



CATHOLIC SCRIPTURE STUDY

Catholic Scripture Study Notes written by Sister Marie Therese, are provided for the personal use of students during their active participation and must not be loaned or given to others.

SERIES V

WISDOM LITERATURE AND NEW TESTAMENT LETTERS

Lesson 23 Commentary 2 Timothy

Lesson 24 Questions Titus and Philemon

STIR INTO FLAME THE GIFT OF GOD

2 Timothy

INTRODUCTION

This letter from prison may have been written in a second captivity, ending in Paul's death and shortly before the traditional date of his martyrdom, 67 A.D.

However, scholars have difficulties with the thought and language of this letter, with its little emphasis on the great mysteries of Christianity, so prevalent in Paul's teaching, such as the Cross, the Body of Christ, the Sonship of Christ. The argument is quite different; Paul simply condemns false teaching, with no arguing against it. The fiery enthusiasm and vivid writing is missing; also there is considerable difference of vocabulary, Paul's familiar words common to the other letters are absent, some not only not used before by Paul, but not used elsewhere in the New Testament! This may be explained by Paul's age and his situation. Some believe that a follower of Paul, knowing that he would inherit Paul's mission, began with advice and instruction. This was a literary convention of that time; others believe that the pastoral epistles contain genuine fragments from Paul's other letters.

Yet we also see that by this time the church had arrived at this stage of evolution. The titles "episkopos and presbyteros" are still nearly the same. The office of bishop still has no trace of the authority developed by the time of Ignatius of Antioch, the third bishop there, who had heard the preaching of the Apostle John, the longest-lived of the Apostles. Yet Timothy and Titus, both delegates of St. Paul, were responsible for a number of churches. When the apostles had all disappeared, the gap began to be filled by the head of the group of presbyteros in an area, who came to be called "bishop"; around the years 80-90 A.D. Some of the doctrinal errors later to be part of the Gnostic heresy were already dangerous new ideas. Some of these ideas mentioned in these pastoral letters are "myths and endless genealogies" (1 Timothy 1:4); "Jewish myths (Titus 1:14), "disputes about the Law" (Titus 3:9), and their ascetic practices as well.

I. THE GREETING (2 Timothy 1-5)

This is one of the most interesting of Paul's openings to his letters; one apostle to another of his co-workers, a beloved "son" in Christ, "dear

son of mine” (2 Timothy 1:1). Paul can quite easily say, “I thank God with a pure conscience.” How many of us, Paul’s followers today, can say that? “Night and day” Paul remembered Timothy in his prayers and their parting at Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3) and longed to see him again. Also in this beautiful greeting, Paul thinks of and mentions his earlier converts, “your grandmother Lois, and your mother Eunice” (2 Timothy 1:5).

II. GIFTS GIVEN TO TIMOTHY (2 Timothy 1-11)

What the Church has for centuries called the Sacraments are given an historical basis in Paul’s remark here to a younger man baptized and made a member of the leaders of the Church.

“Fan into a flame the gift of God that you received through the laying on of my hands” (2 Timothy 1:6). The word flame immediately calls to mind the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the infant church after Christ’s Ascension. And the necessity to fan this flame to a new life and power is certainly one which each generation of Christians and their leaders have before them as the Church goes on. We wonder: “How do we ‘fan this flame?’”

A. Personal prayer stirs up our hearts, our minds; it is a time when we contact God and He contacts us; it is truly personal because it is between persons, divine and human, made like the divine in our gifts, as in Timothy’s.

B. Another important fan to stir the flame of our faith and love is reading the Scriptures certainly. Due to historical situations of differing beliefs and piety among Christians, Protestant and Catholic, we Catholics ended up with the fullness of faith and all its historical background in the “Mother Church,” so that we could not accept the insistence of others that the “Bible is the rule of faith,” which could not be true, or those early Christians we are studying would not have been true ones, for the Bible was

only collected, as we have it, and vouched for by the Church, in the late 300’s after Christ. But this situation has many other facts we must know to explain this accusation from other Christians. However, all through history, the saints that we note among each generation, especially the writing ones, show a profound knowledge and flame well-fanned by the Scriptures, and we must also imitate and develop this.

C. A third way to fan our flame of faith and gifts from God is probably the most important of all: Practice it! Simply to follow the readings at daily Mass will bring a tremendous spurt to our spiritual lives. Readings from Scripture around a common theme, an explanation of them in a good homily, and finally, the great gift of the Eucharist consecration, and reception of the Body and Blood of Christ, is to greatly bring our faith flaming anew.

Paul’s mention of “through the laying on of hands” is another gift of God such as the powers of the priesthood or the coming of the Spirit in a greater way as needed in a growing adult. We call these “sacraments” (meaning “made holy”). The “laying on of hands” sacraments are Confirmation, Holy Orders, and, perhaps, the Last Anointing of the Sick.

D. Witnessing. According to Paul (or his teaching through a disciple), we are given by the Spirit, “a Spirit of power and love and self-control,” and so we “are never to be ashamed of witnessing to the Lord.” That is a real problem for most of us—to learn when and how to do that; this is why we do not usually; we do not have the practice. Listen to others, even listen to other devoted Christians who are used to sharing how their Christian faith helps them. We today are particularly in a situation like the apostles and evangelists—they spoke to people without knowledge or care about God, as many Americans are today.

Let us remember and repeat to ourselves at times that “our Lord Christ Jesus, our Savior, has

brought to light immortality and life through the gospel,” and that we, too, “have been made heralds..., and teacher” (2 Timothy 1:11). We know the “sound teaching” from Paul; let us also “look after that precious thing given in trust” (2 Timothy 1:12).

Another wonderful lesson is next written to Timothy (and to us). “Pass on to reliable people what you have heard from me through many witnesses so that they in turn will be able to teach others” (2 Timothy 2:2). This is a clear definition of what the Church calls “Sacred Tradition.” St. Paul wrote to his converts at Thessalonica: “Stand firm, and keep the traditions that we taught you, whether by word of mouth or by letter” (2 Timothy 2:15). The Vatican II document on Revelation gives a wonderful definition of Sacred Tradition:

“What was handed on by the apostles includes everything which contributes to the holiness of life, and the increase in faith of the People of God, and so the church, in her teaching, life, and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes. This tradition which comes from the Apostles develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. For there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down” (Revelation, Chapter 1:8).

III. DANGERS TO CHRISTIANS

A. From False Teachers (2 Timothy 2:14-26). We must not wrangle about words to the destruction of those who are listening, or engage in godless discussions on philosophy. This can lead away from true religion and upset faith in others. These undisciplined speculations often cause quarrels, which is beneath a servant of the Lord, who must be kind to everyone, a good teacher and patient; gentle when he corrects those who oppose him, hoping that God will give them a change of mind, and grace to recognize truth, thus escaping the trap of the devil to whom they are captives.

B. From Dangers of the Last Days (2 Timothy 3:1-17). In these difficult days, there will be people filled with traits contrary to Christian virtues. Paul lists eighteen such qualities, as he did in Romans 1:29ff. It is a terrible set of human faults of character, and doubtless we can find ourselves with some of them. One real possibility for us Catholics is to “keep up the outward appearance of religion” (Mass on Sundays?) “but we have rejected the inner power of it” (2 Timothy 3:5). That inner power is a flame in our hearts that lights and warms our day and moves us to right actions and words; it is fed by pondering the words of scripture, by the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, by personal prayer, and by associations with those who do (John 16:33).

The example of Paul’s life and virtue that Timothy has observed and followed is another description of aims for us. Can our children say this of us? Will they “remember who their teachers were, and how, ever since they were children, they have known the Holy Scriptures” (2 Timothy 3:14)?

Paul follows here with one of the best definitions of the Scriptures and what they mean for us: “All Scripture is inspired by God and useful for refuting error, for guiding people’s lives and teaching them to be upright. This is how someone who is dedicated to God becomes fully equipped and ready for any good work” (2 Peter 1:19-21). We, in this Bible Study, are surely doing a good work, one which God is very pleased with. Do we also work at putting it to practice in our lives? Paul continues: “This is how”... we become “fully equipped and ready for any good work.” When this Bible Study is concluded for you, its five years of daily and weekly attention to reading and growing in the Word of God, will you then continue such a powerful source for the most important activity, the most valuable gift we can give to ourselves or share with others; “pondering in our hearts” (Luke 2:19) the words from God, as Mary did?

The letters to Timothy conclude with a solemn charge from Paul: "Proclaim the message, insist on it" (2 Timothy 4:1). Again, we hear a description greatly like our world: "The time is sure to come when people will not accept sound teaching, but their ears will itch for anything new... and then they will shut their ears to the truth and turn to myths. But you must keep steady, fulfill what is asked of you" (2 Timothy 4:2-5). The next words are a very moving description of his life, one which each of us want to be able to say (2 Timothy 6-8).

In his farewell, Paul, as usual, greeted his friends: Priscilla and Aquila, a couple he early brought to Christ; also Claudia, another feminine

convert, and in verse 11, he gives an important mention of two other writers of the New Testament: Luke and Mark. Indeed, this St. Paul, the apostle who filled the absence of a lost apostle, became an apostle almost equal to Peter. The two of them are considered to be the greatest Apostles and are celebrated by the Church in one feast as well as individual feasts.

Paul's influence on the New Testament is tremendous; besides his 14 letters, there are the gospels of his followers, Luke and Mark. Christ personally chose him and dedicated him to be the Apostle who would bring the Good News of Jesus to the world outside the land made holy to God.

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QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 24
Titus and Philemon

Day 1 Read the Notes, underlining words or sentences which impressed you.

a. Read an underlined word or words and tell the group why it struck you.

b. If you learned anything new in the notes, tell it to the group.

Day 2 Read Titus 1:1-4.

a. For us today, who are the “servants of God” who “manifest his Word” to the Church by the command of God our Savior?

b. How does the unmarried Paul claim Titus as “my own true child”?

c. Today in the Church, who might be Paul for you, and Titus for you?

Day 3 Read Titus 1:5-16.

a. In Titus 1:5, who in our day has the office that Titus then had? Who are our presbyters?

b. Quote words in Titus 1:16 that might describe us sometimes.

Day 4 Read Titus 2:1-10.

a. From the qualifications for older women, explain what you understand by “submissive to their husbands.”

- b. In what age group in this passage is Titus? Give the text that tells us this.
- c. How can verse 7 apply to parents?
- d. Since slavery was legal in that time, and Christians had no control over it, what goodness could they practice that will bring praise to the “doctrine of God our Savior”?

Day 5 Read Titus 2:11-15.

- a. Choose some words or phrases that help or inspire you and share them.
- b. In verse 12, what words describe the strong temptation for Christians in American life and culture? How?
- c. Read Titus 3:1-3. Check your own lifestyle in regard to verse 2 and verse 3. Give an example of someone you know who is an example of a quality in verse 2.
- d. Which phrase in verse 3 are Christians in America especially prone to? What do you think “worldly desires” means?

Day 6 Read the Introduction to Philemon verses 1-7.

- a. What do we learn of the early church in these verses?
- b. Read Philemon 8-25. What impresses you most in Paul’s appeal to Philemon? Quote it.