of the Holy Bible. It is a perfect example for us to follow whenever we pray.

Verse 1:

Having concluded His earlier, lengthy, discourse with His disciples, our Lord started a discussion with the Father, raising His eyes towards heaven, in order to teach us: our thoughts transcend terrestrials by directing our attention towards heaven.

Christ foretold the approaching hour of His redemption on the Cross - since that was the objective of His incarnation. **"Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You"** - The Son's glory consisted of fulfillment of His redemption on the Cross; glorifying the Father consisted of fulfillment of His will, which is/was salvation of humanity through redemption.

Verse 2:

Throughout His incarnation, the Son's glory was concealed. For this reason, Christ started to proclaim some of the mysteries associated with that glory. Hence, He has sole authority over His entire creation, and He is the sole granter of eternal life, through redemption, to all who believe on Him.

Verse 3:

Eternal life is the knowledge of, and permanent presence with, God. Eternal life is attained through belief on Christ the Saviour, Who redeemed us on the Cross, and Who taught us - through His life - how to live with God on earth.

Verse 4:

Christ completed His mission. He glorified the Father by fulfilling all the righteousness of the law. He called all people to the kingdom of heaven by continually discussing God the Father and the nature of life with God the Father and, finally, by obeying the Father through sacrificing Himself on the Cross, for mankind's redemption.

Verse 5:

Divinity's glory was the Son's since eternity; concealed by His incarnation, it reappeared through His resurrection and ascension.

+ *Let us enable ourselves to savour eternity on earth by obeying God's commandments. God will then glorify us and gladden us in His kingdom.*

2. Prayer for the disciples - verses 6 - 19:

"I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. For I have given to them the words

which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me. I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth." (John 17:6 - 19)

Verse 6:

"I have manifested Your name" - That was through referring to You as "Father." The Jews' knowledge of God was deficient - they failed to understand the "Trinity."

Their knowledge of God increased following Christ's incarnation; many followed Christ and obeyed His commandments.

Verses 7 & 8:

"All things which You have given Me" - This refers to perfect wisdom, teaching the commandments, and the miracles they had witnessed, all combined to convince them that Christ was sent by the Father, and that His words were the words of God. Their faith was thus edified.

Verse 9:

This verse does not imply in any way that Christ does not pray for the world. In verses 20 & 21 He prays for the world that believes on Him and, on the Cross, He prayed for those who crucified Him (see Luke 23:34). In this particular verse, though, He devoted His prayer to His disciples, because of the trials, persecutions and evangelizing responsibilities awaiting them - more so than anyone else.

Verse 10:

This is a declaration of the Father-Son equality vis-a-vis ownership of the entire creation; this means that Christ is God. Christ is glorified through His disciples' obedience to His commandments, and through their evangelizing in His name.

+ *My dear brother, glorifying and proclaiming Christ's name is the responsibility of each and every child of God - not merely that of Christ's disciples. Thus, a significant responsibility rests on our shoulders, namely, glorifying the name of Christ to everyone around us. In turn, this can only be achieved by obeying His commandments, by constant repentance, and by struggling against our carnal desires; the "old man" will be eliminated through such a lifestyle (see Romans 6:6, Ephesians 4:22 and Colossians 3:9) and Christ, indwelling us, will be manifested.*

Verse 11:

Christ's time and mission on earth ended, but the disciples' lives on earth continue; they would encounter much, they were tasked with glorifying Christ's name, and with completing what Christ had started. For this reason, Christ asked the Father to protect them against evil and against the world, and everything, they would face.

"I kept them in Your name" - This reflects God's power and care, as written in the Book of Proverbs: ***"The name of the Lord is a strong tower; The righteous run to it and are safe."*** (Proverbs 18:10)

"That they may be one..." - This is a union at the level of heartfelt love, thought and goal, with neither enmity nor divisiveness.

+ *Today, servants and shepherds are in dire need of such a petition. The Church's and congregation's peace is founded on the servants' love and unity of thought. The Church needs to pray for its shepherds, so the Lord may shield them against divisiveness and polarization.*

"As We are" - Christ desired that unity among His disciples be as perfect as His unity with the Father.

Verses 12 & 13:

While I was with them in the world....But now I come to You" - The two verses are linked, complementing each other. Christ meant that, during His presence on earth, the disciples were in His custody, and He taught them His precepts and aphorisms. When the time came for Christ to leave them in the world, He entrusted their care under the Father's

name. Christ made His petition in the disciples' presence, to impart to them the confidence and joy in the uninterrupted Divine shepherding, enabling them to endure the hardships and persecutions they would face in the world.

"The son of perdition" - This is a clear reference to Judas. The Lord chose to assign him that label in order to accentuate Judas' evil intention, rendering him worthy of perdition. Judas did not benefit from Christ's shepherding, protecting the rest of the disciples.

"...that the Scripture might be fulfilled..." - The holy Bible's prophecies foretold Judas' betrayal and God's rejection of him (see Psalms 41:9 and 109:8).

Verse 14:

Christ taught His disciples, and the Church, God's sublime words, revealing the world's erroneous tendencies. For this reason, as the world hated Christ, it also hates God's children who adhere to a pure lifestyle.

+ *Indeed, we derive comfort from St. Paul's assertion: "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."* (2 Timothy 3:12)

Verses 15 & 16:

The world hates God's children; rather than lifting them up with Christ, the solution was for Him to protect and strengthen them, so that they may confront evil and Satan. Furthermore, Christ encourages God's children, emphasizing their spiritual link to God, rather than to the world.

Verses 17 - 19:

In His prayer, Christ asks that His disciples be edified in all His words - the truth. As Christ had designated - sanctified - Himself to teach and redeem them, it is now incumbent on them to do likewise, in evangelizing the world, preaching redemption and the kingdom of heaven.

3. Prayer for the Church - verses 20 - 26:

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You

have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them." (John 17:20 - 26)

Verse 20:

In this verse, Christ prays for the Church for all generations.

Verse 21:

"....that they all may be one" - The redeeming blood is one, the Teacher is one, and baptism is one; it is thus perfectly natural for us to be one - not in appearance, rather, in thought and heartfelt love, similarly to the oneness of Father and Son, not in essence, but in love to the extent permissible by our human nature.

Verse 22:

"And the glory which You gave Me I have given them..." - St. John Chrysostom explains that "the glory" in this context refers to the authority and talents while sharing Christ's salvational work through evangelizing. Such glory is granted for the sake of oneness.

+ *Since the Father and Son are One, their glory is also one. Christ granted us this glory for the very reason of edification of the Church and oneness of its congregation.*

Verse 23:

Christ elevates His discourse to the highest level of oneness, by presenting a magnificent theological, spiritual fact: ***"I in them"*** - this is through His incarnation and sacrificing Himself for their sake; and ***"You in Me"*** - this is through the fullness of the Father's Divinity in Christ and Christ in the Father. Through His holy Person, Christ reconciled humanity with the Father and, through Christ, humanity was united with God, and heaven with earth, and Christ became the atoning Intercessor/Mediator. This resulted in the Father's love for humanity becoming an extension of His love for His only begotten Son.

+ *Our union with God can only be achieved by submitting to His commandments.*

Comment:

Verses 20 - 23 accentuate God's care for unity within His Church. However, Satan succeeded in introducing divisiveness within the Church through pride. The solution lies in adherence to the Faith delivered by Christ and His apostles, and in humility, aiming to attain unity.

Verse 24:

The first petition was their sanctification; the second was for unity among themselves and union with Him; the third (this verse) was for their constant presence with Him - that was the highest level of desire expressed by Christ, hence the reason for His saying "**I desire**" not "I ask." "Asking" implies a request - but "desiring" adds an emotional dimension, and true shepherding through the presence of all His children in His bosom. As they shared the cross of persecutions, and the toil of evangelizing, they would also have a share in the Son's glory (see 1 Corinthians 12:26).

"...before the foundation of the world..." - This accentuates the Son's eternity (see Ch. 1:1).

Verses 25 & 26:

"The world has not known You" - Paganism prevailed throughout the world. In Israel, knowledge of God was theoretical, literal and superficial. On the other hand, Christ's knowledge of the Father was eternal and profound. Knowledge of the Father became available to us through His only begotten Son. Christ referred to His disciples' belief, by their acceptance of the Son, as an initial step towards knowing the Father; Christ would complete it after His resurrection through His explanation of kingdom-related issues. The Holy Spirit completes our knowledge of the infinite Father, thereby nurturing growth of our love for Him. Thus, Christ would be edified in our hearts.

+ *Dear God, I thank You for Your great love, of which I appreciated only a fraction. Grant me the appropriate response to Your love, that would be reflected as love to all around me.*



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Chapter 18

Christ's arrest and trial



Christ's arrest

1. Christ's arrest - verses 1 - 12:

"When Jesus had spoken these words, He went out with His disciples over the Brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which He and His disciples entered. And Judas, who betrayed Him, also knew the place; for Jesus often met there with His disciples. Then Judas, having received a detachment of troops, and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons. Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward and said to them, "Whom are you seeking?" They answered Him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am He." And Judas, who betrayed Him, also stood with them. Now when He said to them, "I am He," they drew back and fell to the ground. Then He asked them again, "Whom are you seeking?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answered, "I have told you that I am He. Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way," that the saying might be fulfilled which He spoke, "Of those whom You gave

Me I have lost none." Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?" Then the detachment of troops and the captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound Him." (John 18:1 - 12)

Verse 1:

Our Lord concluded His Passover discourse (Chs.14, 15 & 16), and His prayer to the Father (Ch. 17). The final stage of His life on earth then started, by His proceeding to the Garden of Gethsemane, by the Brook of Kidron - east of Jerusalem - accompanied by His disciples.

Verses 2 & 3:

We note that St. John did not mention any details either of Judas' agreement with the priests, or of the price of Christ's betrayal - those details are given in the other three gospels. St. John only mentioned Judas' knowledge of the place where Christ would be found - the place He usually frequented with His disciples. St. John also describes the multitude that had accompanied Judas to arrest Christ.

Verses 4 - 6:

"Jesus....knowing all things....went forward...." - This means that Jesus faced death of His own free will; hence, He went to them - they did not come to Him. Thus, St. John highlighted Christ's knowledge by referring once more to His Divinity; Christ asked them about their intent, although He knew it quite well - hence, His answer, ***"I am He,"*** accentuates the evil kingdom's reaction before God and His word: they were an armed multitude of soldiers, yet ***"they drew back and fell to the ground,"*** upon facing Christ. That was as though Christ was telling them, "You cannot arrest Me, if I did not give Myself up of My own free will."

Verses 7 - 9:

Christ repeated His question - and they gave the same response. He subsequently offered up Himself to the cause for which He had come, without neglecting to deliver His disciples - He requested that ***"these go their way."*** St. John referred to what Christ had asked in His prayer to the Father (Ch. 1:12) - ***"...keep through Your name those whom You have given Me."***

Verse 10:

See Matthew 26:51, Mark 14:47 and Luke 22:50, noting that St. John is the only one mentioning the names of Peter and the servant.

Verse 11:

See Matthew 26:52 & 54, noting that our Lord Christ rejected the impetuous human reaction displayed by Peter; He thereby clarified that He had to fulfill a much greater task, namely, the cup of the world and redemption on the Cross.

Verse 12:

"...the detachment of troops and the captain..." - Those were the Roman soldiers; they were accompanied by Jewish troops - all were against Christ. They bound Him - likely driven by malice, while emphasizing His appearance as a criminal, and guarding against any attempts by Him to escape in the dark. Binding Christ is analogous to Abraham's binding his son Isaac on his way to offer him as a sacrifice.

+ *O soul of mine - I wish you would understand - how great is the love that sets the guilty free and binds the innocent - O Great Creator and Redeemer of the entire universe - You willingly allowed them to bind You, when You could have commanded legions of angels....*

2. Christ's session with Annas - Peter's denial - verses 13 - 27:

"And they led Him away to Annas first, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high priest that year. Now it was Caiaphas who advised the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people. And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest. But Peter stood at the door outside. Then the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to her who kept the door, and brought Peter in. Then the servant girl who kept the door said to Peter, "You are not also one of this Man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." Now the servants and officers who had made a fire of coals stood there, for it was cold, and they warmed themselves. And Peter stood with them and warmed himself. The high priest then asked Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine. Jesus answered him, "I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing. Why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard Me what I said to them. Indeed they know what I said." And when He had said these things, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, "Do You answer the high priest like that?" Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?" Then Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. Now Simon Peter stood and warmed

himself. Therefore they said to him, "You are not also one of His disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not!" One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of him whose ear Peter cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?" Peter then denied again; and immediately a rooster crowed."

(John 18:13 - 27)

Verses 13 & 14:

Caiaphas was the high priest; Annas, his father-in-law, was high priest before him. The title "high priest" was retained for the person's entire life, even after his retirement. St. John is the only evangelist to mention Christ's session with Annas. It is speculated that Christ was taken to Annas first merely out of deference for his age and his previous tenure as high priest. St. John also reminds us that ***"it was Caiaphas who advised the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people"*** - see also Ch. 11:49 & 50. This is important, since it accentuates the fact that Christ's sentencing to death was premeditated - His trial was a mere formality.

Verses 15 - 18:

Unlike Matthew (Ch. 26 :56), John did not mention the disciples' flight. He simply stated that he followed Christ along with Peter. John was able to enter the high priest's house, given his relationship with the clergy; Peter, on the other hand, stayed outside, warming himself with the servants. Out of fear, Peter denied any knowledge of Christ, when challenged by the maid.

Verses 19 - 21:

Annas asked Christ about His teachings to the multitude, likely, hoping to find something incriminating Christ, that he could relay to Caiaphas and the council. Christ's rebuttal, though, shattered his hopes, since none of Christ's teachings was secret: they were all in public places, and were heard by the multitudes. Thus, Christ said, ***"Why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard Me what I said to them."***

Verses 22 & 23:

Considering Christ's response to be inappropriate, one of the servants ***"struck Jesus with the palm of his hand"*** - hence, the guilty struck the guiltless. The servant's action was also supposed to complement the high priest - at the expense of truth and justice. It should be noted that, according to Mosaic law (Exodus 22:28), Christ had not erred - thus, ***"Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?"***

+ We glean the following lessons from those verses:

1. What has Christ endured for my salvation? Behold our God became a spectacle for all watchers, smitten on His cheek by a servant....do I tolerate people's abuse??

2. There is no impediment for the oppressed to ask, civilly, his oppressor, to clarify the reasons for his oppression.

In this regard, St. Augustine wrote the following extraordinary meditation about this strike: "Our Lord here showed that His great precepts of patience are to be put in practice, not by outward show of the body, but by preparedness of heart. Visibly to present the other cheek is no more than an angry man can do. How much better then that with mild answer he speaks the truth, and with tranquil mind endure worse outrages." (see also Matthew 5:39)

Verse 24:

Although Christ's official Jewish trial was the one before Caiaphas, John did not focus on it - rather, details are given in Matthew's and Mark's gospels. John, however, mentioned the session with Annas, which is not given in the other gospels. John subsequently recorded the official Roman trial before Pilate.

Verses 25 - 27:

John mentioned Peter's first denial during Christ's session with Annas; then he mentioned Peter's second and third denials, as well as the rooster's crowing, during Christ's appearance before Caiaphas. On the other hand, Matthew (26:69 - 73), Mark (14:66 - 71), and Luke (22:55 - 62), mentioned the three denials after the trial.

It should also be noted that St. John neither mentioned Peter's swearing, nor Christ's look at him, nor his weeping bitterly and repentance - all of which were stated in the other three gospels.

+ Many marvel at Peter's denial after all he had seen and heard throughout the years!!

On the other hand, Peter might have been excused due to his fear, the unmanifested Divinity of Christ through His resurrection, and the lack of the Holy Spirit's descent upon him. Today, though, many have no excuse whatsoever: they declare verbally their belief on Christ and their adherence to His precepts, yet, their hearts and deeds deny Him, and they become the reason for others' blasphemies! Indeed, Dear God, we entreat You to forgive us and to have mercy upon us - for we are in dire need of Peter's remorseful tears.....

3. Christ's trial before Pilate - verses 28 - 40:

"Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover. Pilate then went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this Man?" They answered and said to him, "If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you." Then Pilate said to them, "You take Him and judge Him according to your law." Therefore the Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death," that the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled which He spoke, signifying by what death He would die. Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered him, "Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?" Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here." Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, "I find no fault in Him at all. "But you have a custom that I should release someone to you at the Passover. Do you therefore want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" Then they all cried again, saying, "Not this Man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a robber." (John 18:28 - 40)



Christ's trial before Pontius Pilate

Verses 28 & 29:

As indicated earlier, St. John did not give details of Christ's trial before Caiaphas, during which it was clear that Christ was the Son of God; the Jews considered that declaration to be blasphemous (Matthew 26:65, Mark 14:64 and Luke 22:71). St. John also skipped the Jews' council meeting and its decision, proceeding directly to the trial before Pilate.

The "***Praetorium***" was built by Herod the Great - Roman governors resided there whenever they visited Jerusalem. The Jews never entered it, considering it a "Gentile building," and thus "unclean." Therefore, ***"Pilate then went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this Man?"***

"....that they might eat the Passover...." - This reflects the continuity of the Passover celebration. It is indeed amazing to note that, while the Jewish leadership adhered strictly to apparent physical purity, they harboured in their hearts spilling an innocent Person's blood!!

Verses 30 & 31:

The Jewish leadership failed to attribute any crime to Christ - they simply sought a decision to have Him killed; thus, they told Pilate, ***"If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you."***

In their minds and hearts Christ's crucifixion was a foregone conclusion - that was only within the power of the Roman governor. Pilate, though, did not hasten to grant them their wish.

Verse 32:

".....that the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled...." - Our Lord Christ had foretold His crucifixion (see Matthew 20:19, Mark 10:21 and Luke 9:23 and 14:27). If it were up to the Jews without Pilate's involvement, they would have stoned Him. By insisting that His death be crucifixion through a Roman decree, they were unknowingly fulfilling the Divine economy.

Verses 33 & 34:

Pilate called Jesus by Himself into the praetorium, and asked Him about the Jews' allegations, levelled at Him, that He considered Himself to be King of the Jews. The Jews knew that such a crime would be considered a rebellion against Caesar and would incur the penalty of crucifixion. Rather than answer Pilate's question, Christ challenged him to warn him and prod his conscience, with another question: ***"Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?"***

Put differently, Christ was asking Pilate: "Is this your personal opinion, or are you merely reiterating the allegations against Me, seeking some justification for your eventual ruling??"

Verse 35:

"Am I a Jew?" That was a disavowing question, clarifying Pilate's position, namely, he did not consider Christ to be King. It was as though he said, "This is merely what the Jews are saying, none of which concerns me." Some commentators speculate that Pilate was belittling any notion that there could be any king other than Caesar, ruler of the ancient world. Pilate continues his interrogation by saying **"What have You done?"** That was because of all the multitude's complaints against Christ....

Verse 36:

Christ repudiates all accusations that the priests had levelled against Him.

+ By defending Himself, Christ had no intention of bypassing the Cross, for which He had come and was incarnate. Rather, He intended to teach us a spiritual rule: since Christ, our King, has proclaimed to us that He did not belong to this world, and that He had another heavenly, eternal, kingdom, it follows that His congregation also should transcend this world with all its carnal desires, and echo Christ's words: "We are from above and not of this world." (see John 8:23) We must consistently seek our God's heavenly kingdom, and not allow the world to dominate us.

Christ added that, if He were indeed an earthly King, He would have made sure of having servants and guards serving Him and protecting Him against the Jews. Of course, quite the contrary, He voluntarily gave Himself up in return for His disciples' safety.

Verse 37:

"Are You a king then?" - This question reflects amazement and perplexity. Christ declared that He was King - but not in the earthly sense that Pilate understood. Christ's response confirmed the spiritual meaning of His kingdom. Thus, He did not deny that He was King, rather, He added that He was incarnate to redeem mankind and to reign over men's hearts.

"Everyone who is of the truth" - This means "everyone who accepts My words, and who accepts the work of the Holy Spirit within him; hence, everyone who submits to God Who is truth, and who knows Christ as sheep know their shepherd and follow him. (see Ch. 10:4)"

Verse 38:

"What is truth?" - Failing to comprehend Christ's words, Pilate asked this question, neither expecting an answer, nor with any interest in understanding. Undoubtedly, Pilate found no fault in Christ requiring the death penalty. For this reason he went out a second time to the Jews, declaring his initial ruling of Christ's innocence, on the basis of finding no faults whatsoever in Christ. It might have been Divine economy for Pilate

to make that pronouncement, to accentuate the fact that Christ was the true unblemished Passover, the spotless Sacrifice offered for all our sins. Thus, Pilate's pronouncement was merely a confirmation of the spotless Sacrifice offered by Christ.

Verses 39 & 40:

Pilate erred in abandoning the duties of his post, namely, to judge truthfully by releasing an innocent victim; instead, he abdicated the truth to the multitude - an unheard of practice. He believed that declaring Christ's innocence would absolve him of the responsibility he turned over to the multitude. Likely, he thought that by giving the multitude the choice, they would opt for releasing the innocent. Surprisingly, they chose a thief!

+ *It is indeed amazing that the people should choose a thief's release, and an innocent Person's crucifixion!!*

Pilate's gross error should teach us a lesson in witnessing for the truth. Politicians may barter, present distorted views, and obfuscate the boundaries of the truth. God's children, though, are different: the truth is the truth, come what may.... **"He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just, both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord."** (Proverbs 17:15)



*"Interpretation of the holy Bible - the New Testament"
taken from the series: "Patristic expositions and meditations"*

*An exegetical study of
the Gospel according to St. John*

Chapter 19

Christ's crucifixion, death and burial



"Christ died for our sins." 1 Corinthians 15:3b

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Christ's crucifixion

1. Continuation of Christ's trial before Pilate - verses 1 - 16:

"So then Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him. And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe. Then they said, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they struck Him with their hands. Pilate then went out again, and said to them, "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you, that you may know that I find no fault in Him." Then Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said to them, "Behold the Man!" Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him." The Jews

answered him, "We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God." Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid, and went again into the Praetorium, and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. Then Pilate said to Him, "Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?" Jesus answered, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin." From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, "If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar." When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" But they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar!" Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus and led Him away." (John 19:1 - 16)

Verses 1 - 4:

Pilate was undecided between the truth (the voice of his conscience) versus the Jews' fierce insistence on Christ's crucifixion; thus, as confirmed in St. Luke's gospel, he had Christ scourged, attempting to appease the multitude (see Luke 23:16). Matthew and Mark (27:27 and 15:15 respectively) mention Christ's scourging and crucifixion simultaneously. St. John, though, mentions them separately, in addition to Pilate's feeble attempts at justifying Jesus' innocence. St. John subsequently proceeds to narrate the troops' mockery of Christ, hence, **"....the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe. Then they said, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they struck Him with their hands."** (see also Isaiah 53:5)

"And they struck Him" - In Matthew's gospel, we read that they also struck Him on the head: **"Then they spat on Him, and took the reed and struck Him on the head."** (Matthew 27:30) There does not exist a single tongue capable of describing such a despicable scene.

+ *It suffices us to ask our Lord: "Why, Dear God, did You endure the sinners' hand to smite Your all-holy face, and how could this have possibly happened??" His answer will be: "For your salvation, My child!!"*

Attempting to appease his conscience, Pilate declares, again, his belief in Christ's innocence. However, that did not constitute a formal judgment.

Verses 5 & 6:

After having Jesus scourged, Pilate brought Him out **"wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe."** He did this as a final attempt to win the Jews' sympathy for releasing Christ. However, the Jews continued to clamour ruthlessly for Christ's crucifixion. For the third time, Pilate stated his belief in Christ's innocence (see also Chs.18:38 and 19:6 - 4). Pilate also tried to disclaim any responsibility, and told them **"You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him."**

Verse 7:

The first accusation that the Jews levelled against Christ was that He was an evil-doer (Ch. 18:30). Having failed, they advanced their second accusation, namely, He was a rebel against Caesar - Christ's rebuttal was that His kingdom was/is not of this world (Ch. 8:36). Finally, they accused Christ of blaspheming against the law - their religion - thus, He was worthy of the death penalty. In their view, that should rebut Pilate's assertions of Christ's innocence.

Verse 8:

Pilate was terrified at the notion that Christ was **"the Son of God."** One might infer that he was terrified at the thought of condemning an innocent Person. Nevertheless, he was also acutely cognizent of the Jews' harshness driving him to condemn Christ. Furthermore, the expression **"the Son of God"** terrified him because both Romans and Greeks believed in the possibility that gods could appear and have carnal relationships with humans; hence, if Christ had been one of those "gods," He could create trouble between Pilate and the gods! Finally, his wife's dream worried him, **"Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him."** (Matthew 27:19)

Verses 9 - 11:

Attempting to subdue his feelings of fear and terror, Pilate took Jesus inside and asked Him, **"Where are You from?"** Hence, "Are You from heaven - were you sent by the gods??!!!" Christ's refraining from answering reflects His perfect knowledge that whatever Pilate said or thought would be inconsequential. Pilate furthermore threatened Christ to have Him killed in a further attempt to extract an answer.

Christ's powerful response terrified Pilate even more: **"You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above."** The crucifixion was thus the Father's will and the Son's submissive acceptance - no earthly power could have authority over it. Nothing could

absolve Pilate of his responsibility, his hesitation, or his lack of unequivocal declaration of Christ's innocence. Christ also asserted that **"the one [Judas and the envious Jews] who delivered Me to you has the greater sin."** Pilate was judged to have a lighter sin likely because he was a Gentile and had no knowledge of the Jews' Scriptures.

Verse 12:

We do not know how Pilate sought to release Christ - it could have been through further discussions with the Jews or the chief priests. However, his fear and perplexity were aggravated by his guilty conscience and by the Jews' pressure and threats - they unexpectedly threatened to proclaim him an enemy of Caesar if he released someone purporting to be king and, hence, Caesar's rival. The Jews thus succeeded in introducing a new element of fear in his heart, namely, fear for his political position, and fear of being labelled "Caesar's enemy."

Verse 13:

"Pilate.....brought Jesus out [from the praetorium to where the Jews were gathered] **and sat down in the judgment seat** [where Roman governors sat when sentencing] **in a place that is called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha** [in Hebrew this means "high or elevated"]."

Verse 14:

At about the sixth hour - three hours before the Passover - it was incumbent on Pilate to pronounce his sentencing; thus he tried for the last time to avoid a decision, leaving it up to the Jews to decide. Therefore he told the Jews: **"Behold your King!"**

Verses 15 & 16:

Pilate's action aggravated the Jews further, and **"they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!"**" When Pilate asked them **"Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar!"** This constitutes at once a denial and an "abdication." The Jews knew quite well that they had no other king but God, and that the Romans were their colonialists, from whom they expected deliverance.

By clamouring that they had **"no king but Caesar!"** they would be likened unto the person who changes his principles at a moment's notice because of some uncanniness in his heart - hence, a person who believes that "the end justifies the means." Christ's ridiculous trial scene thus came to an end by the submission, to the multitude's pressure, of someone seeking to protect his own position. Put differently, behold, the ludicrous principle of an innocent person dying, just to protect one's own interests!!

+ Dear, beloved, reader, it is easy for us to criticize Pilate for failing to exercise his authority, and for his fear and cowardice. Nevertheless, throughout our daily life, we lie, sometimes, to avoid a situation for which we deserve rebuke, or we evade the responsibility of having to witness for the truth; in so doing, we attempt to transfer responsibilities to others - as Pilate did. Alternatively, we try, like the Jews, to justify our wrong-doing and dull our conscience !! God help us!

2. The crucifixion journey - verses 17 - 24:

"And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, one on either side, and Jesus in the center. Now Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. And the writing was: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Then many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. Therefore the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, 'Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'He said, "I am the King of the Jews." ' " Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written." Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. They said therefore among themselves, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be," that the Scripture might be fulfilled which says: "They divided My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots." Therefore the soldiers did these things." (John 19:17 - 24)

Verse 17:

The crucifixion procession started from the praetorium, proceeding through Jerusalem and, finally, to Golgotha. St. Paul meditates on this, saying, **"Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach."** (Hebrews 13:12 & 13)

+ It should be noted, dear reader, that our Church accentuates this spiritual meaning by conducting the rites of Passover Week in the church's nave, outside the sanctuary and the deacons' chancel. Thus, the Church exits Jerusalem with Christ.

"Golgotha" - In Jewish tradition, that is the place where Adam's skull was buried. Scholars, though, believe it is simply an elevated rocky plateau having the form of a skull. That location, not far from the city, was used for stoning.

Verse 18:

St. John gives a brief description of the crucifixion's scene, mentioning only the thieves who were crucified with Christ, without mentioning their dialogue with Christ. More ample descriptions are given in Matthew 27, Mark 15 and Luke 23.

Verses 19 - 22:

Customarily, the inscription on a given cross indicated the name of the crucified plus the reason for his crucifixion. St. John mentions that the inscription on Christ's Cross was through Pilate's personal instructions, reflecting the Jews' language (Hebrew), the language of science and intellect (Greek) and the official Roman language (Latin). Since the Cross and its inscription were visible to most, the chief priests objected to the inscription saying that Christ was their King - since that would incriminate them, having killed their own King. Pilate though, for unknown motives, countered their objections, refusing to change what he had decreed.

Verses 23 & 24:

St. John's gospel is the one that gave the most details about partitioning Christ's garments - we understand that there were four troops, and each one took a portion. However, **"the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece;"** therefore, they cast lots to determine who would take it. St. John reminds us (as did Matthew 27:35) of what the Psalmist had said: **"They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots."** (Psalm 22:18)

3. Christ's words on the Cross - Christ's death - verses 25 - 37:

"Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home. After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!" Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth. So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit. Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. But when

they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe. For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, "Not one of His bones shall be broken." And again another Scripture says, "They shall look on Him Whom they pierced."" (John 19:25 - 37)

Verse 25:

The holy Bible states that the following women were present at Christ's Cross:

1. St. Mary, the holy virgin.
2. Salome, St. Mary's cousin, St. John's and Zebedee's sons' mother (see Matthew 20:20 and Mark 15:40 and 16:1).
3. Mary the wife of Cleopas, and the mother of James the Less and Joses (see Mark 15:40).
4. Mary Magdalene (see Matthew 27:56).

As was his wont, St. John refrained from mentioning his mother's name.

Verses 26 & 27:

Throughout His most difficult moments, His Passion and His crucifixion, Christ never forgot about His mother in the flesh, the holy virgin St. Mary. Since He was her only Child, Christ offered her St. John as a son; Christ thus entrusted the care of His mother to St. John. They both accepted, and John took her into his custody.

+ *Why did John, in particular, acquire such an honour?? Was he not the sole disciple at the Cross's suffering, while all others had fled??!!*

My friend, St. John acquired the honour of hosting the mother of God in his home, because he had not abandoned the Cross of our Lord - behold, a special gift awaits all who do not turn their backs to their cross, rather, accepting it joyfully from God.

Verses 28 - 30:

"After this" - This could have more than one interpretation:

1. After the three hours of darkness.
2. After all the words/discussions on the Cross - whether mentioned by St. John or not.
3. After handing our Lord's mother into St. John's custody.

St. John also referred to two other prophecies about Christ's Passion:

"My tongue clings to My jaws..." (Psalm 22:15)

and

"....for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." (Psalm 69:21)

It was necessary for those two prophecies to be fulfilled; for this reason, humanity's Redeemer, with His own blood, cried out saying, **"I thirst!"**

St. John's was the only gospel mentioning the **"vessel full of sour wine."** Troops used to drink that cheap, almost free, sour wine; thus, they filled a sponge with it, **"put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth."** A hyssop is a small, bushy, aromatic wild shrub, used for sprinkling in ancient Jewish rites of purification.

"It is finished!" - This is the sixth of the seven words Christ uttered on the Cross. Put differently, Christ had fulfilled the mission for which He had come, namely, offering Himself a Sacrifice, an atonement for our sins. The seven words were said in the following sequence:

1. **"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."** (Luke 23:34)
2. **"Woman, behold your son!"** Then He said to the disciple, **"Behold your mother!"** (John 19:26 & 27)
3. **"I thirst!"** (John 19:28)
4. **"Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."** (Luke 23:43)
5. **"Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?"** that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46)
6. **"It is finished!"** (John 19:30)
7. **"Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit."** (Luke 23:46)

Verses 31 - 34:

"Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day..." - The Jews were preparing for the Passover Feast - for them, the first Saturday of the Passover week was the holiest. Since this tradition contrasted sharply with the bodies hanging on the crosses, the Jews sought Pilate's permission to break the crucified's legs to hasten their death - that being the custom then. The troops consequently broke the legs of the two criminals - but Christ remained untouched; they were amazed at His having already yielded up His spirit (see also Mark 15:44). To provide further assurance of His death, one of the soldiers **"pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out..."**

Several of the Church's forefathers meditated on the **"blood and water"** coming out of the Saviour's side; below are some of them:

St. John Chrysostom:

"For *"there came forth water and blood."* Not without a purpose, or by chance did they come forth, but because by means of these two together the Church consisteth. And the initiated know it, being by water indeed regenerate, and nourished by the Blood and the Flesh. Hence the Mysteries take their beginning; i.e. to teach thee that when thou approachest to that awful cup, thou mayest so approach, as drinking from the very side."

St. Tertullian:

".....the Lord said, ***"I have to be baptized with a baptism"*** (Luke 12:50)when He had been baptized already. For He had come "by means of water and blood," just as John has written; that He might be baptized by the water, glorified by the blood; to make us, similarly, called by water, chosen by blood. These two baptisms He sent out from the wound in His pierced side, in order that they who believed in His blood might be bathed with the water; they who had been bathed in the water might likewise drink the blood."

Verses 35 - 37:

As usual, St. John refers to himself indirectly; he explained the reason for not breaking our Saviour's legs and for the lance piercing His side, giving the following prophecies which had thus been fulfilled, to strengthen our faith in Christ:

1. ***"...they did not break His legs...."*** - This commandment pertained to the Passover lamb, which refers directly to Christ (see Exodus 12:46). St. Paul also referred to it in 1 Corinthians 5:7 - hence, ***"For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us."*** Furthermore, the Psalmist refers to it in Psalm 34:20, hence, ***"He guards all His bones; not one of them is broken."***

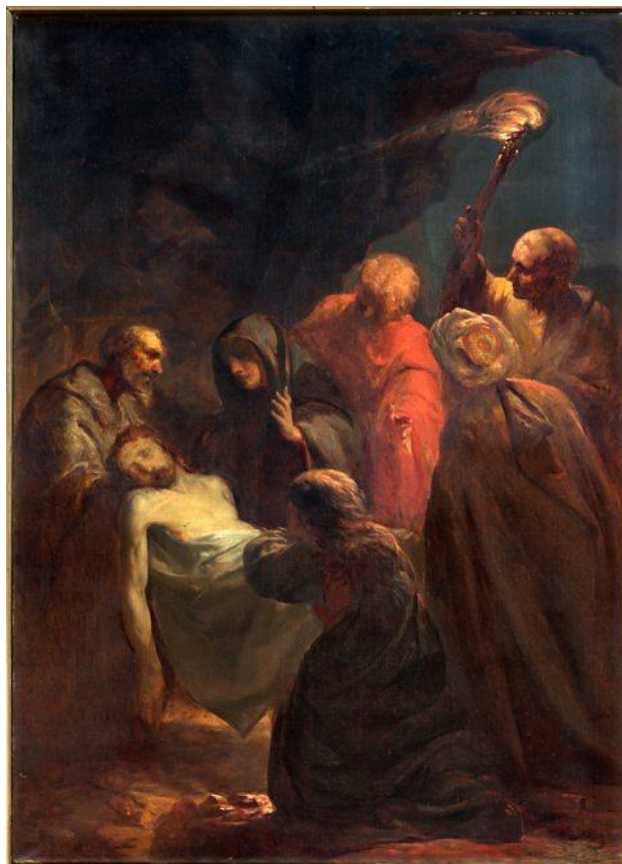
2. ***"They shall look on Him Whom they pierced."*** This was given in Zechariah 12:10 - ***"And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me Whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn."***

As John had indicated earlier, Christ's death had been fulfilled; however, the hand of God moved the soldier to pierce His side, in order to fulfill what the Father had proclaimed through the Holy Spirit about the Messiah.

+ Dearly beloved, let us pause here for a moment...our Lord's pierced side was not a mere fulfillment of prophecies, rather, it was a sign of love which Christ bore in His body, in addition to the nails. The pierced side thus became a source of hope and protection within Him against all Satan's wiles. If, someday, you doubted having a place in Christ's bosom, remember the baptismal water in which you washed, and the flowing blood awaiting you on the altar - then your hope will be renewed, and your heart will be inflamed with the love of Him Who loved you.

4. The burial - verses 38 - 42:

"After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took the body of Jesus. And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews' Preparation Day, for the tomb was nearby." (John 19:38 - 42)



Christ's burial

Verse 38:

Out of all His followers, why did Christ choose "**Joseph of Arimathea**" to bury His body?

1. He was rich, and he owned a new tomb at the same location as that of the crucifixion, thus fulfilling the prophecy: "**And they made His grave with the wicked-- but with the rich at His death....**" (Isaiah 53:9 and Matthew 27:57 - 60)
2. Being an affluent councillor, he managed to speak to Pilate (Mark 15:43).

Verses 39 & 40:

"So he came and took the body of Jesus...." - Many sequential events occurred - and their responsibilities towards Christ's burial were perfectly discharged. Thus, Joseph went to Pilate, and Nicodemus brought everything necessary for the burial; together, they took Christ's body. St. John mentions that it was Nicodemus **"...who first came to Jesus by night..."** (see Ch. 3), and also the same Nicodemus who had tried to defend Christ before the Jewish council (see Ch. 7:50). Nicodemus **"came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes."** Myrrh is a bitter substance extracted from a thorny tree species, and used for purification as well as a pain-killer; it was used by ancient Egyptians for embalming and, later, used by the Jews. Aloe is a fragrant product also extracted from plants. The quantity brought by Nicodemus amounted to about 340 grams.

Verses 41 & 42:

"Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid." As indicated earlier, the tomb belonged to Joseph of Arimathea. Its proximity to the crucifixion site facilitated completion of the burial rite before midnight - six p.m. on our time scale - hence, before the Sabbath's start.

The submission of the Saviour's body between the hands of those who buried Him is likely the final indication of humility, of the God Whom we shall see later in the glory of His resurrection and ascension.

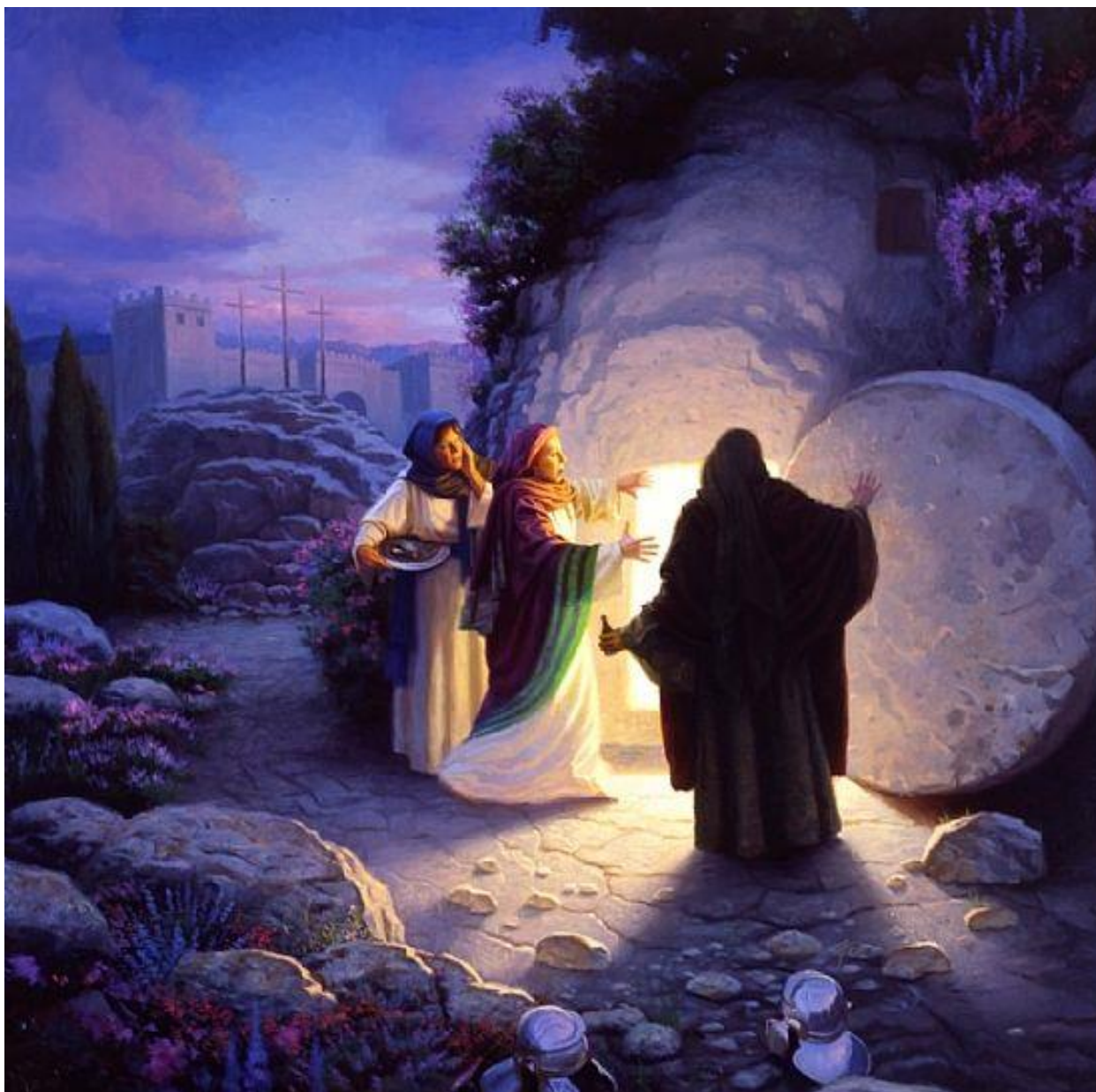


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Chapter 20

***The visit to the empty tomb - Christ's apparitions following
His resurrection***



The visit to the empty tomb

1. The visit of Mary Mgdalene, Peter and John to the empty tomb
- verses 1 - 10:

"Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. Then she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple, and were going to the tomb. So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there; yet he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there, and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed. For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again to their own homes." (John 20:1 - 10)

Verse 1:

"....on the first day of the week...." - That was Sunday, the day when triumph was declared, and when the authority of death was crushed. Sunday became the day of the Lord, replacing Saturday, for all Christians, since the early Church of the apostolic age.

"....while it was still dark...." - This reflects Mary Magdalene's great love for the Saviour - she proceeded to visit His tomb at the crack of dawn when the city's gates were starting to open. She had no concerns for the fact that she was a woman, and that the western side was still shrouded in darkness; all she aspired to achieve was to see the tomb....However, as given in Matthew 28:2, the angel had already rolled away the stone covering the tomb's entrance.

Verses 2 - 4:

By hastening to the tomb, Mary became resurrection's first annunciator. Her zeal drove her first to Peter's home - hence, the eldest and most known - then to John's, where St. Mary resided. However, despite her not having appreciated the resurrection's significance, she informed them of what she had seen - thus, someone had taken the Lord's body to an unknown location. Peter's and John's zeal was also evident in their rush towards the tomb - John, being younger, was the first to arrive.

Verses 5 - 7:

Jews used to wrap a dead person's body in linen, and wrap the head separately. St. John mentioned these details, proving that Christ's body had not been stolen - a thief would not have bothered to separate the linens.

St. John also provides more details - hence, having to bend down due to the tomb's low entrance, refraining from entering due to being awestruck, and Peter's bold entrance....

Verse 8:

Following Peter's entrance, John was emboldened and entered; their amazement was transformed into faith - hence, belief in what Mary had told them, and which they had doubted. Thus, they believed that Christ had risen out of the darkened tomb - by Himself....

Verses 9 & 10:

The disciples were shocked at Christ's death, since they had not comprehended the Old Testament prophecies about His resurrection. This scenario ended by the disciples' return to their homes.

2. Christ appears to Mary Magdalene - verses 11 - 18:

"But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. Then they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him, "Rabboni!" (which is to say, Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.' " Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her." (John 20:11 - 18)



Christ appeared to Mary Magdalene

Verses 11 & 12:

The two disciples returned, but Mary's love was too great - she remained and stooped to look inside. She saw two angels in human form. Mark (16:5) and Luke (24:4) described them as "**a young man**" and "**two men**" respectively. St. John also indicates where they were seated.

Verses 13 & 14:

Amazingly, Mary was not scared at the angels' presence.

"Woman, why are you weeping?" - This question does not mean that they did not know the reason - rather, it expresses their disapproval at her weeping, since she should have been rejoicing at the Lord's resurrection. Her response, though, showed her continued disbelief, or lack of understanding, of the resurrection; she remained confident that someone had taken away the body....

Having responded to the angels, **"...she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus."** She never imagined that He would be Jesus....

Verse 15:

The tomb was situated inside a garden; therefore, Mary assumed naturally, that the person "working" at such an early hour would be the gardener. Since she never considered the fact that Jesus had risen, she did not pay attention to His voice. Christ's questions, **"Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?"** do not, of course, mean that He did not know - rather, He wanted to re-orient her mode of thinking...

Verse 16:

Our Lord called her by name. She responded as a sheep that finally recognized its shepherd - as though she had awakened from a stupor, to the reality of Christ's resurrection. She answered, **"Rabboni!" (which is**

to say, Teacher)." Such was the title by which Christ used to be addressed. By her response, she therefore acknowledged that she was speaking to the resurrected Saviour.

Verse 17:

"Do not cling to Me..." - Why did Christ say this, given that in Matthew 28:1 - 9 we read that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary held His feet: **"Now after the Sabbath.....Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb.....And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them....So they came and held Him by the feet...."**

Several interpretations have been postulated concerning Jesus' saying **"Do not cling to Me..."** Some feel that, initially, Mary had indeed touched Him; however, she continued to have doubts concerning His resurrection, so Jesus forbade her to touch Him, by way of spiritual rebuke for her doubting His resurrection.

St. John Chrysostom, though, says that our Lord desired to elevate Mary from her emotional attachment to Him, to the higher, more sublime, reality of His Divine, glorified, resurrection. It was as though He was transcending her from physical to higher, spiritual, feelings.

A third view says that Christ intended to tell Mary: *"Do not hinder Me and neither delay proclamation of My resurrection, nor your task of informing My disciples. Also, **"I have not yet ascended to My Father,"** hence, I am not ascending immediately, rather, after forty days. You will be seeing Me on other occasions."*

"...My Father and your Father..." - This means, "specifically My Father, and generally, your Father." Put differently, He is My hypostatic Father, Whose Son - the Word - I am, and He is your Father, in the sense that He is Father to all believers.

"...My God and your God..." - **"My God"** because the Father in all His glory is greater than the incarnate Son on earth, having His glory concealed - even though the Father and Son are One. **"Your God"** because you are His creation.

Verse 18:

Mary hastened to inform the disciples, that she had seen the resurrected Christ, and that she had spoken to Him. She also told them that He would ascend after a certain period, during which He would appear to them.

3. Christ's initial appearance to His disciples - verses 19 - 25:

"Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you." When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

(John 20:19 - 25)

Verse 19:

St. John describes the ten disciples' state, the evening of Resurrection Sunday: their state of apprehension was promulgated by Judas' disappearance and Thomas' absence. The doors were securely locked. However, Christ appeared in their midst, thereby proving the doctrine of the glorified resurrection body, which is not subject to physical rules.

The disciples were surprised at Christ's presence in their midst saying, ***"Peace be with you,"*** to comfort their hearts, and liberate them from the fear which had gripped their souls.

+ *All of us have experienced closed doors and high barriers of anxiety. However, Dear Lord, we all seek Your peace and the shining of Your Divine light within us, to soothe our hearts and dispel our fears.*

Verse 20:

Christ presented evidence of His body's resurrection. Thus, He was neither a spirit nor an illusion, rather, a resurrected body bearing all the signs of the Cross. The disciples were overjoyed at having ascertained Christ's resurrection. Nothing in the world outweighs the joy of seeing the Lord.

+ *All who fail to believe in God, or who live outside the Church's fold, deprive themselves of the Divine gift of seeing God, through the eyes of our faith, throughout our daily life. This gift is tantamount to a prelude, for those whose faith in God is steadfast, to what they will see in heaven, thus completing their limitless, unimpeded, joy in Him - as the Church recites in the Litany of the Departed.*

Verse 21:

Christ repeated His greeting to accentuate their feelings of comfort. Subsequently, He proceeded to the disciples' approaching task; hence, **"As the Father has sent Me** [for mankind's redemption - a task which no one else can accomplish], **I also send you** [to evangelize and to bear witness to this redemption]."

Verse 22:

"And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit...." - Our Lord had mentioned, previously, that the Father would send them the Holy Spirit in His name. Here, Christ grants His disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit, by breathing on them, since His authority is the Father's. Two points should be noted:

1. This breath founded the New Testament's *"Sacrament of Holy Orders."*
2. In the apostolic tradition, this breath became like a leaven, which the apostles received from Christ and embedded within the Church's sacraments. In the rite of baptism, the priest breathes upon the baptized's face saying, **"Receive the Holy Spirit."** Similarly, during the rite of priest ordainment - Sacrament of Holy Orders - the bishop breathes on the candidate's face saying **"Receive the Holy Spirit."** Also, some priests use the same statement during confessions, as a breath of forgiveness....

Verse 23:

This verse clarifies, unequivocally, the authority of the Holy Spirit resident in the Sacrament of Holy Orders, and which Christ granted (in the previous verse) to His apostles and which, in turn, they passed on to the Church.

St. Cyril the Great expounded this: *"Forgiveness is solely within the purview of God. However, to those whom He had granted His Holy Spirit, He also granted the power of forgiveness - since whatever they do would be through the Holy Spirit indwelling them, through the Sacrament of Holy Orders - the Holy Spirit is the One Who forgives or retains sins. The physical act is executed by the priest. Put differently, this authority is derived from the Holy Spirit, rather than from man's holiness. See also Peter's encounter with Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1 - 10); Peter said in verse 3: **"Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?"** Thus, Peter did not say, "Why did you lie to me?"*

The Sacrament of Penance, constitutes a declaration before the Holy Spirit, Who uses the priest's hand, in transferring the confessor's sins to Christ's atoning blood. The Holy Spirit then proclaims, through the priest,

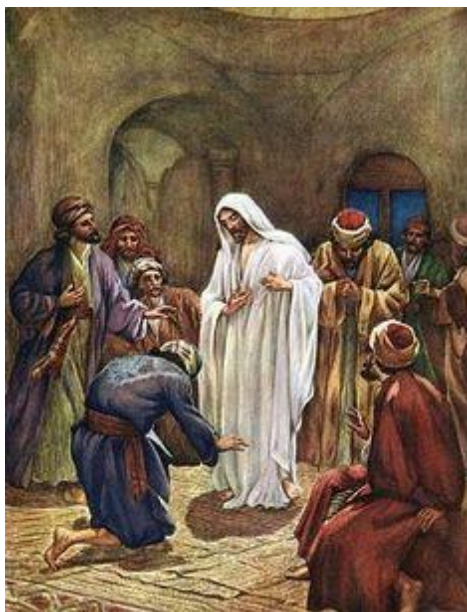
the forgiveness of those sins. Consequently, the Sacrament of Penance is among the most gratifying sacraments - especially when practised with full belief and understanding.

Verses 24 & 25:

Thomas is considered to be typical of a person who rationalizes everything to the extent of impeding simple faith or belief. He neither believed the disciples' nor the Marys' testimony concerning Christ's resurrection (see also Ch. 14:5); rather he said boldly: ***"Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."*** St. John mentioned Thomas' reaction here as a prelude to Christ's forthcoming appearance amidst His disciples.

4. Christ's second appearance to His disciples - verses 26 - 31:

"And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." (John 20:26 - 31)



Christ appeared to His disciples

Verses 26 & 27:

The same scenario recurred the following Sunday - the only difference was Thomas' presence. After greeting His disciples, Christ addressed Thomas directly saying, "**Reach your finger here...and reach your hand here....Do not be unbelieving, but believing.**"

+ Christ's style when addressing Thomas gives us an example of Christ's tenderness and long-suffering, even towards someone who had doubted, and demanded that God respond to his request and provide proof of His resurrection. This teaches us the true meaning of humility, and condescension towards the spiritually weak.

Some believe that Christ's words bore some gentle reproach.

Verse 28:

"**My Lord and My God!**" - Thomas' response was at once an apology and a proclamation. He proclaimed his strong faith, and he apologized for his significant lack of faith, gently reproached by Christ. Thomas did not stop at "**My Lord,**" rather, he added "**and My God**" strongly expressing his appreciation of the mystery of Christ's resurrection. Thus, he confessed his presence before the incarnate God, Who crushed death's authority through His Divinity.

Verse 29:

Here, again, Christ reproaches Thomas gently for his doubts. It was not befitting a disciple, who had lived with Christ more than three years, during which he had witnessed miracles and heard teachings, to adopt such a stance, demanding physical proof of Christ's resurrection. For this reason, Christ blessed all those whose belief is unimpeded by their reasoning.

Verses 30 & 31:

In these verses, St. John clarifies the primary objective of his gospel: he did not intend to list all Christ's miracles and wonders, hence, "**....which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.**" (John 21:25) St. John's intention was/is "**...that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.**" Christ is the Word, hypostasis, the eternal Son of God, consubstantial with the Father. This is as though St. John concluded his gospel by reminding us of what he had said about Christ in the first chapter, namely, "**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**" (John 1:1) St. John gives the readership the purpose and

essence of his gospel, namely, there is neither life nor eternity without Christ. Only those who accepted Him have become children of God.

+ Dear God, do grant us this living faith, through which the world may be vanquished, as St. John said in his first epistle: **"Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"** (1 John 5:5)



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Chapter 21

***Christ's second apparition to His disciples - Christ's final
commandment to Peter to shepherd the flock***

1. The Sea of Tiberias - verses 1 - 14:

"After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and in this way He showed Himself: Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We are going with you also." They went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing. But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Then Jesus said to them, "Children, have you any food?" They answered Him, "No." And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea. But the other disciples came in the little boat (for they were not far from land, but about two hundred cubits), dragging the net with fish. Then, as soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have just caught." Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not broken. Jesus said to them, "Come and eat breakfast." Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, "Who are You?"--knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish. This is now the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead." (John 21:1 - 14)

Verses 1 & 2:

The Sea of Tiberias is also called the Sea of Galilee. The city of Tiberias was founded by Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee under the Romans, and named after the ruling emperor Tiberius. There were seven disciples

among whom were John and his brother James; two of those present were not among the apostles.

"After these things Jesus showed Himself again...." - This clause indicates that our Lord showed Himself multiple times after His resurrection - again, proving Christ's Divinity, as will be evident later.

Verse 3:

Some feel that what Peter did constituted a regression towards the world. Others feel that what he did was inconsequential, since Christianity does not prohibit work - in fact, St. Paul praises work (see Acts 29:34 and 2 Thessalonians 3:8). The most moderate viewpoint is expressed by St. Gregory the Great: *"Peter returned to fishing, but Matthew did not return to tax collection since, it is not befitting to practise some types of work within the fold of Christianity."*

Peter may also be blamed for resuming his initial trade, without accompanying it by any evangelical work.

Verses 4 & 5:

The Lord appeared after their having failed to catch any fish. **"Then Jesus said to them, "Children, have you any food?"** - Naturally, by **"food"** Jesus meant "fish." He knew that their answer would be negative, but His question was merely a prelude to the miracle which followed.

Verse 6:

Our Lord offers advice to the weary fishermen (servants) who had toiled all night - this brings to mind the advice that Christ had offered Peter on an earlier occasion (see Luke 5:4).

+ *We can say that this miracle is a lesson applicable to what we - especially servants - encounter daily. Often, we do not resort to God - relying on our hearts, intellect and experience. However, true success can only be achieved through reliance on God and His word. Any amount of labour is worthless if separated from God, Who works through His Church. Similarly, any work unblessed by Christ is worthless. This miracle is tantamount to a lesson that Christ gave to His disciples and which applies to us at all times. Peter, a follower of Christ, denied Christ when he relied on himself - despite his love for the Lord. On the other hand, when the Holy Spirit worked through him on Pentecost, three thousand were converted by his sermon (see Acts 2:41) - surely that was a significant catch of fish!!*

Verse 7:

John, being the most alert and having a loving heart, realized quickly what was happening, and proclaimed firmly and joyfully ***"It is the Lord!"***

"Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea."

Peter's apparently unusual reaction (putting on his clothes before plunging into the sea) could be explained thus:

1. It is consistent with God's reverence, before Whom angels cover their feet and faces.
2. Peter continued to be conscious of his sinful and shameful denial of Christ - thus, he covered his body and bare, bitterly weeping, soul, which had hitherto not heard the Lord's forgiveness.

Verses 8 & 9:

The boat was about 88 metres from shore (one cubit is about 44 centimetres). Meditating spiritually, one can speculate that the boat represented the Church, while the disciples represented the Church's servants and clergy. Resorting to the Church's safety saves souls from the world's wiles.

+ *All who have toiled in bringing souls to God will experience the omnipotent Christ's help in providing sustenance and a heavenly share. This is as though Christ has set aside a special recompense for all who laboured towards bringing souls to Him.*

"Bring some of the fish which you have just caught." Here, there are two points worth underlining:

1. What the disciples had caught was essentially a Divine miracle; however, in all humility, God attributes His work to His children.
2. God desires that they offer what they had caught in their net, in addition to what He had prepared for them. Thus, they share His table and their joy is multiplied.

+ *We learn an important lesson from the above: although God is the One Who does the work, it is incumbent on man to do as much as possible - thus, man's finite, limited, resources, meld with God's infinite power.*

Verses 11 - 14:

We note that the net was ***"full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three."*** That was a very large number for a single catch - beyond one's imagination! This is an indication that, despite the world's gloom and multiple spiritual wars, Christ's Church, through His infinite power,

continues to be capable of attracting many souls; this is because the Church derives its power from heaven, regardless of the intensity of the world's gloom.

"Come and eat breakfast." God is the source of all sustenance - examples include sustaining an entire nation in the wilderness, and the miracles of feeding multitudes....He fully sustains all who follow Him, both spiritually and materially.

"....none of the disciples dared ask Him..." - This clause accentuates being awe-stricken by a Person, as well as by a situation. St. John points out that the disciples' lack of questioning was due to their full knowledge and conviction that it was indeed our Lord Christ. Questioning was totally unwarranted. They were awe-stricken to the extent that they hesitated when the Lord invited them to eat. Christ Himself - in all humility - offered the bread and fish. Behold, the Master, Lord, serving and being hospitable to His disciples.

St. John's statement **"this is now the third time..."** does not imply that it was the last time - rather, it is in the context of the sequence of events.

2. Christ's discussion with Peter - verses 15 - 19:

"So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Feed My lambs." He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep. Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish." This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me.""

(John 21:15 - 19)

Verse 15:

After breakfast, Christ addressed Peter, calling him by his biological name, rather than by the apostolic name Christ had given him since, by denying Christ, Peter had descended to the level of a "regular" person.

Hence, **"...do you love Me more than these?"** Peter responded by declaring in the same proud fashion he had used earlier, distinguishing himself from the rest of the apostles (see Matthew 26:33 and Mark 14:29), **"Yes, Lord; You know that I love You."** Christ commented by assigning Peter the task of **"Feed My lambs."** This means that proof of sincere love is shepherding the Church's souls; thus, a servant faithful to his Master demonstrates his love by caring selflessly and tirelessly for His children. Conversely, love expressed through empty rhetoric or flattery fails before trials - as was the case initially with Peter.

Verses 16 & 17:

Our Lord repeated His question two more times - that was to counteract Peter's three denials. After each of Peter's responses, our Lord consistently tells him that the real, acceptable, apology/repentance for his denials lies in shepherding the Lord's flock. After the third time, St. John accentuates Peter's grief at Christ's repeated questioning. Attempting to negate any accusation pointing to his lack of love for the Lord, he said, **"You know that I love You."** Peter meant that Christ did not need to ask that question - He knows the innermost feelings of all hearts, and He even knew that Peter's denials were purely a product of his human weakness.

Verses 18 & 19:

What Christ told Peter directly, applies to us indirectly, from a spiritual perspective. Throughout our spiritual adolescence, rife with inexperience in our faith, we rely on our human prowess in service and in daily tasks. However, as we grow in our spiritual experience, we become increasingly humble and submissive to the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the human self gradually fades and is replaced by complete submission to the Divine will. On the other hand, the direct meaning for Peter which St. John clarified in Verse 18, is that *"Dear Peter, in the current early stages of your faith, you are being impulsive, and you promise what you are unable to fulfill. But, as you grow, you will be able to brush aside death, which had scared you earlier, through the power of the Holy Spirit indwelling you. You will accept to be crucified upside down, and the latter part of your life, culminating in your martyrdom, will constitute the greatest glorification you can offer to Christ's holy name."*

+ *Dear God, we all are in dire need of the work of Your Spirit in our lives. We need to rid ourselves of our self-esteem and stretch forth our arms seeking Your guidance according to Your righteous will. Our reasoning is significantly deficient.*

3. ...between Peter and John - verses 20 - 25:

"Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?" Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, "But Lord, what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me." Then this saying went out among the brethren that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?" This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen." (John 21:20 - 25)

Verses 20 - 22:

Christ's final words to Peter were, **"You follow Me."** Having been pacified by his return to his apostolic stature, and having been forgiven for his denials, Peter turned to John, who was also following Christ. Peter then asked Christ about John's future, which was a totally inappropriate question. Peter had no right to ask about anybody's future - which is solely within God's purview. For this reason, Christ responded quite forcefully: **"...what is that to you?"** This means "This is none of your business! Just focus on the task I assigned to you, which is to follow Me without worrying about anybody else - even if I intended to keep him alive till My second coming."

+ Christ's response to Peter applies to all of us. Too often we slide into explanations or reasonings which are not our concern - an example being salvation of others; Christ's response to us will be, "You follow Me - and do not worry about others!" Let us be concerned solely with our salvation....

Verse 23:

St. John expounds Christ's last statement which had perplexed the disciples.

Verses 24 & 25:

At this point, St. John concludes his gospel by emphasizing two points:

1. We should believe his testimony, since he was an eye witness, and he wrote the words of this gospel himself without copying from anybody else.

2. What he wrote in his gospel, and his testimonies, do not represent an exhaustive account; he only recorded a subset to induce belief on Jesus Christ - there were many other miracles and aphorisms recorded by the other gospels. The subset he chose accentuates the magnificence of what the Lord had done. It is impossible to record everything eloquently, and, ***"even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written."***

Glory be to our God now and forver. Amen.

