

Suggested Reading

This week you may wish to read the following passages from the Bible.

A Recommended Reading

Matthew 19:1 - 25:46

B Read Carefully

Matthew 24:1 - 25:46 *The Final Sermon*
Matthew 23:1 - 39 *Woe to the Pharisees*
Matthew 20:1 - 16 *Parable of labourers in Vineyard*
Matthew 21:1 - 17 *Entry & cleansing of Temple*
Matthew 21:28 - 22:14 *Parables of Jesus*
Matthew 19:1 - 30 *Teaching of Jesus*

C Background Reading

Matthew 24:4-36 = *Luke 21:8-36* *= Mark 13:1-37*
Isaiah 19:2, 13:10, 27:13 & 34:4
Daniel 7:13, 12:1 *2:28-29:45* *9:27-11:31-12:11*
Deut 13:2 & 30:4 *Mic 7:6* *Zech 2:6 & 7:16*
2 Cron 15:6 *Ps 65:7* *1 Macc 1:54*

Prayer

O God, who by the pages of both Testaments
Instruct and prepare us to celebrate the Paschal Mystery,
Grant that we may comprehend your mercy,
So that the gifts we receive from you this night
may confirm our hope of the gifts to come.
Through Christ our Lord Amen.
(From the Easter Vigil)

PFP v6 2/2020

Sacred Heart Catholic Church

Henley on Thames



The Church: God's Kingdom on Earth.

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Matthew 13:53 - 18:35



Matthew 13:54 begins a new section of the Gospel. The events within the narrative closely follow Mark's structure. Jesus predicts his passion, following the road which will lead to the Cross, while at the same time forming his disciples to carry on after his death and resurrection. We are familiar with the structure within each section of Matthew's Gospel. A narrative section is followed by a discourse or sermon, which develops and enhances the themes that precede it. The discourse within this section is frequently called '*The Community Sermon.*' While this section is predominantly derived from Mark's Gospel, Matthew includes his own material which relates to Peter. (*Mtt 14:28-31; 16:16-19; 17:24-27*)

The miracles of the Walking on the Water and the Feeding of the Five Thousand reveal Jesus to be the Messiah. Jesus walks under-foot the forces of chaos and evil, revealing himself: '*Courage! It is I!*' (*Mtt 14:27*) At this point Peter, with more daring than sense, addresses Jesus formally '*Lord, ... tell me to come to you across the water.*'

Peter's conduct reveals his impulsive love and faith, weakened by doubt. Peter's panic-stricken cry repeats his faith, *'Lord, save me!'* (Mtt 14:30) Jesus rebukes Peter for his little faith and his doubt, while the other disciples bow down before him, and express the fullness of faith; *'Truly, you are Son of God.'* (Mtt 14:33) Matthew does not emphasise the disciple's lack of faith; but rather their fear which would disable this faith. Tragically, for Peter, we may understand his denial of Christ in this light.

Matthew's highlights Peter's role, particularly his confession of faith at Caesarea Philippi. (Mtt 16:13-20) This section concerns the nature of the Church as much as the role of Peter. It is known as the ecclesial section. (*ekklesia* = Greek for Church) Jesus has rejected the teaching authority of the Scribes and Pharisees. He now confers this authority upon Peter. Peter's declaration of faith; *'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God'*. (Mtt 16:16) reminds us of the importance of this title for Matthew. This is Jesus' complete identity. Peter is praised; *'blessed are you'* (a beatitude) because this insight can only come from God.

It is upon this rock that the Church will be built. The term *'rock'* is a play on words with the Aramaic *'Cephas'* A change of name indicates a change of vocation e.g. Abram = Abraham; Saul = Paul. This is the first of only two occasions when the word *'Church'* = *ekklesia* is used in the Gospel. Both are within this section of Matthew's Gospel and relate to the authority to bind and loose. (Mtt 16:18 & 18:18) *Isaiah 22:22* offers the background to this authority. *Mtt 18:18* applies this authority to the local Church, while only to Peter, are granted the keys, and this authority over the universal Church.

Peter's confession of faith is followed by his failure to understand that the way of the Messiah is the way of the Cross. Jesus rebukes Peter, *'Get behind me Satan! You are an stumbling-block* (the irony of a rock). (Mtt 16:23)

Matthew's third Petrine passage is the question of the Temple Tax. This passage forms the bridge which introduces the themes within the Community Sermon. Peter is asked to be the spokesman for Jesus. (He already has spoken on behalf of the disciples) He is an impetuous spokesman.

Next Week

The Final Sermon.

Next week will study Jesus' first days in Jerusalem. This section includes the *'Final Sermon.'* It is called the final Sermon, not only because it is the last of the five sermons of Jesus, but also because its subject is the *'final or last things.'* This sermon contains a particular type of teaching which is known as *'Apocalyptic.'* The other great examples of this style of literature in the Bible are the *Book of Daniel* and the *Book of Revelation* and *Mark Chapter 13*.

This is one of the longest sections we shall study in the course. If you have time you might try to read all this section. Otherwise, you may wish to limit your study to the final Sermon itself and its parallel in Mark Chapter 13. Another exercise may be to read the Old Testament background reading, particularly from the Book of Daniel.

You may wish to concentrate on the first days in Jerusalem. You could discover which action or teaching of Jesus contributed to his death. You would include the cleansing of the Temple, his attack upon the Pharisees and the nature of the parables.

Overleaf there is a description of the features of Apocalyptic Literature, especially that found within the Book of Daniel. This is not the only source of the Literature, as you will find other examples listed as background reading. This is an extensive list which is offered only as a guide. It is not necessary to read all these passages. If you have time you are invited to choose one or two.

The Book of Daniel and Apocalyptic Literature.

The Book of Daniel was written between 167-164 BC to encourage the Jews to be faithful to their religion at a time when it was threatened by the allurements of the worldly culture of Hellenism and the threat of persecution. The second part of the Book of Daniel (*Ch 7-12*) is Apocalyptic. This is most evident in *Chap. 7* which is the central vision of the book, composed in the heat of the persecution of the Jews by Antiochus Epiphanes. Daniel reports his vision of the four beasts rising from sea and one like a Son of Man riding on the clouds of heaven. In the Old Testament, this role was distinctive of *God*. However, in the Book of Daniel, this figure is not *God*, but a lesser being, most usually understood as an angel. The prominence of angels in Daniel is a distinctive feature of the book. This belief in the 'exalted angel' forms the background against which the Christian belief in Jesus as 'the Son of Man' must be understood.

Another important feature of Daniel comes in *12:1-3* with the Resurrection of the Dead. This is the first (and only) passage in the Hebrew Bible that speaks unambiguously of personal afterlife. We should not underestimate the comfort which this book gave to the Jews suffering under dire persecution in a battle for their very existence. This book enabled its readers to look beyond the present experience and entrust their lives and hopes to God who would reward the faithfulness by the defeat of the enemies of Israel, the establishment of the heavenly kingdom on earth and the hope of the resurrection.

The main historical importance of apocalyptic literature is that it set the stage for the origin of Christianity. Apocalyptic thought has been called '*the mother of Christian theology*.' This claim has been exaggerated but is not without basis. Apocalyptic writing had tremendous influence during the following centuries. The development of Angelology is important for the future of Jewish and Christian theology. Its immense contribution to the development of the teaching of the resurrection of the dead meant that Israel gave great significance to the resurrection of the body over the Greek idea of the immortality of the soul. The resurrection of Jesus is best understood in the context of apocalyptic thought.

The messianic theme within Daniel brings Israel's hope for salvation to its final stage before its realisation in the New Testament. Although the 'Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven' does not refer directly to an individual messiah, before long this term was understood in precisely this connotation and became the favourite expression by which Jesus described himself. Early Christian thought drew heavily upon the understanding of the heavenly Son of Man, which is extensively used in the Synoptic Gospels.

Rabbi's and Priests were sometimes exempt from paying the Temple tax. Peter's answer reflects his knowledge that Jesus would wish to fulfil this law. However, the question is: can the law claim jurisdiction over Jesus, who is the fulfilment of the Temple. He is the Tabernacle, (the meeting place) between God and mankind. Jesus may claim that the Temple Tax has no claim on him, because he is greater than the Temple. However, not to offend his audience Jesus will pay the Temple Tax for Peter and himself. This passage forms the link between the narrative and the discourse. The question of scandal is prominent throughout this narrative.

The question of greatness may be a response to Peter's role amongst the twelve. A little child is an example and almost a parable in itself. The child is a symbol of humility because they are dependent upon others. The disciple must change and become dependent upon God. This child-like trust is necessary for the believer.

The theme of the child or the 'little one' continues. The least in the community must be the priority in every circumstance. One should avoid the possibility of scandal, or becoming a stumbling block, rather one should seek out the one who has gone astray. (This care for the one, who has *wandered off*, may be different than seeking the one who is *lost*.)

There is a need for brotherly correction. These traditions reflect the discipline of Jewish practice. (*Deut 19:15*) The authority to excommunicate is given to the Church. This is to bind or to loose. In this sense authority is practised by the local church, as opposed to the rule of Peter (*Mtt 16:18*.) This is the second use of the word *Church* in the Gospels.

The final section is devoted to the one who sins often and therefore needs forgiveness often. The parable contrasts the complete impossibility of the 'wicked servant' to meet his debt, with the triviality of his fellow servant's debt. The master's pity and forgiveness are contrasted with his lack of mercy or understanding. The lesson is that our forgiveness must not be grudging; it must be sincere and effective - 'from the heart'. By this Matthew places the disciplinary measures of the church in the context of God's abundant mercy. The final word on church life and church order must be forgiveness within the family.

548 The signs worked by Jesus attest that the Father has sent him. They invite belief in him.²⁶⁹ To those who turn to him in faith, he grants what they ask.²⁷⁰ So miracles strengthen faith in the One who does his Father's works; they bear witness that he is the Son of God.²⁷¹ But his miracles can also be occasions for 'offence';²⁷² they are not intended to satisfy people's curiosity or desire for magic. Despite his evident miracles some people reject Jesus; he is even accused of acting by the power of demons.²⁷³

549 By freeing some individuals from the earthly evils of hunger, injustice, illness and death,²⁷⁴ Jesus performed messianic signs. Nevertheless he did not come to abolish all evils here below,²⁷⁵ but to free men from the gravest slavery, sin, which thwarts them in their vocation as God's sons and causes all forms of human bondage.²⁷⁶

550 The coming of God's kingdom means the defeat of Satan's: 'If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.'²⁷⁷ Jesus' *exorcisms* free some individuals from the domination of demons. They anticipate Jesus' great victory over 'the ruler of this world'.²⁷⁸ The kingdom of God will be definitively established through Christ's cross: 'God reigned from the wood.'²⁷⁹

'The keys of the kingdom'

551 From the beginning of his public life Jesus chose certain men, twelve in number, to be with him and to participate in his mission.²⁸⁰ He gives the Twelve a share in his authority and 'sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal.'²⁸¹ They remain associated for ever with Christ's kingdom, for through them he directs the Church:

As my Father appointed a kingdom for me, so do I appoint for you that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.²⁸²

552 Simon Peter holds the first place in the college of the Twelve;²⁸³ Jesus entrusted a unique mission to him. Through a

revelation from the Father, Peter had confessed: 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Our Lord then declared to him: 'You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.'²⁸⁴ Christ, the 'living stone',²⁸⁵ thus assures his Church, built on Peter, of victory over the powers of death. Because of the faith he confessed Peter will remain the unshakeable rock of the Church. His mission will be to keep this faith from every lapse and to strengthen his brothers in it.²⁸⁶

553 Jesus entrusted a specific authority to Peter: 'I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.'²⁸⁷ The 'power of the keys' designates authority to govern the house of God, which is the Church. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, confirmed this mandate after his Resurrection: 'Feed my sheep.'²⁸⁸ The power to 'bind and loose' connotes the authority to absolve sins, to pronounce doctrinal judgements, and to make disciplinary decisions in the Church. Jesus entrusted this authority to the Church through the ministry of the apostles²⁸⁹ and in particular through the ministry of Peter, the only one to whom he specifically entrusted the keys of the kingdom.

881 The Lord made Simon alone, whom he named Peter, the 'rock' of his Church. He gave him the keys of his Church, and instituted him shepherd of the whole flock.⁴⁰⁰ 'The office of binding and loosing which was given to Peter was also assigned to the college of apostles united to its head.'⁴⁰¹ This pastoral office of Peter and the other apostles belongs to the Church's very foundation and is continued by the bishops under the primacy of the Pope.