

Gospel of John - episode 30

Chapter 14 part 4 & chapter 15 part 1

Welcome to our reflection on the second half of St. John's Gospel. I want to complete chapter 14 with you today. Let us pick up in 14:21 "anyone who receives my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves me". Now, we've had this before, but since John is repeating it, then we repeat it also. Jesus is saying that if we take his living Word and interiorize it; if we live it, then we show that we actually love him. We've had that before. "Anyone who receives my commandment"; we receive it inside, in our hearts. The one who keeps them, is the one who loves me. The bit I want to comment on is, "anybody who loves me **will be loved by my Father**". Now, we already heard Philip saying, "oh, show us the Father!" That's everything. That's the ultimate in religion. Here Jesus says, "anybody who loves me will be loved by my Father, **and I shall love him and show myself to him**". This is a very special promise that Jesus makes here.

As I've already said, to be loved by God the Father is the ultimate in religion. He is the Creator of the universe. We have this drive in us that we really need to see God. It's incredibly important. Many people misunderstand that inner drive within them. To know the Father and to be loved by the Father, that is the ultimate religious experience. Jesus alone can give it to us. Everything is through him, with him, and in him, as the church proclaims. Since Jesus alone can give it to us he prefaces this by saying that if you love me, you will keep my commandments. So, if we're in a right relationship with Jesus and we're living this intimate communion with him in prayer, which allows him to live in us and allows the Holy Spirit to indwell us, **he says, you will be loved by God the Father**.

You will be loved by God. You will be loved by the Three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, you will be somebody who is very precious on the earth. He says that not only that, but "I will manifest myself to you". Now, manifest means to show, to reveal. He doesn't promise that he will come in apparitions to us. He does to some people, but he does say that in the inner eye of the soul, you will know him. You will recognise him; you will recognise His Presence. You will be able to give your own individual, personal, unique response to him, and he will give a very personal, unique response to you, because no relationship with God is repeated by anybody else. Every person has a completely unique response to God, and your unique response is the walking with God that He wants. Go back to Genesis 3 before the fall, Adam walked with God and had his own unique communion with God.

Proverbs 8:31 tells us that God delights to be with the children of men. Now, if you are the Father of five or six children, the fact that there are five or six children, or whatever the number, does not mean that you're going to pay attention to only one. Each one of them has a unique response to you. I grew up in a large family and was utterly amazed that the parents had a unique response to each one of us, as if you were the only one there. Of course, we're made like God, so we respond similar to him. Jesus says, **you will know Him**. Now, in John's gospel, to know is a very special verb. It has nothing to do with intellectual information. The verb 'to know' means to have a personal relationship with another person. The Douay translation of a verse in Genesis will help; It says that "Adam knew his wife Eve and therefore she

conceived". That is an intimate, personal relationship that is fruitful in life. It's not a sterile knowledge. It's a fertile and wonderful experience. So, to know God is to have this very personal, intimate relationship with him that produces the fruits of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, that Paul speaks about in Galatians 5:22. So, it's a very dynamic thing. The more deep, intimate and personal that relationship between us and Jesus in the Holy Spirit reveals that we have a unique mission upon the earth. The Lord will get you to do something that nobody else has done. You will have something to do which enables you to leave your footprints in the sands of time. The rest of humanity will know that you have walked this journey.

The Holy Spirit becomes our enlightener, the one who opens us up, so let's read that: "But the advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father, will send in my name, he will teach you everything, and he will remind you of everything I have said". Now, that is spoken on two levels. One is the level of the individual and the other is the level of the whole church. That throughout every stage of your own personal life the Holy Spirit will bring you deeper and deeper if only you allow him to do it. I've been teaching scripture for 60 years and I remember many years ago saying to the Lord, you need to do something for me. You need to put the whole bible together for me. I barely had the words framed in my mind - I'm not sure if I said them with my lips - when He brought the whole of scripture together as one woven pattern, and I've never separated the Old and the New Testament since. It's all one woven pattern, whether you're talking about the old or the new, it's either preparation or fulfilment. It's fantastic. It was something I wanted because of the mission He gave to me. Therefore, if I got this, I could pass it on to others.

Each one of us has a completely unique relationship with him and it is the delight of the Holy Spirit to be our interior teacher. So, I would recommend to you, if you are studying the scriptures, to pray to the Lord in your own particular way. Psalm 13 says, "open my eyes, o Lord, lest I sleep in death, lest the enemy say, I have overcome him or her. Open my eyes - that is - enlighten me, open this text to me; let me understand. It's absolutely amazing what God will do for you if you're sincere, but if you're only saying words, of course, that's different. The Holy Spirit is the one who is teaching us all.

Now, in 14:22, Jesus gets a reaction from another apostle. He's also a Judas, but not the Iscariot - because Judas Iscariot is gone. There were two James's and two Judas's among the twelve apostles. This one is called Judas Thaddeus, the brother of the James who was called 'James the Less'. In other words, James the less is not John's brother. John's brother is 'James the Greater'. So, this is Judas Thaddeus, and he turns to Jesus. Like Peter, Philip and Thomas he speaks at the wrong level. He speaks at a low level that showing he doesn't understand what Jesus is doing.

He said," Lord, what's all this thing about going to show yourself to us and not to the world?" How can this happen? Of course, that's exactly what's going to happen after the Resurrection! Instead of answering him directly Jesus emphasises that they really need to get ready for the new life. He repeats in 14:23, "if anyone loves me, he will keep my Word". Now, we've already dealt with this, but Jesus is a teacher dealing with pupils who are not getting the message. So, he repeats the lesson again, "if anyone loves me, he will keep my Word and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with

them". In other Words, he repeats the fact that we are living tabernacles and God wants to make his home with us. Of course, those who don't love me, don't keep my Words.

John emphasises in 14:25 that Jesus's Word was not his own. In the first half of the gospel, Jesus repeatedly said, "I only say what my Father tells me to say. I only do what my Father tells me to do. I only reveal what my Father tells me to reveal". So, Jesus' Word is the Word of the Father. Jesus himself is the uncreated Word, become flesh. **Everything is Jesus**. So, he said, "I've told these things to you because the Holy Spirit will come and he will reveal everything to you". So, there's going to be a step by step deepening as the church goes on in history, as more problems turn up and more situations ask for answers, the Holy Spirit is there to guide the church. So here we are, 21 centuries later, with loads of teaching from all the popes and the saints, where the Lord has been teaching us and giving us understanding, and He is still opening the scriptures to us. At different stages of history, we look at the scriptures from a slightly different angle according to our needs. One of the functions that the Holy Spirit operates for us individually and for the church is to show the deeper levels in scripture.

It is sad when people read the scriptures on a surface level. It produces the problem of 'literalism' which is rampant in the Protestant tradition. If you've ever done surf riding on the sea, you're not going to meet the deep coral reefs underneath. To observe the extraordinary life under the sea, you've got to dive down deep into the coral reefs. But if you stay on the surface, yeah, you might enjoy the ride and you may have good experience in terms of physical activity, but you're not going to meet this wonderful life. In the same way if you stay on the surface of the scriptures you might enjoy the ride, but when you go down deep into the different layers that are there it is a life-giving experience. You find the most wonderful food, and the Lord has promised this - but he's not finished giving gifts here yet.

In 14:27, Jesus gives us the gift of peace. Now, the gift of peace is the most astonishing thing that Jesus can give to us. The world thinks it's at peace when it's not at war, but that is not peace. You can walk into a household where people are not physically fighting with each other, but the atmosphere says, ugh, 'this is cold'. People are not communicating; there's something wrong. So, the fact that they're not physically fighting does not mean peace. Peace is completely different. It is that I am at one with God, that I am at one with myself, and that I am at one with my neighbours. The scriptures use peace as a synonym for happiness and contentment. It was prophesied in the Old Testament as one of the gifts that Messiah was going to give. You'll find it in Psalms 20:9-11, 72:7, 85:8, and also Isaiah 9:6. There are plenty others.

Jesus said, "peace, I am bequeathing to you". I'm giving it to you as an inheritance. This is going to be one of the signs. The love that we've already spoken about is one of the signs that it is Jesus' community. Peace is the other. We know that we can just look at a person to know whether that person is at peace or not. "Peace I bequeath to you my own peace I give you". Jesus passes on his own happiness to us - that happiness that he has as the Second Person of the Most Blessed Trinity. "This is a peace the world cannot give. The world doesn't know what peace is, and I give it to you as my unique gift". He says that this is his gift to the whole church. So, he's saying to the church, 'if you're in right relationship with the Most Blessed Trinity, you're going to have this deep inner contentment. Cf. Phil 4:7

The amazing thing is you could be suffering from an illness, or some kind of disability. You could be in economic distress; you could be very poor or you could be very old; there are all kinds of situations, yet you can have this deep peace inside because it's God's gift to us. It's not something that we produce ourselves. Unfortunately, the world thinks that if you are exercised enough, fed properly and medicated correctly, that you'll have this peace. That's not so, because peace is not like that. Peace is something that comes from your interior and flows out into the exterior. If you add peace, love and then joy, they are the 3 signs, the 3 keys Jesus gives his church. When you add these together, you have a unique testimony on the earth. So, we need to finish with this great chapter in John's gospel. Jesus has had the Apostles up at his own divine level. He has been passing on the most extraordinary gifts and privileges to them, calling them to the highest possible relationship with God and the most wonderful mission that they could possibly have on the earth.

Then all of a sudden, he brings them right back to present reality. We say, 'come down with a bang'. So, let's pick up at 14:28. "Listen, do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid". Now, they shouldn't be troubled or afraid because of all that is being given to them. Jesus said, "you heard me say I am going away, but I will return". Now, they don't realise that this going away is in a couple of minutes - that it's this very evening that he's going to go away and their normal life ends. "You heard me say that I'm going away. Now, if you loved me, you'd be glad that I was going to go, because you're going to get all these gifts. If I do, I am going back to the Father, and the Father is greater than I".

How can the Father be greater than the Son if both are divine? Jesus is talking about himself in the incarnation, so as man, the Father is greater than him. "I've told you this before it happens so that when it does happen, you may believe. I shall not talk to you much longer". In other words, we're almost finished, almost ready to go to Gethsemane, but he has something else to tell them in chapter 15 and chapter 16.

"The prince of this world is on his way". But don't let your hearts be troubled. Jesus tries to get them to come back, to register the very painful situation that he is in. While he is giving all this comfort, joy, peace and grace to them, he himself is painfully aware of the fact that Judas is out there organising his arrest and that others are cutting wood for a cross for him! There are people collecting nails, and soldiers ready to torture him so that he will reach a point that they won't even recognise him. Jesus is painfully aware of that.

So, he tries to tell them that "the prince of this world is on his way". Here we connect with chapter 13 and with the betrayal of Judas - that when Judas left the room, "night had fallen". Judas opened the door for the prince of darkness to set up the most terrible set of circumstances. The poor apostles, of course, have forgotten all about Judas because they get so caught up in the wonderful things that Jesus is saying. So, it is like throwing cold water on them to bring them back to this very difficult situation. But even though Jesus says the prince of this world is on his way, I want you to notice something that may not have noticed about John's gospel.

Once Judas left the room, John will not mention his name again. Judas is out of this text. And any information you get about Judas from here on in is in the Synoptic Gospels. John will only give attention

to Jesus from now on, and he will let these incredible events reveal the full reality of who Jesus is. So, the traitor gets no more space. Even though the prince of this world is on his way, Jesus says that “he has no power over me”. Now, what gives Satan power over us? It is sin. Sin opens the door for evil to come in. But they could not convict Jesus of sin. You have that in John 8:46. “Can any of you convict me of sin?” There was no opening for Satan to come into Jesus life. It was not possible, so, no matter what Satan does, and Satan is going to do a lot to try and open Jesus up to sin... he's going to subject him to an unjust trial. He's going to have him mocked, abused, tortured and nailed to a cross to die as a criminal, **but he cannot make Jesus sin!** Because he cannot make Jesus sin, Jesus wins the victory before he even starts. If we allow the world to torture us emotionally or mentally or physically or anyway to open us up to evil, then the world has won the victory. But in Jesus case, he had the victory. “Satan has no power over me”. So here we have before any of the events take place, Jesus announces the victory. Satan has no power over me. What a wonderful thing it would be for you and me to be able to say that Satan has no power over me.

Thank you for listening. Goodbye. God bless you.

INTERVAL

Welcome to our reflection on St. John's gospel. We now begin chapter 15: the mystery of the true vine. I need to give you an introduction to this, because John and Jesus pick up the mystery of the vine from the Old Testament. John, the author, emphasises that what happens to us in the church is a fulfilment of what has been prepared ahead of time. So there obviously was a lot of discussion in the early church about what exactly is this ‘indwelling’? What is this ‘God living in us and we living in God’? How can you possibly explain it? So, the image of the vine is a way to explain the relationship between Jesus and each one of his beloved disciples after the Resurrection when the new mystery kicks in. In order to explain this intimate relationship, he chooses something that everybody understands which is the relationship between a branch and its tree, because that branch is completely dependent on the tree; it is only the SAP that keeps the branch alive. Jesus chose images that were so ordinary that everybody understand them. It's a bit like if I were to say, ‘I am Francis and this arm is part of me’ - there's the branch! If the arm is cut off from me, of course it's going to die. So, Jesus uses something very simple to get the idea through to us.

But it is important to look at the background so that we grasp the richness of the image. The Old Testament reveals that Israel as a nation, as an entire people, had been chosen by God to be ‘a son among the nations’. In Exodus 4:22, Moses informs Pharaoh that God said, “set my son free”. Now ‘my son’ is the firstborn son among the nations. All of them who were under the covenant of Moses were the sons of God. So, the nation was ‘the son’, and they were the sons. So, you can see the vine and its branches. Psalm 82:6 said, “I said, you are gods, all of you, sons of the Most High”. John quoted that in chapter 10:34. So, the reality was ‘a son and sons’.

The prophets give us a taste of how they speak about the vine. They say a lot but I'm only going to say a little. Jeremiah 2:21, reveals that God said He had made a choice vine which was the chosen people. It was of sound stock therefore it should produce good fruit. But Jeremiah says very clearly in chapter 5:10 and in chapter 12:10-11 that this vine of very good stock had become a degenerate plant which makes it completely useless. Ezekiel has two passages I want to look at just very briefly. Ezekiel, chapter 17:5-10 speaks about the choice vine of God which was looking elsewhere; it was turning to the world to root itself, and that the eagle - which was the world power it was trying to lean on - would destroy it. So, the vine was turning away from where the Lord had planted it (in Israel); it was turning away from the One who created it to a world power. In other words, to use the language that we've been using already in chapters 13 and 14, it was turning to the unbelieving world, the Cosmos. The chosen people were turning to the unbelieving world, and that unbelieving world was going to destroy it. So, following that, Ezekiel says in chapter 19:10-14 that Israel was a vine planted by the living waters – that is the living waters of grace coming from the Covenant - and that it would be thrown down by the east wind, and taken off into the desert.

Now, look at the map of Israel: the east is Assyria and Babylonia. At the time of Ezekiel it was Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylonia, who came in from the east, conquered them, and took them off into exile into Babylon. So, the vine was uprooted from where it was planted and taken off into the desert. If you want to read that in poetic form, it is in Psalm 80:8-18, or Hosea 10:1-2.

Finally, I want to go to Isaiah 5:1-6. You might wonder why I left this last. It's because it's the best introduction to chapter 15. Isaiah 5:1-6 has a very famous parable about the vineyard where God the Father Himself was the vine dresser. It is this parable that Jesus picks up in chapter 15 where and he says that he is **The True Vine**. Don't forget, he is The Son and it is through him that we become the sons of God.

So, Jesus takes up this parable and will reveal that **he is the vine** that will produce all the divine fruits of the Spirit, the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and goodness... So, in Isaiah's parable God called Israel 'my beloved', because she was in covenant with God. That covenant was considered a Spiritual Marriage, therefore spiritually she was the 'wife' of the Lord. Just as Jesus refers to his beloved disciples as his beloved ones also, because together they form the Bride of Christ or the Bride of the Lamb in the New Testament. But Isaiah goes on to say that even though this vine was of God's own planting - the other prophets confirmed that they were God's choice - he said that this vine produced sour grapes. Sour grapes is the opposite of the harvest that you're looking for, so the sour grapes bring judgement upon the vine.

Throughout the Old Testament various judgments come to the vine. For example, the northern state of Israel was taken out into Assyria and never returned. The southern state of Judah was taken into Babylon but it returned. It was through that state that the Messiah actually came. But the final judgement of the vine came in 70 AD, when the vine was cut down and burnt - that is in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple under the Roman army. This is very important because in Ezekiel 15:1-8 we are told very clearly that the wood of the vine was useless. It was only fit to be burnt if the vine didn't produce fruit.

When the temple and the city were both destroyed and burnt to the ground in 70 AD, the vine was burnt to the ground. That judgement came upon a vine that absolutely failed the Lord.

The symbol of the vine was very important for the chosen people, it became a national symbol. They had a large golden vine standing before the holy place in the temple - one of the glories of the temple. It represented the chosen people standing in worship before the throne of God. They used the image on certain coins at the time of the Maccabees. But unfortunately, as we have just seen in the prophets almost every reference to Israel being the vine is a reference to the fact that God was disappointed with His people because of their lack of response to him and the fact that they didn't produce fruit. So, it all looks a bit hopeless until you come to one of the latest books of the Old Testament, which is the book of Ecclesiasticus written by Ben Sira. Some of the modern scholars call it the Book of Sirach. Chapter 24 gives a wonderful chapter on wisdom. Wisdom is the vine that will produce the divine fruit. Going into that text would take a lot of time as I want to stay with John 15. Yet I want to connect wisdom with John's gospel because Jesus is Wisdom Incarnate, and here Wisdom Incarnate will produce the fruit that God wants from the vine. That's the connexion. You can see that the Old and the New Testament is absolutely married together.

In this chapter Ben Sirah says that wisdom calls out to the people and says that those who eat and drink of her will never be hungry or thirsty again. That's exactly what Jesus said in chapters 6 and 7 with regard to his gift of living water and the divine food he was going to give us in the Eucharist. So, we've come out of chapter 14 where we were speaking about the mutual indwelling between the Lord and his people. In order to try and get people to understand this, Jesus chooses the vine as the image. Choosing the image of the vine enables him to say 'now, you will understand that the life of the vine or the SAP of the plant is what keeps the branches alive'. If the branches are attached to the vine, then they will remain alive and they will produce fruit. So, Jesus is saying, 'I am Christianity and you are part of me. If you remain attached to me with my life and my Spirit in you, with my food feeding you, you will produce the fruit. But if you cut yourself off from me, you will die'.

What Jesus says is utterly simple; even the smallest child can understand the image, but not while Jesus was alive on the earth! He somehow externalised the Presence of the Father because "the Father and I are one", he said; so, God the Father was walking on the earth! I've said that to you before. It was going to be even more difficult for them to take on board that when they walked the earth in the future when the Holy Spirit came, that they would be externalising the presence of Jesus, that it would be Jesus walking the earth! They would be eyes and ears for him; they would be a tongue for him, and hands and feet for him, because we are his body. It is important to understand that as we go into this text, because Jesus said in John 5:17, "the Father goes on working, and so do I". He said that at the beginning of his public ministry, that the Father, who had been working all through the Old Testament - through history with his children, went on working through His very special Son, his unique Son, Jesus. Now that the unique Son, the only begotten, is going back to the Father, Jesus will continue working throughout the whole of history through his sons, who are the members of the church.

So, let's come to the text of John 15. Jesus said, "I am the true vine". That's the way we usually read it. I want you to read it slightly differently. **I am IS the true vine.** Jesus is Christianity. Christianity is not just an institution; not just doctrines and laws. It is a person. I am is the true vine, and my Father is the vine dresser. The Father is in charge. That's exactly what Isaiah said - that the Father was the vine dresser. John says that Jesus is the vine of the Father's perfect planting. **This is it.** This is the vine that will produce the fruit. So, the apostles understood that Israel as a whole was God's choice vine, but she did not live up to God's expectation of her. Why couldn't she live up to God's expectation? It was because the people were not yet redeemed; they were still under the influence of the prince of this world. They were steeped in the world of unbelief and sin so, we are told repeatedly that they are drawn into sin, and into the Cosmos all the time. It was extremely difficult to keep fighting idolatry, sin and the powers of the unbelieving world. But now we have the one who cannot be convicted of sin. Now we have the one who is totally at one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. We have Him Incarnate. Yes, everything that God wants to do for humanity can be done through him, with him and in him.

He is the one who will produce the fruit. Now, to be part of him, to be part of that mystery, to be part of that grace, is a privilege beyond our ability to understand. It's literally beyond our capacity to grasp. That is exactly what Jesus is offering to us. We saw in the first half of the gospel that Jesus replaced the temple, the sacrifices and the feasts of Israel. Here in chapter 15, Jesus has not only replaced all of that, but he **replaces 'the son nation' also.** Israel as a whole was the son nation. **JESUS IS THE SON.** He is the unique son, he's the only begotten Son, and he replaces everything to do with Israel. It's all in him.

Because of his unique position, you can say the Father is the vinedresser because it was the Father who sent His Son to Israel. You have parables in the Synoptic Gospels explaining that it was the Father who sent His Son. So, the Beloved Son will do for the Father what the Father wants. We had that as an introduction to chapter 15 because we ended chapter 14 with "I want the world to know that I love the Father and therefore I will do exactly what my Father tells me". So, this heroic obedience, humility and love that the unique Son has for the Father will accomplish everything that Israel in its entire history couldn't do.

If you look back for a minute in chapter six, when Jesus was on the hillside, he offered the people real food and real bread, and he told them he was offering them real bread and real wine in the offering of himself. In chapter seven, at the feast of Tabernacles, he said he was going to offer them the true living water, the real thing. When he stood at the tomb of Lazarus, he gave Lazarus back real life. I am the way; I am the truth; "I am the life". Everything is in him. So, in chapter 13 and 14, we looked at the fact that Jesus also gave the real environment to his beloved disciples so that they could come to the fullness of life with him and with each other, and therefore accomplish all that God was asking of them in their mission and this real environment. What is it? It is that each one of them individually and all of them collectively, are in union with the blessed Trinity.

They are in a union of love with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. So that is absolutely essential for us to understand if we are to come and get the message that John wants to give us and Jesus particularly wants to give us in chapter 15.

Thank you for listening. Goodbye. God bless you.