

Bible Study Lesson Summary, May 27, 2018

This Sunday, May 27th, your readings should be Day 211: Chapters 4-6 of the Tobit, Proverbs 29, 1-13, and Chapter 3 of St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians.

ST. PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

Eph. 6: Vs. 1&3: "Children, obey your parents... That it may go well with you and that you may have a long life on earth." That was Dad's line to us after it was read on Holy Family Sunday. We would respond with vs. 4: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up with the training and instruction of the Lord." Paul's reasoning on why slaves should be obedient to their masters is good, "as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. Notice that it does not depend on how the master acts. But then he does give instructions to the masters also. Vs. 11, "Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil." Vs. 14-17: "with your loins girded in truth, clothed with righteousness as a breastplate, and your feet shod in readiness for the gospel peace... Hold faith as a shield... and take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." Then pray.

ST. PAUL'S LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS

Col. 1: He starts his address identifying himself as an apostle. The in vs. 7 he says that he is a "beloved fellow slave, who is a trustworthy minister of Christ" just like Epaphras. Vs. 15-20 aren't as cool in English. They were probably an early hymn. Hymn or not they are powerful. In other words, Christ is the answer. In vs. 24 he writes what will be a line that will drive Protestants crazy. "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church..." We can make such an impact on the lives of us if we offer our sufferings in this way. The old nuns knew this when they said, "Offer it up."

Col. 2: Padre Pio talked many times of the sacrifices and struggles he would need to offer up for a particular miracle to happen. Paul is not saying that we have to pay for grace with our sufferings but that it shows God we understand that there was a price that His Son paid. Vs. 4-15 let us know that Christ is the one who brings salvation and not fancy talkers. There must have been teachers who have seen visions of angels or maybe just are attributing angelic power to natural things like the moon and sun, etc. There must have also been those who thought that self-abasement would help them receive forgiveness for their sins. It can help with self-discipline, which might help fight sin but does not forgive sins. (vs. 23)

Cor. 3: Vs. 1-4 is more than thinking good thoughts. Focusing on what is above, or spiritual, is a way to stop focusing on the things of this sinful world. Vs. 18-23 is another version of what we just read in Ephesians. We always loved it on Holy Family Sunday, when Dad quoted vs. 18 to Mom; "Wives, be subordinate to your husbands, as is proper in the Lord." We laughed because it was so silly. Dad would die for Mom and always got to make the final declaration. "Mom said, 'this is what you have to do.'"

Cor. 4: Then he finishes those thoughts just like he did in Ephesians with a reminder to persevere in prayer. (vs. 2-6) Then he ends the letter with commendations on trustworthy people.

ST. PAUL'S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

Phil. 1: This letter includes Timothy as a slave of Christ Jesus. If you have been to a priestly ordination this phrase will sound familiar to you: vs. 6, “that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus.” A version of that is used in an ordination. Vs. 13 & 14 mentions his imprisonment. This time it seems to be real and not just like his concept of slavery. But in vs. 19 he rejoices because it will result in deliverance for him. Vs. 20-26 is his idea of deliverance. That he not be put to shame. That Christ will be magnified in his body, living or dead. “For to me life is Christ, and death is gain. If I go on living in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. And I do not know which I shall choose.” He ends the chapter exhorting them to think the same way.

Phil 2: Remember in the start of chapter 1 he writes this to the holy ones in Christ Jesus who are... with the overseers and ministers. Here he seems to be talking to them as elders or priests, or maybe deacons. In other words this is to the bigshots. But vs. 5-11 are the basis of my book, that Jesus “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave.” Whether bigshots or laity, everyone must, in vs. 12, “work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” He ends the chapter with notes on the plans and problems of Timothy and Epaphroditus.

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

Prv. 25: 15-28: If you think Jesus made up “Love your enemies,” you missed vs. 21: “If your enemy be hungry, give him food to eat, if he be thirsty, give him to drink; for live coals you will heap on his head, and the Lord will vindicate you.” Vs. 24 is another repeat from Prov.21:9.

Prv. 26: My favorite in this chapter is vs. 17; “Like the man who seizes a passing dog by the ears is he who meddles in a quarrel not is own.” He is going to get bit.

Prv. 27: Vs. 5 sounds like he asked a few ladies to dance in his life: “Better is an open rebuke than a love that remains hidden.”

Prv. 28: Vs. 13 gives a foreshadowing of the Sacrament of Confession. “He who conceals his sins prospers not, but he who confesses and forsakes them obtains mercy.”

THE BOOK OF EZRA

Ez. 9: Ezra has to deal with the problem of mixed marriages. This is to keep the belief system strong. The Catholic Church still has a sense of this when couples come to be married. If one of them is not Catholic, they aren't rejected, but they do have to be ready to make a commitment to raise their kids Catholic. If they don't the Church will not do the wedding. Ezra's frustration comes out in vs. 8 & 10. "And now, but a short time ago, mercy came to us from the Lord, our God, who left us a remnant and gave us a stake in his holy place..." In other words they got to go and rebuild Judah and the temple after exile for 70 years. Then, "But now, O our God, what can we say after all this? For we have abandoned your commandments, which you gave through your servants the prophets..."

Ex. 10: After discussion the result was that the Levites had to change. "All these had taken foreign wives; but they sent them away, both the women and their children." Almost like celibacy.

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET NEHEMIAH

Neh. 1: Only a layman, Nehemiah's first concern is the city of Jerusalem, which is in shambles. He knows the people have no one to blame but themselves for they were not being faithful to God. This should sound just like the Book of Ezra because it is the same time period and they worked together. But Nehemiah wants to help with the rebuilding.

Neh. 2: He finds favor with King Artaxerxes of Persia, for whom he is the cupbearer. He gets permission and assistance from the king to work on rebuilding the walls of the city. Of course there is opposition.

Neh. 3: In vs. 33, Sanballat doesn't want walled Jerusalem being rebuilt. It might make them a world power again. Think North Korea.

Neh. 4: Because of the opposition the work is slowed down because half of the workers have to stand guard.

Neh. 5: Nehemiah stands up to the abusive Jewish nobles and magistrates, whom he accuses of usury (vs. 10). This is the kind of thing that Jesus gets angry about also. So see Nehemiah as a Christ figure.

Neh. 6: The Christ figure, Nehemiah, finds himself being plotted against again.

Neh. 7: The walls are rebuilt so they immediately take a census. Again there are some who cannot be traced so they are degraded from the priesthood (vs. 64).

Neh. 8: Ezra reads from the book of the law and the people listen attentively (vs. 3). Vs. 5, "as he opened it, all the people rose." This is just like the reading of the gospel at Mass. Vs. 8, "Ezra read plainly from the book of the law of God, interpreting it so that all could understand what was read. That would be the homily.

Neh. 9: Vs. 2, “Those of Israelite descent separated themselves from all who were of foreign extraction, then stood forward and confessed their sins and the guilty deeds of their fathers.” This should sound familiar. We still are supposed to confess our sins, and not just keep them between God and ourselves. In doing this the people realize “As soon as they had relief, they would go back to doing evil in your sight.” This was their history.

Neh. 10: The people recommit themselves to Godly ways.

Neh. 11: Jerusalem is reopened and priestly duties are worked out so the priests can help the people to remain good.

Neh. 12: Vs. 44-47 are about the offertory gifts that are brought forward as the people realize how they have been blessed by God.

Neh. 13: Vs. 6, “During all this time I had not been in Jerusalem...I had gone back to the king.” He had to come back and straighten more things out. Levitic service, Sabbath observance, and mixed marriages were his main concerns. To him these seemed to be the minimum that should be expected.

THE BOOK OF TOBIT

The Book of Tobit is an awesome story about how God works in the lives of individuals. Many of the books of the OT are filled with what happens to the nation, or the tribe, etc. It makes is sound like God does not care about individuals. That He sees them as expendable, or insignificant. This is not the case. In the big picture many people might die in a battle. That does not mean that God forgets everyone who died. The reality is that everyone dies. No one gets out of this world without dying. How that life and death for each individual might have many different purposes. Many people in the OT died so God could prove a point about what happens to a nation that does not obey Him. Within that group that died there are people like Tobit who follow God faithfully and God takes care of them by answering some of their prayers with a yes. He does answer all prayers. Sometimes He says “No.” But even when a person has prayers answered, he/she still dies. Only the NT shows us the final plan of God to make everything come out fair, but the OT books like Tobit already help us understand many of the ways that God has to help people and nations.

Tb. 1: The first chapter sets the stage. Tobit and his family have been deported from Israel to Nineveh, capital of Assyria. He misses his homeland. He is trying to do good things for the other deportees, especially burying the ones who get killed. This is dangerous for the king might find out and kill him. In vs. 20 the king does find out and confiscates Tobit property and leaves him only his wife Anna and son Tobiah. In the next verse that king is killed and Tobit brings his family back into Nineveh. By the way, vs. 6 tells us that Tobit is a faithful steward and gives God 10%.

Tb. 2: Tobit buries another fellow countryman and in vs. 8 is mocked by his neighbors. Vs. 9 tells how he ends up blind. This sounds like a punishment from God but it is not. It is actually a part of His plan. In vs. 11 we read about Anna doing her work and Tobit getting angry with her, so he is not perfect but probably feeling sorry for himself.

Tb. 3: Tobit's prayer is great. In vs. 3a he says: "Punish me not for my sins nor for my inadvertent offenses, nor for those of my fathers." He wants to make sure that God gets it right. Since he cannot see all that God sees, he might be thinking that his blindness is a sign that God doesn't always get things right. In vs. 6 he says: "So now, deal with me as you please, and command my life breath to be taken from me...." God does deal with him as He pleases but does not want to kill him. Tobit is feeling bad because many have insulted him. Then we get the story of Sarah. She has also been insulted and wants to die. She has been married seven times but each time an evil spirit kills her husband on her wedding night. She would kill herself but that would be an insult to her father, so she prays to God to slay her or fix the problem. God hears both of their prayers and sends Raphael to heal them.