

Bible Study Lesson Summary, June 3, 2018

This Sunday, June 3rd, your readings should be Day 218: Chapters 12-14 of the Judith, Ecclesiastes 2, and Chapter 2:36-52 of the Gospel of St. Luke.

Next Sunday, June 10th, there is no class, so on June 17 you will be on Day 225.

ST. PAUL'S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

Phil. 3: Vs. 3: “For we are the circumcision, we who worship through the Spirit of God... and do not put our confidence in flesh...” Circumcision was a sign that God gave to the Israelites to help them understand that their flesh was not the answer, a guy’s strength or vitality. Living according to the Spirit and not the flesh is the same thing without the mutilation. Remember, all that gives them is a membership in the family of God and a place in the Holy Land. Christ gives us much more. Vs. 12-21 are his description of how his life is a model of this goal. It is a goal that drives him and makes it so he never looks back at “the good old days.”

Phil. 4: After a few words about some specific people in vs. 4-8 he goes back into the theme of looking to the glorious future and living for the sake of that glory. Then he talks of his lack of need but also of their generosity before ending with an extra good-bye. These last two chapters are really great things to have handy if you are discouraged. He gives great reasons and a wonderful example, with encouragement that should get you out of the funk.

THE LETTER TO PHILEMON

Here is a letter that would have been like many of the time, one parchment. He is dealing with slavery indirectly. As the notes say, since the end times were expected to come soon there was no need for social reform, just life in Christ.

Philemon: Now Paul is a prisoner for Christ, figuratively and probably literally. Paul must have brought Onesimus into the faith for he sees himself as a father to him (vs.10). He is hoping that Philemon will accept Onesimus as more than a slave, a brother (in Christ). We speak all the time of our brothers and sister in Christ. Paul is using that concept to bring harmony to a slave and master.

THE GOSPEL OF ST. LUKE

You have already read the second half of this Gospel when we went through Acts of the Apostles. Remember that these scrolls did not have titles or authors written on them. They would have been one long story, so were written together as an account of salvation history. Theophilus would have known who this was from. Luke was a physician so he is conscious of the sick and suffering. This puts a powerful perspective on the gospel that the Holy Spirit obviously saw as very important.

These first few chapters concerning the Birth Narrative are very important to us as Catholics. Like Matthew and John's account of Jesus' origin they contain information that sets up a stage for us to understand Jesus. They tie things together in beautiful ways.

Lk. 1: He says he was not an eye-witness of it all but wants to give an accurate account. With vs. 5 he starts with the story of John the Baptist. This is a way of credentialing Jesus. The amazing story of John give credence to the life of Jesus for Theophilus, just as the Gospels give credibility to Jesus in our time. This family from the priestly clan is so much like Samson's birth. That is significant because Samson was from the time of the judges who came before the kings. (Judges 13) John comes to announce the king. Zechariah was probably 50 and in his last year of priestly service for they were only supposed to serve from 25-50 year of age. So Elizabeth was probably that age or older. His lack of belief as a priest did not make Gabriel happy.

Then with vs. 26, the story jumps to Mary and Gabriel. Gabriel's greeting is confusing to Mary because people are to honor angels and there has never been a situation which is the other way until now: "Hail, favored one!" (vs. 28) Vs. 34, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" This is not questioning like Zechariah but because of her vow of virginity, she needed to know if she would have to break it. She was married with Joseph but going through the betrothal time in which they lived apart to prove virginity.

With vs. 36 the stories are connected: "And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age..." Mary's response: "I am the handmaid." She follows the Lord will, like she would teach Jesus. With vs. 39 she visits Elizabeth and proclaims the greatness of the Lord. She was there for the birth to help the elderly cousin and then went home. She would have been there to hear about the nosey neighbors and relatives argue about the name of Elizabeth's son. I love small towns. Then Zechariah make his famous prophecy about his son and Jesus.

Lk. 2:1-35: Here we learn about the census and the trip to Bethlehem (house of bread), the manger where animals ate from, the shepherds who witnessed angels. The angels did not come to praise the shepherds, but Jesus the king who was opposite of Caesar Augustus who had himself made the son of god by having his father named a god. You have the proud moment of Mary presenting her son in the temple to the priests who probably all knew her because tradition says she worked there from the time she was five until she was twelve. They fulfilled the law and brought doves, which means they were poor. Simeon points out the Messiah.

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

Prv. 29: Vs. 18: “Without prophecy the people become demoralized: but happy is he who keeps the law.” The purpose of the Transfiguration of Jesus was to keep the apostles Peter, James and John from being demoralized by the Passion. So Jesus had the great prophet, Elijah, and the great lawgiver, Moses, with him to give the fullest effect.

Prv. 30: The “most stupid of men” is compared to God in vs. 1-6. In vs. 4 we are asked questions some of which we can now answer. “Who has gone up to heaven and come down again... What is his name, what is his son’s name, if you know it?” (Jesus)

Prv. 31: Vs. 10-31 outline the ideal wife. Be sure and read this a second time with the idea of the wife being the Church, the Bride of Christ.

THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

Here is a truly depressing book. If I weren’t a believer in Jesus, this could make life totally worthless. It asks questions. It gives answers. It looks at all the different avenues that a person can follow in life and shows them to be vanity, or a waste. The only positive is shown to be following the Lord, but without the resurrection, that would be questionable.

Eccl. 1: Vs. 3, “What profit has man from all the labor which he toils at under the sun?” Vs. 11, “There is no remembrance of the men of old; nor of those to come will there be any remembrance among those who come after them.” Even wisdom is looked down on. Vs. 18: “For in much wisdom there is much sorrow, and he who stores up knowledge stores up grief.”

THE BOOK OF TOBIT

Tb. 4: We have just had two people pray to die, because their life is so bad. God gives them something better. But Tobit presumes that God will answer his prayer to die so he gives his son Tobiah some final words of wisdom and sends him off to get some money that is owed him. In vs. 20 Tobit tells Tobiah how to get the money but says: “You will be a rich man if you fear God, avoid sin, and do what is right before the Lord you God.” He won’t be rich just because he has lots of money.

Tb. 5: Raphael shows up to help Tobiah find his way to Media. Raphael says: “I am an Israelite, one of your kinsmen.” This sounds like a lie but then neither we nor the author knows exactly how angels or demons work. That still has not all been revealed. This statement that is confusing to us does not diminish the goodness of Raphael. For that line is not the point of the story. There are many incorrect things mentioned in the Bible, but the message is true. Vs. 13: ““Raphael answered, “I am Azariah, son of Hananiah the elder, one of your own kinsmen.”” This also sounds dishonest. Someday I hope to meet Archangel Raphael and ask him about this.

In vs. 15, Tobit agrees to pay Raphael 17 cents a day, a drachma, for his work. Vs. 20, Tobit consoles Anna with the line: “For a good angel will go with him, his journey will be successful, and he will return unharmed.” Good guess!

Tb. 6: Raphael gets medicine from a big fish that jumped out of the Tigris River and tried to swallow Tobiah's foot. Raphael takes Tobiah to Raguel and Sarah's house to stay. Tobiah has heard of Sarah and is not pleased when in vs. 16 Raphael reminds Tobiah: "Do you not remember your father's orders? He commanded you to marry a woman from your own family." Raphael explains what Tobiah must do to save himself when he marries Sarah, "for she was set apart for you before the world existed."

Tb. 7: Tobiah and Sarah are married according to the law.

Tb. 8: Tobiah follows Raphael's instructions about adding the fish parts to the incense to drive the demon away. Raphael takes care of that demon in Upper Egypt, devil's territory. Tobiah even prays with Sarah so he survives their wedding night, even though his father-in-law dug a grave just in case. Sarah's prayer is answered and a perfectly good grave goes to waste.

Tb. 9: They get the money owed to Tobit.

Tb. 10: Tobit and Anna are worrisome parents. Tobiah receives Sarah's dowry from her parents and everyone is happy and hoping for grandchildren. What a great family.

Tb. 11: Raphael gets Tobiah back to Tobit safely with Sarah and the money. The medicine works to cure Tobit's blindness and Tobit's prayer is answered better than he planned.

Tb. 12: Tobit is ready to give Raphael half of what they came back with. Raphael tells him to thank God proclaim His goodness to everyone, then he reveals himself in vs. 15, "I am Raphael, one of the seven angels who enter and serve before the Glory of the Lord."

Tb. 13: Tobit prays a prayer of thanksgiving.

Tb. 14: Tobiah has seven sons. Tobit tells them all what he has learned from the prophets about Assyria and Israel. Tobit repeats the words of the prophets that "the temple of God shall also be rebuilt..." Then in vs. 6: "All the nations of the world shall be converted and shall offer God true worship..." Then they all died. Basically all of this was during the 70 year exile. The moral of the story is that even with the big picture going on, God does not forget the faithful individuals.

THE BOOK OF JUDITH

Now we have a story of a woman who saves the day. Her name, Judith, means Jewess. This is certainly part of God's plan to help us understand how he uses everyone and explains why some of the praises of Judith are applied to Mary in the liturgy. The book is not about history, so there are liberties taken concerning some facts, but the message is that God works through women also.

Jdt. 1: Nebuchadnezzar is king of Assyria and is in Nineveh, its capital. He wants a whole bunch of countries around and including Judea to send soldiers to fight with him against the Medes. He doesn't get his way so he falls into a violent rage. It was always hard for the little guys to decide who to fight for because being on the losing side was disastrous. Not picking a side was also risky.

Jdt. 2: He plans to take revenge and sends Holofernes, general in chief of his forces to do the destruction. This is important because we have read of how God led the people of Israel into battle with the idea of destruction. Realize that this was how things worked back then. War is not peaceful.

Jdt. 3: In fear the people try to submit but it does no good for Nebuchadnezzar thinks of himself as god so he is going to keep his word and destroy these people. There is no mercy like with the God of Israel.

Jdt. 4: The people in Jerusalem are terrified. They had just returned from exile (vs.3) and now they feel they will be destroyed. Historically this doesn't make sense because Nebuchadnezzar was the one who put them in exile. Either way in vs. 9-15 they pray and God hears them.

Jdt. 5: Achior, the leader of the Ammonites gives Holofernes a history lesson about the Jews. In vs. 17 he even recognizes: "As long as the Israelites did not sin in the sight of their God, they prospered, for their God, who hates wickedness, was with them." He knows that if the Israelites are sinning, that God will not protect them, so they should check this out. Vs. 21, "But if they are not a guilty nation, then your lordship should keep his distance; otherwise their Lord and God will shield them, and we shall become the laughingstock of the whole world."

Jdt. 6: Holofernes is not impressed with Achior's speech. He still thinks that he is god. (vs. 2)

Jdt. 7: He goes in for the attack and even cuts off the water supply for the Israelites. Vs. 23 on is the people giving up on God because they did not have enough water after 34 days of siege.

Jdt. 8: Judith is a beautiful, God-fearing widow. She is angry that the people have decided to give up if God does not save them in five days. Vs. 16: "God is not man that he should be moved by threats, nor human, that he may be given an ultimatum." In vs. 25-27 she says the people should be grateful that God is putting them to the test.

Jdt. 9: Judith prays. She mentions Dinah who was raped in Gen. 34:2 and how God avenged her. In vs. 11, she recognizes how God's strength works. "Your strength is not in numbers, nor does your power depend upon stalwart men; but you are the God of the lowly...."

Jdt. 10: Judith dresses up and heads out to Holofernes and his army, claiming she is switching sides. Notice in vs. 3 that she is a widow so she is not disgracing her husband. She is taken to Holofernes.

Jdt. 11: He thinks she is coming to help him so God can give him victory over the Israelites, vs. 22. He is so impressed with her that he even says in vs. 23, "your God will be my God; you shall dwell in the palace of King Nebuchadnezzar, and shall be renowned throughout the earth." At this point you should be remembering some of the warnings about women in the Book of Wisdom. It is a good thing she was on the right side.