

MATTHEW 7 NOTES

With the accuracy of an ex-tax collector and the enthusiasm of an eye-witness, Matthew carefully records the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount in Chapter 7. This forgiven apostle exquisitely aware of the mercy of Jesus had learned what Pope John Paul II would pen centuries later: "What really matters in life is that we are loved by Christ and that we love Him in return. In comparison to the love of Jesus, everything else is secondary. And, without the love of Jesus, everything is useless."

Within this chapter is found practical wisdom and challenges as we learn how to love free of criticism, discern well the actions and intentions of others, build a firm foundation on Christ alone, and make the intentional choice to enter through a gate that although narrow opens unto eternal bliss.... All in just 27 verses! No wonder the people sat stunned, amazed at both His authority and ability to powerfully communicate God's truth.

How will we listen and choose today?

Matthew 7:1-5: Judging Others

While shopping for groceries one day, I overheard someone sarcastically say to their companion: "So when did God die and put you in charge?"

How often do you find yourself making rash judgments on others' behavior, feelings, or motives? How is this type of judgment different from being a "fruit inspector"? When is it vital to evaluate another's behavior to determine whether to trust the individual in question? _____

"Jesus' teaching on judgment is two-sided:

(1) He condemns judging other's faults (7:1-2; Lk 6:37). We are incapable of judging with fairness since God alone knows the heart (Prov 21:2; Lk 16:15).

(2) However, Jesus commands us to exercise critical discernment (7:6, 15-19; 1 Thess 5:21). Examination is necessary to avoid profaning what is holy (7:6) and embracing what is false (7:15)."¹

Matthew 7:5: It requires great skill to be an eye surgeon, and no less skill is required to remove a splinter from another's eye. What must first happen before you even contemplate admonition or fraternal correction of another? _____

"Try to acquire those virtues which you think your brothers lack, and you will no longer see their defects, because you will not have them yourselves"-St Augustine.²

Summary: Difference between judging and walking in prudence³

1. Luke 6:27- Judge not, condemn not, but forgive

¹ Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: *The Gospel of Matthew*, with Commentary, Notes, & Study Questions by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch. (c) 2000 by Ignatius Press, San Francisco, pp 29.

² St Augustine, from *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 30, 2, 7 found in *The Navarre Bible: St Matthew*, with Text and Commentaries. (c) 1998 by Four Courts Press, Dublin, Ireland, pp 80-81.

³ Cavins, Jeff and Sarah Christmyer. *Matthew: The King and His Kingdom: Workbook*. (c) 2019 by Ascension, West Chester, PA, pp 51.

2. Tend to one's failures first
3. Offer correction with humility
4. Exercise critical discernment (1 Thessalonians 5:21)
5. Try to acquire the virtues you think your brother lacks (St Augustine)

Matthew 7:6- Piety

At a funeral a friend of the deceased leaned over and angrily asked me: "Why can't I receive Communion? I'm a Christian too." Why does the Church jealously guard the Eucharist from those who do not yet understand or appreciate the Real Presence of Jesus? _____

Cultural note: Jews often referred to Gentiles as dogs or swine. Jesus turns these derogatory terms around to inadvertently refer to anyone who rejects the Gospel.

When does it seem more appropriate to keep one's faith 'under wraps,' and when is it appropriate to evangelize zealously? Why is it important to first lay down a foundation for faith before diving into its mysteries? _____

Matthew 7:7-11: God the Good Giver

Jesus wants you to expect good gifts from God the good, good Father. What is your image of God? Does it 'align' with what Jesus reveals in His Word? What contributes to our false images of God? _____

What do you learn is one of God's greatest gifts to you, when you compare this passage to Luke 11: 9-13? _____

Review CCC 2609. How boldly and confidently do you pray? _____
Could a lack of confidence and boldness indicate one does not really view God as a good Father, who of course would be interested in every detail of our lives? _____

Matthew 7:12: The Golden Rule

Interestingly enough, Jesus was not the first to state the Golden Rule. Hillel, a well-known rabbi, stated it in the negative—"Do not do to others what you would not want them to do to you." Jesus gives it a different emphasis; He states it so as to encourage His followers to do good, rather than simply refrain from evil.

How is the Golden Rule further developed in John 13:34? _____

See also CCC 1696; Tobit 4:15; Sirach 31:15.

Matthew 7:13-14: The Narrow Gate

Compare to Luke 13:22-30, where Luke speaks of being "strong enough" to enter the narrow gate. Both Gospel writers imply that it takes great effort to "enter the narrow gate."

How do you find it particularly difficult? How might you become “stronger” so as to make your way to and through this gateway? _____

“The Christian way involves carrying the cross. As St John of the Cross said: ‘If a man resolve to submit himself to carrying this cross--- that is to say, if he resolve to desire in truth to meet trials and to bear them in all things for God’s sake, he will find in them all great relief and sweetness wherewith he may travel upon this road, detached from all things and desiring nothing. Yet, if he desire to possess anything—whether it comes from God or from any other source—with any feeling of attachment, he has not stripped and denied himself in all things; and thus he will be unable to walk along this narrow path or to climb upward by it.’”⁴

Jesus pulls no punches in saying “those who find (the narrow gate that leads to life) are few.” Does this make you uneasy? How would you reply to someone who may presumptively state: “God is a god of love who would never condemn everyone to hell. We can all make our way to Him by different paths.” _____

Review CCC 1696 and the importance of moral decisions.

Matthew 7:15-20: Discernment

How does St Paul help us evaluate the fruit of others in Galatians 5:16-25? _____

Matthew 7:21-23: Self-Deception

How easy is it for us to think we are ‘better’ than we are? _____

What comparative value does Jesus give to our words versus our actions? _____

Can you quote a lot of Jesus’ words but put few into practice? Note that Jesus gives as examples of deeds performed: 1-propheying in His name, 2-driving out demons in His name, 3-carrying out mighty deeds in His name. Have you done any three of these? _____

Note the importance of doing these deeds IN HIS NAME. It is only in the name of Jesus and by the power of His cross and His blood that we can pray and see any miracle occur.

These are sobering words indeed! Why did these so-called disciples fail to enter the Kingdom after all? _____

Review 1 Corinthians 4:20 and James 1:22.

Are you ‘in’ or ‘out’? How confident can you be of your eternal salvation? What does your confidence rest upon? _____

We often pray quite confidently and broadly in words such as: “Oh, Lord, I will do your will. Just show it to me.” Can you see Jesus look at you quite gently but challenge: “Child, if I told you, would you really do it?” What might Jesus be asking you to do now that you have said

⁴ St John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book 2, Chapter 7,7. In *The Navarre Bible: St Matthew*. pp 83.

you would do but haven't yet? Can you start this week? _____

Highly recommend: *"Discerning the Will of God"* by Father Gallagher. Superb for you or for children/grandchildren discerning life choices and vocation.

Matthew 7:24-27: Building on a Solid Foundation

The Kingdom of heaven "defies our expectations. It requires us to undergo a conversion in the way we see the world.... The main point of this parable is: Jesus' teachings are a 'firm rock' on which to build the 'house' of one's life. However, there's a lot more to this parable. 'The wise man who build his house upon a rock' is a loaded phrase for an ancient Jewish audience. It was none other than Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, who built the House of God, the Holy Temple, on a huge rock formation at the top of Mt Moriah (2 Chronicles 3:1), now called the Temple Mount. The Muslim shrine called the 'Dome of the Rock' now stands near the site, where Jewish tradition holds that Abraham attempted to sacrifice Isaac so long ago.

So the 'wise man who built his house on the rock' is a quiet reference to Solomon, the greatest of Israel's kings. The message of the parable, then, is if you follow Jesus' teachings, you will be like Solomon the great king. This promise of a kind of royalty for the faithful disciple of Jesus concludes this sermon that began with the blessing of the 'kingdom of heaven.' So **from beginning to end, the Sermon on the Mount is a 'kingdom sermon,' a description of how to live and behave as part of the kingdom of heaven.**"⁵

How does St Paul encourage us to build a strong foundation in 1 Timothy 6:17-19? _____

Looking ahead: Jesus will build His house (the Church) on the solid rock of Peter (Matthew 16), and that kingdom shall last forever (Daniel 7).

Matthew 7:28-29: The Incomparable Authority of Christ

Jesus is the Judge of the living and the dead; He is God—and He spoke like it! The people heard him loud and clear and were shocked and amazed, astonished and speechless. Have you ever reacted to Jesus' words in such a way? _____

As we move into the next two chapters where Jesus performs mighty miracles, we shall see this divine authority over disease, death, and evil spirits on full display for all to see. He not only speaks with authority, He acts with decisive, divine authority that far outshines that of Moses or any prophet. This will be an important point to underscore as the early Church moves away from the synagogue and establishes the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church against which the powers of evil will not prevail.

⁵ Bergsma, John. *New Testament Basics for Catholics*. (c) 2015 by Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, IN, pp 38-39.

Final thought:

Jesus as King acts as Prophet, Priest, and King and calls the citizens of His Kingdom to act likewise. Jesus “declares his desire to spread eternal life among human beings, saying **‘I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!’** (Luke 12:49-53). What is that fire? His forerunner John gave us a clue: ‘I am baptizing you with water, for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is mightier than I... and will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.’ Jesus came in order to torch the world with the heat and light of the divine Spirit, which is none other than the love shared by the Father and the Son, the very inner life of God.

Jesus is a prophet because he teaches; he is a king because he leads and shepherds; but he is a priest because he is the spreader of the sacred fire. Every one of the baptized shares in the priesthood of Christ and is therefore obligated to be a conduit of holiness, a bearer of the divine life, a spreader of the fire that sets the world ablaze.”⁶

How have you seen Jesus operate as a prophet, priest, and king thus far in the Book of Matthew? _____

How can you operate as a prophet, priest, and king this week? Ponder and (following prayer discussion with Jesus) write out a plan:

- a. Prophet: _____
- b. Priest: _____
- c. King: _____

(C) Glenda Canfield, October 2022.

⁶ Barron, Bishop Robert. “*Daily Gospel Reflections*”: October 20, 2022- Luke 12:49-53. Produced online by *Word on Fire* at wof@wordonfire.org.