

LESSONS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

FOURTH GRADE RELIGION CLASS TEXTBOOK

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER:		Page#
1	THE NATIVITY AND ENTRY INTO THE TEMPLE.	3
2	THE ANNUNCIATION; VISIT TO RIGHTEOUS ELIZABETH	4
3	THE NATIVITY OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST	5
4	THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST	7
5	THE THREE MAGI; KILLING OF THE INFANTS	8
6	THE MEETING OF THE LORD IN THE TEMPLE	10
7	THE SAVIOR IN THE TEMPLE AS A YOUTH	11
8	ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST	13
9	THE BAPTISM OF JESUS CHRIST	14
10	THE FIRST DISCIPLES; THE FIRST MIRACLE	15
11	CLEARING THE TEMPLE OF THE MERCHANTS	17
12	THE SAMARITAN WOMAN AT JACOB'S WELL	19
13	TEACHING IN GALILEE AND NAZARETH	20
14	JESUS HEALS THE SICK IN GALILEE	21
15	HEALING OF THE PARALYTIC AT THE POOL	23
16	THE LORD CHOOSES HIS TWELVE APOSTLES	24
17	THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT ; THE BEATITUDES	25
18	SERMON ON THE MOUNT; OTHER TEACHINGS	28
19	TEACHING BY PARABLES; PARABLE OF THE SOWER	29
20	MIRACLES OF JESUS CHRIST	30
21	THE BEHEADING OF SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST	32
22	FEEDING FIVE THOUSAND WITH FIVE LOAVES	34
23	THE TRANFIGURATION OF THE LORD	35
24	JESUS CHRIST'S TEACHING ON LOVE; GOOD SAMARITAN	36
25	THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON	38
26	THE PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS	40
27	HEALING OF THE TEN LEPERS	41
28	THE PARABLE OF THE PUBLICAN AND THE PHARISEE	42
29	THE BLESSING OF CHILDREN	43
30	THE RAISING OF LAZARUS	45
31	ZACCHEUS	46
32	THE ENTRY OF THE LORD INTO JERUSALEM	47
33	THE LAST JUDGEMENT	49
34	THE MYSTICAL SUPPER	50
35	PRAYER IN THE GARDEN AND CAPTURE	52
36	THE TRIALS OF JESUS	54
37	THE CONVICTION AND CRUCIFIXION	55
38	DEATH AND BURIAL	57
39	THE RESURRECTION	59
40	THE APPEARANCES OF THE RESURRECTION SAVIOR	60
41	THE ASCENSION	61

CHAPTER 1

THE NATIVITY AND ENTRY INTO THE TEMPLE OF THE MOST HOLY VIRGIN MARY

When God first created the visible world, He created people without sin. Since the first people, Adam and Eve, were sinless, they had very close personal contact with God. However, this perfect world soon changed. Jealous of the happiness of the first people, the Devil tempted them, causing them to sin.

When sin entered our world, everything completely changed. No one could live in close contact with God any longer. Sin became part of mankind, and they were unable to free themselves from its effects. Only God was able to correct the damage. And as God is true, perfect love, He promised men that when they would be ready, a Savior would be sent to free them from sin.



For thousands of years, God prepared people for the arrival of the Savior. It took this long because sin had become a very big part of man's nature. Now the time finally was at hand, and a very special maiden (a young woman who was still a virgin) was needed to become the mother of the Savior. Very special parents were first needed to raise this very special maiden. Such special parents were Joachim and Anna who lived in the small Galilean city of Nazareth. They were very holy people who devoted their lives to serving God and people. But a very strong grief filled their hearts. They grieved because they had

no children.

Despite their grief, Joachim and Anna never lost faith. Even in ripe old age, they continued to pray. They promised God that if God would give them their wish, they would give the child to the Temple at the age of three. God heard the prayers of these holy people. He sent His messenger, Archangel Gabriel, to tell them that they would be parents to a very special child. This child would become the mother of the long-awaited Savior. The angel instructed the overjoyed parents to name the child Mary.

For three years, the joyous parents enjoyed their long-awaited child. But then, they needed to keep their promise to God. To do this, they invited their relatives and the little friends of their daughter. They dressed their daughter in her finest clothing, and all the little girls were given



large lighted candles. With the adults singing hymns, all began the trip from Nazareth to Jerusalem.

The procession came to the Temple where it was met by the priests along with the high priest, Zacharias. Anna placed Mary on the first step of the Temple. To everyone's



surprise, the tiny child walked up the remaining steps without help. The high priest waited for Mary on the top step, and blessed her as she approached him,. Then, miraculously instructed by God, he took her into the Holy of Holies, a place where only a high priest was allowed to enter and only once a year for a special service. Instructing Zacharias to take the little girl into this special place was God's way of revealing that she was the living arc by which God would become a man.

Mary lived in the Temple for eleven years. She was not alone as there were other girls living there who had been given to God in the same way as Mary had been. But she preferred to spend her time alone -in prayer, fasting, and reading sacred books. She was a meek and humble child. Her

special joy was that she was visited many times by Archangel Gabriel. He would bring her food from Heaven and teach her from the Sacred Books. His special mission was to prepare her for that glorious purpose that God had chosen her for. She was to become the mother of the Savior of mankind.

CHAPTER 2

THE ANNUNCIATION; VISIT TO RIGHTEOUS ELIZABETH

The Most Holy Virgin Mary lived in the Temple until she was fourteen. Then, as an adult, she had to either marry or return to her parents' home. The priests were very surprised when the Virgin Mary told them that she could do neither. Her parents had died, and she could not marry because she had promised to devote her life to God.

The priests prayed for guidance. God told them that Mary should live with her distant relative, the 80-year old Joseph who was a carpenter in Nazareth. She could be engaged to him, and he could take care of her. In this way, she would be able to keep her oath (promise).

When the Virgin Mary moved into Joseph's house, she continued to live in the same simple manner that she had lived at the Temple. She continued to spend much time in prayer, fasting and reading Holy Books. It was during one of the times that she was reading that God revealed to her whom He had chosen to be the mother of the Savior.

The Holy Virgin Mary was reading a prophecy that a young maiden was to be the mother of the Savior. She stopped to think about this. How wonderful it would be to be able to see this lucky maiden! How wonderful it would be to be able to serve her! At that moment, Archangel Gabriel entered into her room and greeted her in a very unusual way. "Rejoice", he said, "God is with you. You are the most blessed in the world."

Mary became very confused at this unusual greeting. Why was he talking to her in this manner? He was addressing her as if she was someone very important. Why was her

teacher talking to his simple young student in such a strange way? The angel calmed her and explained. God was so pleased with the way that Mary was living that He decided that she should be the mother of the Savior.

The Holy Virgin became even more confused. How could she become a mother if she did not have a husband? The angel explained that God is all-powerful and can do what He wishes. Through a special blessing from the Holy Spirit, she would give birth to this special Child who should be named Jesus even though she remained a virgin. To further calm her and to show her how powerful God is, the angel revealed that her relative, the righteous Elizabeth, who was very old, too old to have children, would also soon give birth to a son. For God, nothing is impossible.

When she understood the meaning of the angel's message, the Holy Virgin Mary accepted God's wish. She told the angel, "I am God's servant and will do what He tells me to do." The angel was then able to leave, having received her agreement to serve God.

In the meantime, Mary was so overjoyed that she wanted to share her joy. But who would believe her? Only righteous Elizabeth! She too, had just received such wonderful news. All her life she had wanted a child. And now, in very old age when it should be impossible, God was giving her a child. And her child was also to be a very special child. His destiny would be to prepare people to accept the Savior. He would become the greatest of all saints, St. John the Baptist. Yes, only Elizabeth would believe Mary and would be able to share with her this joy. With this in mind, Mary set out.

Righteous Elizabeth lived with her holy husband Zacharias in a small city not far from Jerusalem. It was Zacharias who, while serving as the high priest, had received the three year old Mary into the Temple. Now, as she entered Elizabeth's house, God revealed to Elizabeth that Mary was the chosen maiden. She joyously greeted Mary. In her joy, Mary told Elizabeth why she had been chosen. God wanted to reward her for her great humility (absence of pride). The two stayed together for three months, sharing their joy.

CHAPTER 3

THE NATIVITY OF SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST

Soon after the departure of the Virgin Mary, Elizabeth gave birth to a son. This event brought great joy to all who knew the new parents. Because of Elizabeth's age, the birth was very unexpected. Now no one had reason to suspect that Zacharias and his wife were being punished by God for secret sins.

The miraculous birth occurred in this way. Similar to Joachim and Anna, this holy couple had been suffering because they had no children. They also spent much time in prayer, hoping that God would bless them with a child. But, as time went by, they began to lose hope. They did not suspect that God was preparing them for a big miracle. Thus, they grieved.

One day, Zacharias, a priest, was serving in the Temple. The service called for him to enter the Sanctuary to burn incense. While censuring, he suddenly saw an angel in front of him. Believing, as most people did then, that the appearance of an angel meant that he was about to die, Zacharias became terrified.

"Do not be afraid," the angel calmed him. The stunned Zacharias then heard from the angel the wonderful news that he was to become a father to a most unusual child. The angel instructed him to name the child John. This would be no ordinary child. His son was to become the greatest of prophets and the forerunner to the Savior.

At first, Zacharias was overjoyed. Then doubt crept into his heart. How could this

happen at such an old age? Zacharias forgot that God is almighty. The faith one should have as a priest of the Temple faltered, and afraid to trust, he asked the angel for a sign to prove the truthfulness of his words.

"I am Archangel Gabriel, who stands before God and am sent by God to give you this news," answered the angel. Since Zacharias needed a sign, the angel gave him one. This sign was also a punishment for disbelieving. Zacharias was to lose his ability to speak until the birth of the child.

While this was happening, the people in the Temple were waiting for Zacharias to come out of the Sanctuary, and they were becoming concerned at the delay. When he finally emerged and was unable to speak, they realized that he had received a vision. Despite God's punishment and despite the wonderful news, he stayed to complete his week of service and only then went home to inform his wife about God's great blessing to them. Elizabeth accepted the news with great humility and decided not to tell anyone until the birth of the child. Only the Virgin Mary knew, having learned the wonderful news from the angel.

At last the time arrived, and their baby was born. There was great rejoicing by the relatives and friends. All gathered for the eighth day ceremony when the name is given to the child and special prayers are said for the mother and child. When asked what name she had chosen for her son, Elizabeth shocked everybody with her choice of the name, John. Nobody in the family bore that name, and all present wanted to name him in honor of his father. Thinking that Zacharias was not aware of what had happened, they asked him what name he preferred. He asked for a slate to write on. To the amazement of all, he wrote, "His name shall be John".

The moment Zacharias wrote the name on the slate, he completed the instructions given to him by the Archangel Gabriel. His punishment was then removed, and his voice was restored. With deep joy and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he began to speak, giving a prophecy concerning the true greatness of his son. John was destined to be the prophet who was to prepare people for the arrival of the Savior.

The holy family spent the day in blessed joy. Their happiness, though, was very short-lived, and deep tragedy awaited them. Three months later, the birth of Jesus Christ occurred. Fearing the newborn Savior and not being able to find Him, King Herod ordered his soldiers to kill all children under the age of three in Bethlehem. And because of the unusual circumstances of his birth, John was also included in this order.

The soldiers came for John. Desperate to save her son, Elizabeth ran with him in her arms into the desert. Running blindly, she suddenly found herself surrounded by hills with no place to escape and the soldiers in hot pursuit. Just when it appeared that death was to steal the child's life, Elizabeth pleaded with the hill to open up and receive her. God heard the pleas of the frantic mother, and the hillside opened up. Elizabeth ran in. The hill closed behind them, shielding them from the soldiers. God had preserved the child for his future destiny.

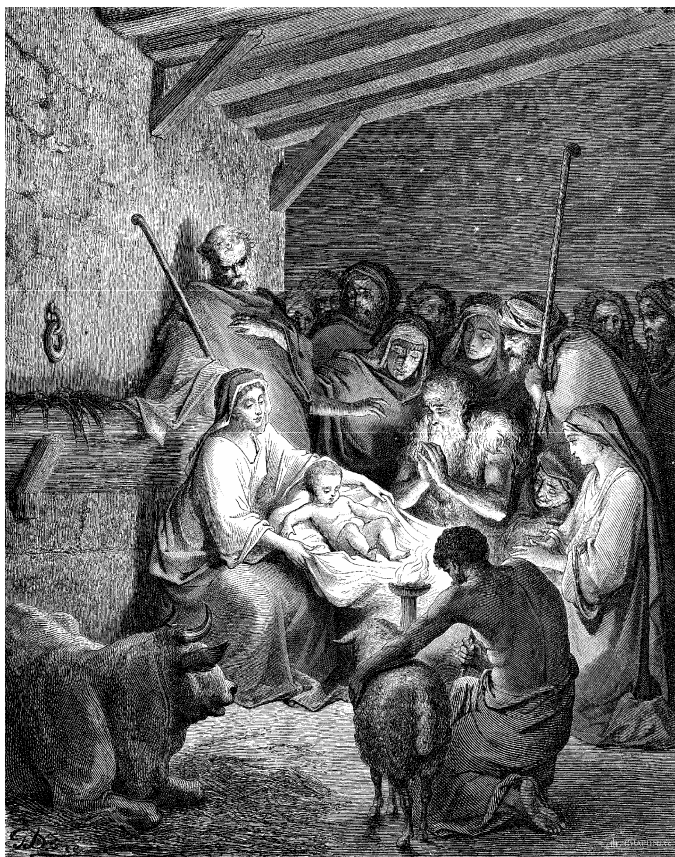
Having lost the child, the soldiers returned and arrested Zacharias. They demanded to know where the child was being hidden. When he would not help them, they killed him.

Having saved her child, Elizabeth had to remain in the desert. Overcome by her terrible experience, she lived for only a very short time with her son in the desert cave. God provided her with food and drink in a very unusual way. A date tree suddenly grew next to the mouth of the cave. The tree would bend over to let Elizabeth pick the fruit when she needed to eat. A spring broke through the ground from which pure water flowed. After Elizabeth died, God sent an angel to take care of and raise the infant. God kept John

hidden in the desert for thirty years, waiting for the day he was to begin his mission.

CHAPTER 4 THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

Three months after the birth of St. John the Forerunner, the moment all of humanity had been waiting for several thousands of years finally arrived. God had promised Adam and Eve to send a Savior to undo the damage their sin (original sin) had done to people. God had been gradually preparing people through His prophets. One such prophecy was that the Savior would be born when the king of the Jews would be from a family line other than the family line of Jacob, through his son Judah. Since the king at that time, King Herod, was not from the family line of Judah, the time for the Savior had arrived.



King Herod became king through the command of the Roman Emperor, whose army had captured the Jewish lands. Wanting a king he could trust, the emperor made Herod the king of the Jews. Then, wanting to know how many people lived in his newly conquered land, he ordered that a census (a count of people) be taken. For the purposes of the census, all people had to go to the place from which their family was descended. Joseph was from the royal family line of King David. Therefore, he had to go with Mary to Bethlehem. Bethlehem had been the home of King David.

At this time, Bethlehem was a small city. It was not far from Jerusalem but quite a distance from where Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth. When they arrived at Bethlehem, it was already late at night. The census had caused many

other people to also come to this small city. Because of this, Joseph could not find an empty place in the city to stay in.

Surrounding Bethlehem were hills where many shepherds kept their sheep. The climate was mild. Therefore, the sheep lived out in the open. Only in bad weather would the shepherds bring their flocks into caves in the hills for protection. That night the weather was good, and the caves were empty. It was in one of these caves that Joseph and Mary stopped to rest for the night. Very tired from the long journey, they were grateful to be able to rest even in this unusual place.

That night the King of Kings, the Savior of the world, was born. Not in a majestic castle! And not in a luxurious home! Not even in a poor man's hut, but in a cave! From His very first breath, our Savior showed by His own example how important humility is in the eyes of God. His mother wrapped him in a cloth diaper and laid Him down to sleep in

a manger from which the sheep fed while in the cave.

During the time this momentous event was happening, the whole world slept. Only the shepherds, who were watching over their sheep to protect them from thieves or wild animals, were awake. The night was calm but cold, and the shepherds sat around a campfire to keep warm.

All of a sudden they were blinded by a powerful light. An angel unexpectedly appeared before them, frightening them terribly. The angel calmed them and told them the wonderful news. The Savior had just been born. They could find Him in a cave near Bethlehem. As the angel finished speaking, the sky opened up and thousands of angels were heard singing, "Glory to God in the highest. Peace on earth, good will to men."¹ The angels then returned into the Heavens, and all was quiet and dark again.

When the shepherds were able to make sense of what had just happened, they quickly got up and went to see the Savior. They found the Holy Family in the cave and fell down on their knees to joyfully worship the baby King. They described how the angels had appeared to them to announce the birth and to glorify the new-born Christ. Listening with awe, Mary tried to remember every word of the shepherds. The shepherds then returned to their flocks glorifying the mercy of God to men.

CHAPTER 5

THE THREE MAGI. THE KILLING OF THE INFANTS



While in captivity in Babylon, the Jewish people taught the Babylonians about the promise of the Savior. This knowledge was preserved by the wise men of that country. Three such wise men lived in Babylon at the time of the birth of Jesus Christ. They had studied all the Jewish prophets and knew that the time was at hand for the Savior to be born.

Also, being astronomers, they studied the stars and planets. One night, they noticed a new and very powerful star in the sky. In those days, the belief was that a new star appears whenever a very important person is born. The three magi realized that this star was the star of the Savior. As they watched the star, they became amazed. They noticed that the star moved in front of them. God was calling them to

¹ The angels did not lie when they promised peace on earth. The peace that they promised is the peace a person has in his spiritual life when he is close to God. The person's conscience gives this peace because of his lack of sins.

worship the newborn King. So they took gifts with them and set out. To their delight, the star seemed to lead them. So they followed it.

Led by the star, the three magi arrived in Jerusalem. Since they understood the newborn baby to be a king, they began asking, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews?" When King Herod was informed about the magi and their question, he became very frightened. He knew that he was not the true king. He knew that the Jewish people were the chosen of God, and that God was more powerful than the Roman Emperor who had made him king. If this Child was born to be king, then he would take the throne away from him. Therefore, Herod decided that He must be killed.

Herod asked that the three magi be brought to him. He gathered the Jewish elders and asked them what the prophecies taught concerning the birthplace of the Savior. The elders consulted the sacred books and answered that the prophecies predicted that the Savior was to be born in Bethlehem.

Having received the desired information, Herod slyly sent the three magi on a mission. He told them to go to Bethlehem to find the Savior. Once they found His location and worshiped Him, they were to return to him and tell him where to find the child. "Then I, too, will go to worship Him," he lied to the magi.

The three magi set out for Bethlehem. To their joy, they saw the star again. It led them to a house and stopped there. The magi entered the house and found the Child. After the departure of the many people who had come into Bethlehem for the census, the holy family was able to move into this house. The magi fell down on their knees to worship Jesus as king and God. And they presented their gifts to Him: gold because He was a king, incense because He was God, and myrrh because He was going to die as the Savior to free all mankind from sin and the devil. Then, having completed their mission, they returned home. They did not go back to Herod because an angel appeared to them and warned them about Herod's evil plan.

In the meantime, Herod waited for the return of the magi. When they didn't come, he realized that they had understood his true intentions and would not return. What could he do now? By now, the Child was probably hidden. The only way to kill Him would be to kill all babies in Bethlehem. One of these would surely be the new-born Savior. Herod also ordered that the baby, Saint John, be killed because St. John's birth was too unusual. Herod thought that it was better to be safe and kill him also. Evil and sin so blinded Herod that he thought he could defy the will of God and kill the very Child sent by God to save mankind.

The soldiers set out for Bethlehem. Before their arrival though, Joseph was instructed at night by an angel to immediately leave the country and go to nearby Egypt. Therefore, when the soldiers arrived in Bethlehem, Jesus Christ was already gone. The whole city became covered with blood and tears as the poor families watched helplessly as their infants were murdered right in front of their eyes.

But King Herod did not succeed in his satanic plot and was severely punished by God. Open wounds, in which worms collected, covered his body. He was eaten alive by these worms and died in agony. This is a stern reminder to us. All who defy God are left to the devil. God turns away from them and takes away His protection. And in his intense hatred of men, the devil begins to torture them even while they are still alive. Such was the fate of Herod.

With the death of Herod, the Holy Family was able return from Egypt. An angel informed Joseph of Herod's death and instructed him to return. However, when Joseph learned that Herod's son was the new king, he was afraid to settle in Jerusalem. For this reason, the Holy Family moved back to Joseph's old home in Nazareth. Thus it was that

even the city where the Child grew up was hidden to protect Him from others who might be inspired by the evil one to harm Him.

CHAPTER 6

THE MEETING OF THE LORD IN THE TEMPLE

In order to free the Hebrew people from captivity in Egypt, Moses was instructed by God to lead them to freedom. The Promised Land was to be their new home. At first, Moses was not able to do what God had instructed because the Egyptian pharaoh refused to free the Hebrews. So God told Moses to punish the Egyptians with ten plagues. The last plague was very frightening. The angel of death flew over Egypt, and the firstborn (the first son) in each family died. Only the Hebrew families were saved from this plague. In remembrance, a law was made that from that time forward, all Hebrew firstborn had to become priests. Later, God had this law changed. Only the men in the Levi tribe were allowed to become priests. The Hebrew families of the other tribes had to consecrate their firstborn to God on the fortieth day of the child's birth.

Jesus Christ was Mary's firstborn. Therefore, His mother and Joseph brought Him to the Temple on His fortieth day. They did this even though it was not necessary. Since He was God, He did not need to be consecrated to God. By doing it however, His mother gave all people a valuable lesson concerning the importance of obeying all of God's laws. Jesus Christ and His mother never ignored any of the commandments of God. Through this, they were teaching us that we have to do this also, no matter what, even if we don't understand why.

At the Temple, the holy family was met by a very old and holy man named Simeon. From his youth, Simeon was a much respected scholar. At that time, the king of Egypt had a very large and famous library which held all the famous writings of the world. The only thing missing was the Hebrew holy books. Therefore, the pharaoh asked the Hebrew elders to send him Hebrew scholars to translate the Hebrew holy books into Greek, the common language of nations in those days. Seventy wise men were chosen for this job. Simeon was one of the seventy.

Simeon was assigned to translate the writings of the prophet Isaiah. He was working on the prophecy that said that the Savior of the world would be born to a maiden. Simeon stopped at these words. He was confused. How was it possible for a maiden to give birth? She would have to be a wife, a woman, not a maiden! Simeon decided that a mistake had been made when the book was being copied and decided to change the word maiden into woman.

With that thought, Simeon went back to work. But the moment that he began to write in his correction, an angel appeared and stopped him. The angel told Simeon that the prophecy was correctly written, and that he, Simeon, would see this truth. God would let him live until he would see with his own eyes the Savior of the world born of a maiden.

Over three hundred years later, the moment was finally at hand. The Holy Spirit instructed Simeon to go to the Temple. There he met the holy family. With great joy and relief, he took the Child into his arms and began to glorify God. "Lord, lettest now Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy Word. For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of Thy people. A light to enlighten the Gentiles and the glory of Thy people, Israel." (These words now are a hymn sung toward the end of every vesper service.)

Both Mary and Joseph listened to this holy elder with amazement. He then returned

the Child to the mother and began to talk to her. He told her what terrible things she would see and feel when her Child was grown. Her child was going to divide the people of Israel. For many, He would be the cause of spiritual death because they would scorn and reject Him. Many others would be saved by Him and taken to Heaven. This is what she would have to live through. How terribly she would suffer then! Her pain would be so great that it would seem as if someone was cutting her with a sword, piercing even her soul. Simeon told her all of this in order to prepare her for the terrible suffering she was going to have to endure.u

At the Temple, the holy family also met a wonderful, holy woman named Anna. She was an eighty-four year old prophetess who never left the Temple. Day and night, she served God in prayer and fasting. God opened up to her that this Child was the Savior and she, with great joy, began to tell everyone.

The holy family finished the ceremony for the Child's fortieth day. Mary brought a sacrifice of two baby doves, as required by law. They then returned to their home. The memory of this event is remembered in the Orthodox Church as one of the twelve major feast days.

CHAPTER 7

THE SAVIOR IN THE TEMPLE AS A YOUTH

There were three major holidays in the Jewish religion. During the celebration of these holidays, all Jews tried to go to the Temple, the center of Jewish religious life. This was especially true for the most important holiday, the Jewish Passover. Since the only Temple for the Jews was in Jerusalem, thousands of Jews from all parts of the world gathered in that city during the holidays.

The Jews were at first a nomadic nation (always moving from one place to



another), therefore, the first Temple was a tent. Later, the great Jewish king and prophet, King David wanted to build a permanent Temple, but God did not allow him. The honor was given by God to King David's son, King Solomon, who built a very beautiful and elegant Temple building. Unfortunately, this wonderful building was destroyed when Jerusalem was burned down by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Because of the sins of the Jewish people and their refusal to repent and improve, God allowed them to be captured and taken into captivity in Babylon.

When the Jews were freed after their seventy year captivity, they built a new Temple. After its completion however, they felt a deep sadness because this Temple was

much less beautiful and rich than Solomon's Temple. Several hundred years later, the Romans made Herod the king of Judea. Wanting to make the Jews accept him, Herod restored and beautified the second Temple. This was the building in which Jesus Christ taught. It was also later destroyed as a punishment to the Jews for their killing of the Savior, Jesus Christ.

Mary and Joseph were very religious. Therefore, they always went to the Temple for the Passover festivities. They did this even though it was not easy for them. Jerusalem was far away, and they were very poor. When Jesus Christ turned twelve and according to Jewish laws, became a man, He was taken along with them for the first time. The trip was long and difficult, through hot and dangerous desert.

At the conclusion of the holiday, the family began the trip home. Since they were traveling with their whole family, Mary did not worry that Jesus was not with her at the start of the trip back. She thought that He was with some of the relatives. When they stopped for the night, she realized that He was nowhere to be found. Overcome by fear and worry, Mary refused to wait until morning but immediately started back to look for her son. She was terrified that He might have wandered away into the desert and fallen into danger.

Joseph and Mary reached Jerusalem. But where should they look? The city was so large, and many people were still there after the holiday. For two terrible days, they looked for Him without success. Only on the third day did they spot Him as they were entering to look into the Temple building. What relief and joy did Mary feel seeing her lost Child. At the same time, she was just as amazed as she was relieved. Their twelve year old son was sitting with the elder scholars and discussing religious questions with them. The elders were in a state of complete awe. How could a twelve year old boy have such incredible wisdom?

Mary rushed up to her Son and gently scolded Him. "Why did You do this? Your father (stepfather) and I were very frightened." Jesus looked at His mother with surprise. He did not understand her fear. He answered that this was where He was supposed to be, in the Temple. He was her Son. But was He not also the Savior? He then returned with them to their home in Nazareth.

From that moment forward, nothing is written about Jesus in the Bible, except that He lived in obedience to His mother and stepfather. He helped Joseph with carpentry and was greatly loved by people (who still did not know that He was the Savior). As He grew in age, He grew in stature and in the love of God. The Bible speaks about Jesus again only after He turned thirty and began His Mission.

When we read about Jesus in the Temple when he was twelve, we learn two wonderful lessons. The first lesson concerns love for the church and church services. As a twelve year old boy, Jesus loved the Temple so much that He was able to stay there for three whole days, thinking only about how wonderful it was to be in God's house. We too, should try to love the church that much. We too, should try to love the services so strongly that nothing could distract us during the services. The next time we are in church and we begin to get tired, we should remember about Jesus in the Temple. We should make the church our second home, a place we love going to. It is after all God's house.

This Bible story can also teach us a lot about the importance of obedience. Jesus was a boy. But He was also God. Yet, He was obedient to Joseph, who was not even His real father. By His example, Jesus shows us that we should obey all adults and people in charge. How evil it is when we are disrespectful and disobedient!

CHAPTER 8

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

While Jesus was growing up in Nazareth, St. John was growing up in the desert. He and his mother continued to live in the cave in the mountain that had miraculously opened to hide them from Herod's soldiers. God opened a spring outside the mouth of the cave to supply them with water. Elizabeth got her food from a date tree which began to grow and reached its full size in a matter of minutes. The tree always had ripe fruit on it and would bend over for Elizabeth to pick the fruit whenever she wanted to eat. In this way, they had the necessary food and water. Elizabeth, however, did not live for a long time after her escape. She was very old and the fright that she had endured was more than her body could take. She died forty days later, leaving her infant alone. God sent an angel to raise St. John and prepare him for his very important mission.

When John was thirty years old, God called him to begin his work. By that time, John was already a very strict saint. He led a severe life of prayer and fasting. His diet consisted of locusts and wild honey. He made his clothes out of camel's hair, a hard, rough material.



God directed John to go to the area near the Jordan River for his mission. John went and began to preach. His message was that all people needed to repent as the time for the arrival of the Savior very near. In order to correctly repent, people first needed to see their sins, then to ask for God's forgiveness and change their way of life. They had to start doing good deeds. For example, if someone had two coats, he should give one away to someone who did not have any. If someone had more food than he needed, he should share with someone who had nothing.

The appearance of a prophet caused quite a stir. It had been some four hundred years since the last prophet had been sent by God. When the people heard about John and found out about his very holy life and wonderful teaching, they flocked

to see and hear him. All sorts of people, from all levels of society hurried into the desert from all directions. St. John greeted each person, and talked to him about the way that he was living. Then he would teach him how to correct his way of life. As a prophet, John could see right through the person and would know everything about him even if the person would try to hide something. If the person accepted John's teaching and was willing to repent, he would be baptized in the Jordan River. The person would enter into the water and confess his sins. Then John would place his hands on the person's head and push him completely under the water. While the water was cleaning this person's body, his

repentance was purifying his soul.

Each person that came to John was taught how to correct his way of life. For example, the tax collectors were taught never to take more than was required by law. The common practice was to take more than they were required and to keep the extra amount for themselves. The soldiers were taught never to use power to take away other people's property, but to be satisfied with their wages. In those days, soldiers were very poorly paid and often took advantage of their force to loot and steal. This was how John tried to change all people into better people.

But not all who came to John came to learn from him. Some thought that they needed no improvement and came only out of curiosity. Many of these were Pharisees and Sadducees. The Pharisees were the scholars who studied and taught the Jewish law. They were very proud of their knowledge and considered themselves to be holy. They were content to follow the letter of the law but did not let it touch their hearts. To people they appeared holy, but in their hearts they were very cold, cruel and evil. The Sadducees, often among the more rich and powerful citizens of Israel, did not believe in life after death. Therefore, they thought it was best to get everything possible out of life before one's death because everything ended with one's death. Try as he might, John was unable to soften and improve the hearts of these evil people.

Seeing the amazing work of John and knowing that the Savior was to come soon, many people began to wonder if John was the Savior. But he would tell them, "I am only preparing you for His arrival. He is much more mighty than I am. I have baptized you with water. My baptism washes away sins but cannot improve you. It does not have the power of the Holy Spirit. The Savior will baptize you with fire and the Holy Spirit. The fire will burn away your faults, while the Holy Spirit will give you power for spiritual life. He is so superior to me that I am unworthy to untie the sandals on his feet." The people listened to St. John and marveled.

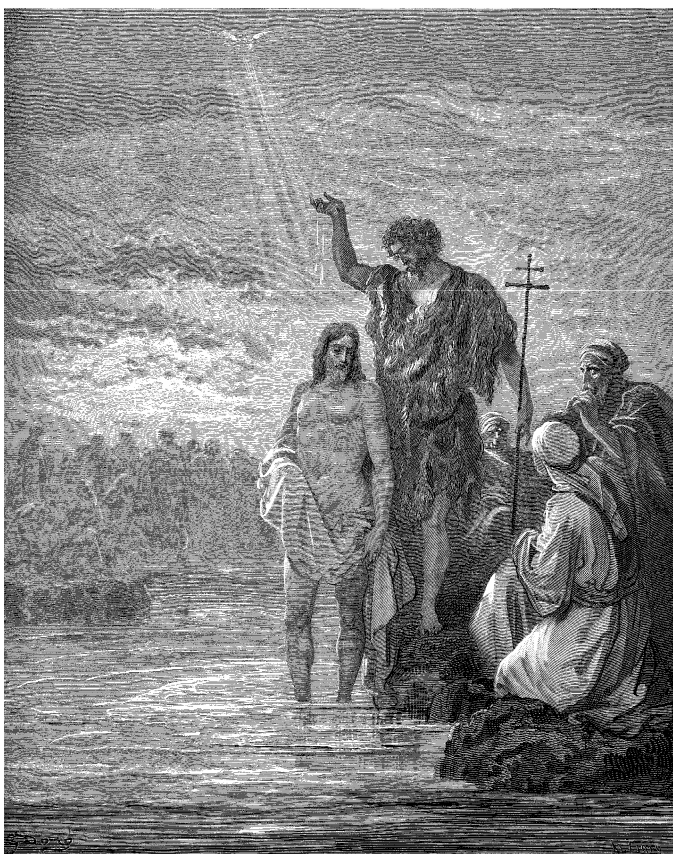
CHAPTER 9

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS CHRIST

Not long after St. John had begun to teach, Jesus Christ turned thirty. According to Jewish law, this was the minimum age for a person to become a teacher. Therefore, it was time for Jesus to begin His mission.

The first thing that Jesus did was to go to the Jordan River to be baptized by St. John. This might seem strange at first. After all, He was God and sinless. He was not required to obey God's commandments to people. But as a man, Jesus obeyed all commandments. Through this, He showed that obedience is required of all people without exception. A person cannot just follow those commandments that he considers necessary while ignoring others. If Jesus obeyed all the laws, people must do so likewise. This was the message Jesus wanted to give through His baptism.

Jesus approached John and asked for baptism. As a prophet, John realized that Jesus was someone very superior to him. Therefore, he refused at first to baptize Jesus, saying that Jesus should baptize him instead. But Jesus told him that it was necessary for them to give an example to all people. It is through baptism that one begins his spiritual life. John then, obeyed and baptized Jesus. As Jesus was coming out of the water, an amazing thing happened. The Heavens opened up and a Dove appeared over Jesus. A voice was heard from Heaven saying, "This is My Beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased". This was the first ever physical appearance of the Most-Holy Trinity. The voice



was the voice of God the Father. God the Son was Jesus Christ. And the Holy Spirit was visible in the form of a dove. Through this appearance of the Most-Holy Trinity, John realized that Jesus Christ was the Savior.

After the baptism, the Holy Spirit guided Jesus Christ into the desert. Jesus went there to prepare Himself spiritually for the very difficult task He was about to begin. He spent forty days alone in the desert, praying and fasting. He ate nothing for the forty days, after which He began to feel very weak. Seeing Jesus in this condition, the devil came to Him and began to tempt Him. The devil wanted to take advantage of Jesus' condition to fool Him into using His Godly powers for earthly needs. This would enable the devil to get control over Jesus through His Passions and stop Him

from becoming the Savior. By using His divine power in the wrong way, Jesus would become an earthly leader instead of a heavenly Savior. But even in His weakened condition, Jesus resisted the temptation and the devil was defeated.

Jesus' time spent in the desert is another case of His teaching people by example. Before a person begins any task, especially an important one, he needs to prepare spiritually. One should begin his task only after he has asked for God's blessing.

What happened to Jesus in the desert should be a warning to us. The devil tried to fool Jesus and spoil His holy mission. In this same way, the devil always tries to stop people from doing anything that is holy and good. He tries to fool people into either stopping altogether or into changing their good deed into something not so good. But he can succeed only if we let him. Jesus defeated the devil in the desert and will always help us do the same if we ask for His help.

The baptism of Jesus Christ marked the beginning of Jesus Christ's mission and is remembered as a major holiday. Just as Jesus proceeded from Nazareth to the Jordan River on this holiday, each church has a procession to a body of water where the water is blessed. This procession is called "the Procession to the Jordan". Afterwards, the priest travels to all the homes of the church members to bless their homes with the Holy Water.

CHAPTER 10 THE FIRST DISCIPLES, THE FIRST MIRACLE

While Jesus was in the desert, St. John remained near the Jordan River. He knew

that his mission was ending. The Messiah was here, and he had done his best to prepare the people. John knew that his followers were very devoted to him. Loving him as much as they did, it was going to be very hard for them to leave him and follow Jesus. He had to have to find a way to help them to do this.

In the meantime, having left the desert, Jesus went back toward the Jordan River. Seeing Him from afar, St. John openly announced to his followers that the Savior was approaching them. "Behold the Lamb of God Who has come to take on Himself the sins of the world." For centuries now, people had been sacrificing lambs as a gift to God. These lambs served to remind people of the sacrifice the Savior was going to make. The true sacrificial Lamb was now approaching them and John openly witnessed Him to his disciples.

Hearing John's witness, two of John's followers began to follow Jesus. They followed Him to His house and spent the day talking to Him. The first of the two was Andrew who became known as "the first called". The second one was John who became Jesus' favorite. John called his brother, Jacob (James), and Andrew brought his brother, Simon. Jesus named Simon, Peter, ("the rock") as a sign of his very strong faith. The next day, Jesus saw Philip and called him to follow them. Philip agreed and called his brother, Nathaniel. At first, Nathaniel was skeptical. However, when Jesus revealed to Nathaniel something that only Nathaniel knew, he was convinced and decided to follow also.

Jesus now had his first disciples. He began to travel with them across the countryside, preaching. His message was similar to St. John's, "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand." In His teaching, Jesus used parables (stories similar to real life situations which have a certain message). Through parables, Jesus was able to present His message in such a way that people could understand. Jesus also performed miracles as a way of touching people and attracting their attention. The first miracle was at a wedding in a small city called Cana.

Jesus was invited to this wedding with His mother and His disciples. The groom was poor and unable to buy a lot of wine for the reception. Soon the wine ran out, and it appeared that the poor couple would have to suffer the embarrassment of not having enough refreshments to serve their guests. Jesus' mother noticed this and wanted to help. She told Jesus about the problem. Even when His response sounded like He wasn't going to do anything, she, nevertheless, told the servants to do whatever Jesus would tell them to do. She never doubted that He would help the poor bridal couple.

Palestine was a very dry desert country where water was very scarce. Water had to be brought in from wells and stored in very large water pots. Jesus told the servants to fill six water pots with water. When they had finished, He told them to take some of this water to the master of ceremonies of the reception. When the master drank from the water, he realized that what he had tasted was very good wine. He did not know where it came from. Only the servants and the disciples knew.

This miracle was done mainly to build the faith of Jesus' new disciples, and Jesus was successful. Witnessing the amazing miracle, they became convinced and believed more strongly in Him.

This event shows us a very wonderful thing. From the very beginning, the mother of Jesus saw herself as a protector and friend of people in need. She continues to help people to this day. The miracles that she has done are so many that it is impossible to count them. Anyone with any kind of grief or need will always have his prayers answered if he prays to her.

A second very important thing that this event demonstrates is how Jesus views

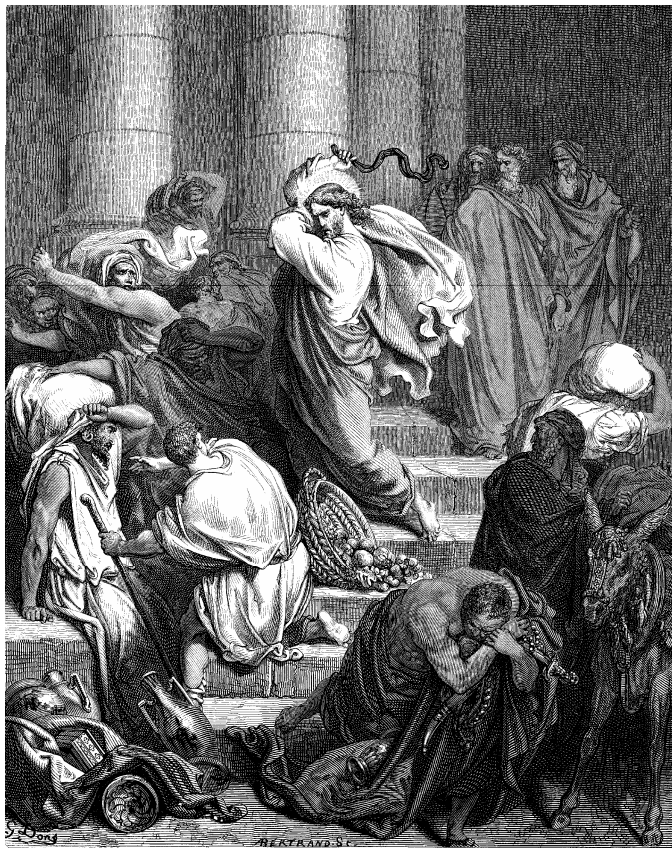
marriage. By performing His first miracle at a wedding, He shows people how holy marriage is. God blesses the couple in the wedding ceremony (the sacrament of marriage) and gives them His invisible help (Grace). This enables them to live together in Christian love for the salvation of their souls. Without this blessing, it is impossible for a couple to live together in such a way as to please God.

CHAPTER 11

CLEARING THE TEMPLE OF THE MERCHANTS

Soon after the wedding in Cana, Jesus went with His disciples to Jerusalem. It was the Passover, and thousands of Jews had gathered from around the world for the holiday. Jesus entered the Temple. What He saw there was shocking. The Temple was full of animals being sold for sacrifices. There were cattle, sheep, and cages full of doves. The noise from the animals and the loud haggling over prices between buyers and sellers was deafening. Added to this clamor was the arguing over money being changed. This arguing came from the rows and rows of tables behind which sat the money changers. Since people came from different countries, they needed to exchange the money of their country into the local money. The arguing, the noise, the smell, the dirt, all of this combined into a terrible picture of chaos and disorder.

What Jesus saw caused Him to become upset. He could not tolerate such shameful disrespect to the Temple. Making a whip out of ropes, He began to chase the animals and their owners out. He knocked over the tables of the money-changers, spilling their money all over the floor. He commanded that the cages of doves be immediately removed. His appearance had so much authority and power that no one dared to disobey Him. He would not allow His Father's holy house to be turned into a street market. When He was finished, peace and dignity returned to the Temple.



From this, we should learn a very important lesson about how to behave in church. In God's house, we should always act with respect, honoring God. We must never allow worldly activities such as eating, drinking or horseplay to occur in church. The church is for praying, singing praises to God, and

performing other spiritual activities.

The Jewish leadership silently watched what Jesus was doing. And they were very displeased. They allowed all of this business in the Temple because they made a big profit

from it. And they were not about to let it stop. At first, they stood back. Jesus had acted with such authority that they were unable to resist Him. But later, they came up to Him and demanded to know who gave Him such rights over the Temple.

Jesus responded with a prophecy in which He called the Temple His body. He told the Jewish leaders that if they destroyed the Temple, He would rebuild it in three days. These words were predicting His death at the hands of the Jews and His Resurrection. The Jews would destroy the Temple by killing Him. He would then resurrect in three day (rebuild the Temple in three days). Neither the Jews nor Jesus' disciples understood His mysterious words. It was only after Jesus Christ's resurrection that the disciples remembered this prophecy and understood its meaning.

Jesus Christ remained in Jerusalem for the duration of the holiday and worked many miracles. Because of these miracles, many began to believe in Him. The leadership, however, began to fear Him. They were evil people and were afraid of losing their power. They needed to prevent Jesus from winning over the hearts of the people. Therefore, they began to watch His every step. They were hoping to find something that they could use against Him and turn the people away from Him.

But even among the leadership, there were some who wanted to believe that Jesus was the Savior. They saw His tremendous miracles and knew that such power could only come from God. However, they chose to keep their beliefs secret because they were afraid of losing their positions of authority. Their fears were justified. The Jewish leaders had agreed to expel anyone in authority who openly admitted his faith in Jesus. Therefore, these men kept their faith a secret, even though by doing this, they were going against their consciences. They were more afraid of offending men than offending God.

One such leader was Nicodemus. His heart told him to believe in Jesus Christ, but he couldn't make up his mind. Therefore, he came secretly at night to talk with Jesus, hoping to find out for sure if Jesus was the Savior.

Nicodemus began by asking Jesus what a man had to do in order to enter the Kingdom of God. Jesus surprised him by telling him that a person had to be born a second time. Nicodemus could not understand how this was possible. Jesus explained that a person was born first into his body. This was his first birth. But he was born with the sin of Adam which prevented him from entering into God's kingdom.

To correct this, a person had to be born a second time. A person needed to be baptized. Baptism was his second birth. It was a spiritual birth through water and the Holy Spirit. The water in baptism washed away the sins, and the Holy Spirit changed and strengthened the person. Through baptism the person became a new person; therefore, he was reborn. This change could only be done by God through baptism. And, this baptism was also different from the baptism of St. John. The first baptism was by water only and did not have the Holy Spirit. It washed away sins but did not spiritually change the person into a new person. This was why Jesus told Nicodemus that he had to be born of water and the Holy Spirit.

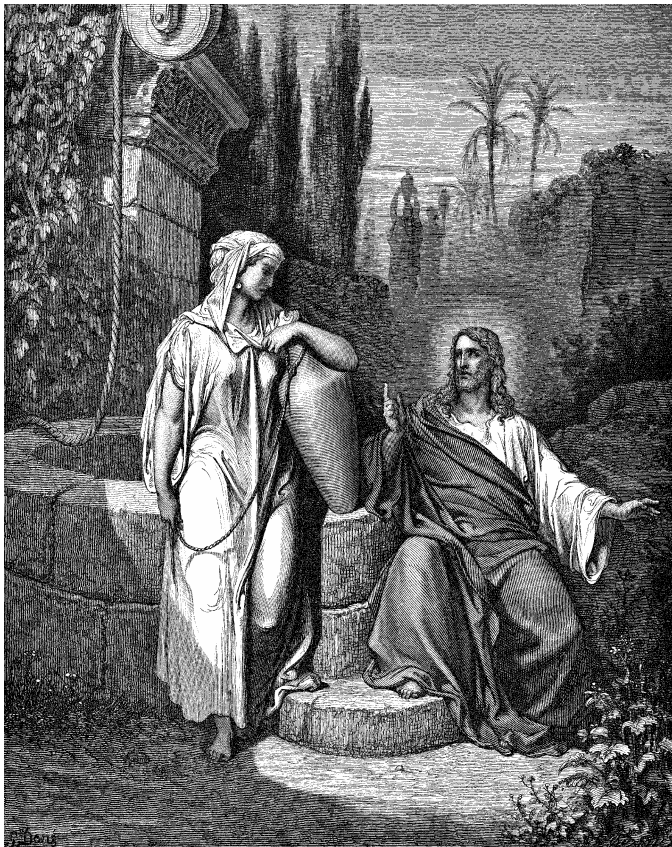
Nicodemus spent the whole night talking with Jesus. In their conversation, Jesus revealed that the Jews would crucify and kill Him. Through His death and then resurrection, all people would have the opportunity to have eternal life with God in Heaven. After this talk with Jesus, Nicodemus became His secret disciple.

CHAPTER 12

THE SAMARITAN WOMAN AT JACOB'S WELL

After the Passover holiday, Jesus left Jerusalem to return to Galilee. To get there, He had to pass through Samaria, the home of the Samaritans. The Samaritans were the descendants of the Babylonians who were moved to Samaria when the Jewish people were taken away into captivity into Babylon. When the Jews were set free and returned to Samaria, they intermixed with the pagan Babylonians. Because of this, the religion of the Samaritans was a mixture of pagan beliefs and the true faith of the Jews. The true Jews did not like the Samaritans and considered them to be inferior and sinful. They considered the Samaritans to be animals like dogs.

While passing through Samaria, Jesus stopped at a well outside of the city of Shechem. He was tired and wanted to rest. While He rested, the disciples went into the city to buy food. A Samaritan woman approached the well for water, and Jesus asked her for a drink. She was very surprised that Jesus, a Jew, would talk to her. Jesus told her that if she knew who He was, she would ask Him to give her "living water". By "living water", Jesus was talking about His divine teaching which gives eternal life. But the woman did not understand and thought that He meant water from the well. And since He did not have anything with Him to use for drawing the water out of the well, how was He going to give her some?



Jesus explained that His living water was very special, that whoever drank it would be quenched for the rest of his life. The woman did not understand that Jesus was talking about His Teaching which spiritually quenches a person's spiritual thirst and gives eternal life. She thought that he had magic water which would quench her bodily thirst forever, and asked Jesus for this water. She thought that if she would drink from this magic water, she would never need to drink water again. Jesus told her to first go and call her husband. When she told Jesus that she had no husband, she was shocked by his answer. He told her that he knew that her husband was not her true husband and that she had lived in sin with several men.

The woman now understood that Jesus was not a plain person. He knew secret things about her life. Thinking that He was a prophet, she asked Him to answer the question that Jews and Samaritans argued about the most, where was the correct place to pray. The Samaritans believed that this place was the holy mountain on which Moses received the Ten Commandants. The Jews, of course, prayed in Jerusalem.

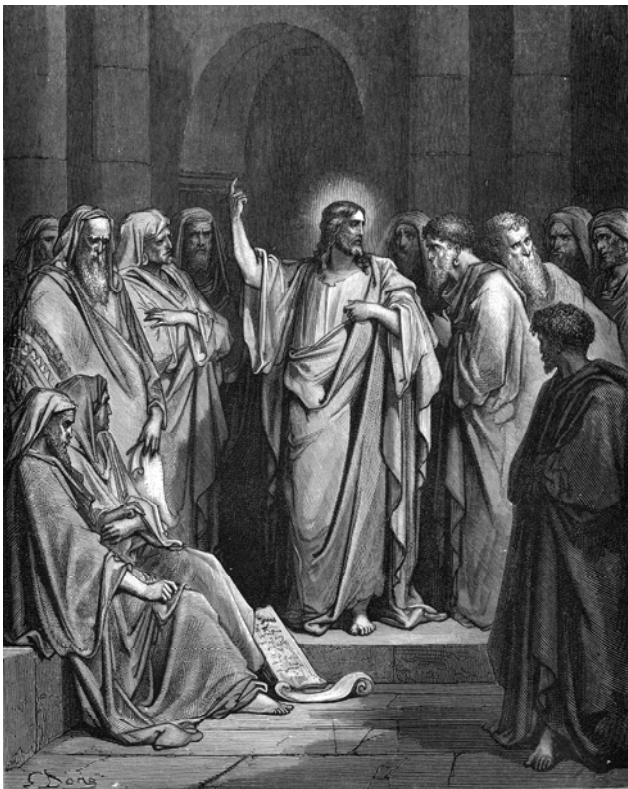
In response, Jesus told her that for now, the Jews were correct. Soon, however, people all over the world would begin to worship God correctly. The place of prayer would no longer be as important as the way the person worshipped. The woman agreed saying that soon the Messiah would come and explain everything. Jesus told her that the Messiah was already there and was talking with her.

The words spoken by Jesus excited the woman. Dropping everything, she ran to the city and began to call the people to come to Jesus. Soon, Jesus was surrounded by a huge crowd of Samaritans, and he began to teach. They were so overjoyed that they asked Jesus to stay with them. He did for two days, during which time nobody left His side but listened to His every word. They believed in Him so strongly that He did not need to do any miracles to prove to them that He was the Messiah. After Jesus left Shechem, the woman devoted the rest of her life to telling people about Jesus. Photini (Svetlana in Russian) died as a martyr for Christ in the year 66.

CHAPTER 13

TEACHING IN GALILEE AND NAZARETH

After His return to Galilee, Jesus started to travel all across the country, teaching people about repentance and about the Kingdom of God. He often taught in the prayer houses (synagogues) of various cities, towns, and villages. He would enter a prayer house on a Saturday, the holy day of the week for the Jews, and go to the front to the podium with the Holy Books. Jesus would open a Holy Book, read from it, and begin to teach. But



that was not the only place in which Jesus taught. Jesus taught anywhere people would listen to Him, such as a private home, a market place, on the street or any other place where people were gathered.

In most of Galilee, people listened to Jesus with joy and faith. He was making them a wonderful promise. If they would repent and live according to His teaching, they would earn salvation and Heaven. It was like coming to a prisoner who was sentenced to spend the rest of his life in prison and promising to free him. All that the prisoner needed to do was to ask for forgiveness and change his life for the better. If he would do that, then, not only would he be freed, he would even be able to live the rest of his life in the king's palace.

But when Jesus entered Nazareth, things were very different. There, in the place where He had lived since childhood, the people had a very hard time accepting Him. They had known Him as a baby. They had watched Him grow up. They were convinced that Joseph was His real

father. How could He all of a sudden be the Messiah? Serious doubts closed their hearts to Jesus. No, there was no way that He could be the Promised One.

This was the mood of the people when Jesus entered the Nazareth prayer house to teach. They listened to Him and were amazed at the power of His Teaching. Having heard of Jesus' wonderful miracles, they demanded that He prove to them that He was the Savior by performing in front of them a big miracle.

But Jesus refused them. They had just listened to His teaching in amazement. And they already had seen His miracles. This should have been enough. Performing a new miracle would not open their hearts. They would simply demand more and more miracles. He performed miracles to either help people in need or to build faith. He never did miracles simply for show.

When Jesus refused, the people exploded in anger. Their wrath was so fierce that they wanted to grab Him and throw Him off the cliffs outside the city. Jesus had to leave and go to other places to teach. Because of their cold, hard hearts, the people of Nazareth turned away Jesus Christ. By doing this, they rejected God and lost salvation for themselves.

We can learn very valuable lessons from these unfortunate people. We can learn how important it is to love and not judge people. If we let our hearts become cold, without love, we too can reject God. Love warms our hearts. We show our love to God by obeying His commandments. One of His most important commandments is to love and be kind to all people. When we do this, our hearts become warm and God moves into us. He lives with us in our hearts.

This Bible narrative also shows us how dangerous it is to judge other people. The people of Nazareth thought that they knew who Jesus was. To them He was the son of a poor carpenter. They did not know that He was the Messiah and rejected Him. This shows us how dangerous it is to think that we know somebody and to judge according to what we know, or think we know. The internal life of a person is closed to us. Only God truly knows everything about a person. Only God has the ability and the right to judge. Our responsibility is to love and accept everybody.

CHAPTER 14

JESUS HEALS THE SICK IN GALILEE

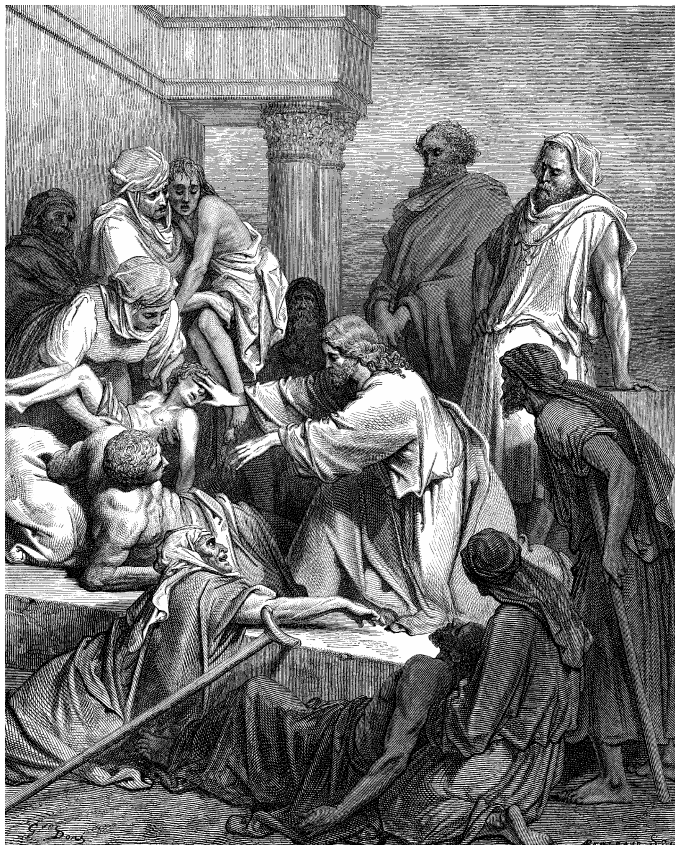
As Jesus continued to teach and heal, more and more people brought their sick relatives and friends to Him. Always merciful, Jesus miraculously healed all who were brought to Him. Fame about His teaching and His healing quickly spread all over Palestine.

Once when Jesus returned to Cana, the place of His first miracle, He was approached by a nobleman who lived in the neighboring city of Capernaum. This man had heard Jesus was healing the sick. Being the father of a sick, dying boy, he rushed to Cana to beg Jesus to come with him to Capernaum and heal his son.

Jesus calmed the man and told him to return home because his son would live. The man believed Jesus and quickly began his return trip home. During the trip, he was met by his servant who was rushing to him. The servant had wonderful news. The sick boy's fever had suddenly dropped, and he was getting better. Amazed by the news, the nobleman asked his servant at what time the child had begun to improve. The servant's

answer amazed the nobleman even more. The improvement began in the seventh hour, exactly the time he had been begging Jesus to cure his son. The nobleman realized that his son was healed by Jesus even though Jesus was miles away from him. In gratitude, this man and his whole family began to believe in Jesus.

On another occasion, Jesus was teaching inside of a house. Several people, carrying a sick friend on a stretcher, tried to get in but couldn't. The crowd listening to



Jesus was too dense. The friends of the sick man did not get discouraged. They lifted the stretcher on to the roof and carried it to the middle of the house, to the courtyard opening. They then took apart the roof and lowered their sick friend down to Jesus' feet. Seeing their strong faith, Jesus decided to reward them by healing their sick friend. He also knew that the man's sickness was caused by his serious sins. It was important for the sick man to understand the reason why he was sick. Therefore, before healing him, Jesus told him that his sins were forgiven.

There were Jewish elders listening to Jesus in the crowd. When they heard Jesus telling the sick man that his sins had been forgiven, they became upset. They did not believe in Jesus and thought to themselves that He had no right to say that. Only God could forgive sins. To their surprise, Jesus turned to them and began to discuss their thoughts. He told them not to be upset. He explained that His words were intended to make all the people understand who He really was. As the Savior, He was God. Therefore, He was able to forgive sins. Jesus then turned to the sick man and told him to get up and carry his stretcher home. To everyone's amazement, the sick man obeyed. He got up, picked up his stretcher, and walked away. This was the same man that had been too sick to walk. Now he was able to not only walk, but also to carry his heavy stretcher.

Jesus journeyed all over Galilee continuing to teach. He also continued to heal. There was not a disease that He did not heal. Especially remarkable were the times He drove demons out of possessed people. All who came to Him were healed and comforted. By this, Jesus was again teaching us a very important lesson on the importance of mercy. In order to get into the Kingdom of God, a person had to do as much as he can to help other people. Only those who were kind and helped people in need could get into Heaven.

CHAPTER 15

THE HEALING OF THE PARALYTIC AT THE POOL OF BETHESDA

The second Passover during Jesus Christ's time of service arrived, and once again, Jesus went to Jerusalem. He entered a building called Bethesda (House of Mercy) which was near the Temple. It was also located near the Sheep's Gate through which the sheep were driven into the city for use in sacrifices in the Temple. This building had five hallways or galleries, all of which led to a pool.

This pool was considered sacred because its waters had healing powers. At certain times, an angel would enter the water and stir it up. The first person to enter the water when it would move would be healed of whatever disease he suffered from. Because of this, the five hallways were always full of sick people waiting for the movement of the water.

When Jesus entered this house, His attention was drawn to a certain man. This man had been sick for thirty-eight years and had spent all of his money seeking medical help without success. The doctors were unable to cure him. Now penniless, his only hope was to be healed by the waters of the pool. His disease had weakened him so much that he was unable to move his arms and legs. Therefore, he was always late in getting into the water. Someone always got there first.

Being God, Jesus knew of this man's many years of suffering. He stopped in front of him and asked him if he wanted to be well. Jesus asked this seemingly strange question in order to focus the man's attention on what He was about to do. This was necessary in order to build his faith, as without faith the miracle could not have been done. The man sadly answered that he did not have any money to hire someone to carry him into the pool. By the time he would reach the water by himself, someone would have already entered the pool to receive the healing. Jesus told him to get up, walk, and take his bedding with him.

What amazing faith was then exhibited by the sick man! He did not know who Jesus was. Yet, he immediately obeyed without questioning. For his faith, he was rewarded with complete healing. He was able to not only get up and walk, but also to carry his bedding. This, after thirty-eight years of sickness in which he had been unable to move his arms and legs! This is the amazing power of unquestioning faith, which, as Jesus said, could even move mountains.

When the elders saw the paralytic man walking with his bedding, they became angry. It was Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath. Instead of being happy for his healing, they began to scold him for breaking the fourth commandment. But, the paralytic was not breaking it. The commandment required people to give the Sabbath to God, that they make it holy by doing holy things. However, the Jewish elders had changed the meaning of the commandment and used it to forbid any kind of activity.

The paralytic explained that he was following the instructions of the Man who had healed him. Although they already knew that it was Jesus, the elders sternly asked him to tell them who that Man was. The paralytic could not tell them. He did not know Jesus and could not point Him out as by then, Jesus had disappeared into the crowd.

Sometime later, Jesus met the paralytic in the Temple. Being God, Jesus knew the reason for the man's long suffering. It was because of serious sins. Jesus wanted him to understand this and not to return to his sins. He needed to repent and change. Therefore, Jesus told him, "You are now well. Sin no more, so that nothing worse happens to you". The man now knew who had healed him. Not suspecting the evil intentions of the Jewish elders, he returned to tell them.

If the elders had been upset with Jesus before this healing, they were really angry now. Not only was Jesus not following their teaching on the Sabbath Himself, He was even instructing others to do the same. They could not allow this to continue. They were not interested in the fact that Jesus was showing people the correct way to obey God's commandments. Since they were interested in political power instead of holiness, they often would change the meaning of God's commandments on purpose. They did this in order to get better control of the people. Jesus was interfering with their plans. Therefore, they began to persecute Him.

In vain did Jesus try to explain to them that He only taught as required by God. He was the Son of God and had to do the work required of Him by the Holy Trinity. When they heard this, they decided that they had to kill Him. He had called Himself God. They did not want to believe Him, and even more importantly, they needed to stop the people from believing in Him. He was such a danger to their power that He had to be killed.

CHAPTER 16

THE LORD CHOOSES HIS TWELVE APOSTLES

As Jesus continued to teach and work many miracles, more and more people began to follow Him. He brought great comfort and hope to the common people in their very hard life. Jesus was very different from the Jewish elders who considered the common people beneath them and treated them very badly. Jesus, on the other hand, reached out to anyone who needed Him and listened to His teaching.

Jesus especially reached out to the sinners. Jesus accepted any sinner, no matter how sinful he was. By teaching him to repent and change, Jesus would make a new person out of him. This greatly angered the Jewish elders. They considered it improper for a teacher to associate with sinners. But when they would protest, Jesus would respond that He was sent by God as a spiritual physician to heal spiritually sick people. The sinners were the ones who needed His help the most, and He needed to be with them in order to cure them.

As the crowds grew in size, Jesus had to spend more and more time in each place. At the same time, He still needed to travel to many new places. He realized that by Himself, he would not be able to go to all the people in all the different countries that needed Him. The success of His mission depended on getting people to help Him teach. And since they would be teaching in His divine name, it was important to choose the right people.

Before making His choices, Jesus left the crowd and went to a mountain to pray. He went there alone and spent the whole night in prayer. Once again, Jesus showed by His personal example what one must do before attempting anything important. If Jesus, the Son of God and the Savior of the world, prayed before making a very important decision, how much more important it is for us, plain people, to do the same.

When daylight came, Jesus returned. He was now ready to choose. From the people following Him, He chose His most important helpers, the twelve apostles. These people were to become the preachers of His teaching to the whole world. The twelve apostles He chose were:

1. **Simon**, whom Jesus named Peter because of his rock-like faith.
2. **Andrew**, Simon's brother, named the first-called because he was the first to come to Jesus after Jesus came out of the desert.

3. **James**, the son of Zebedee.
4. **John**, James' brother, also called the Theologian because of his spiritual nature. Jesus often called these two brothers sons of thunder because their fiery nature.
5. **Philip**
6. **Nathaniel** (also called Bartholomew)
7. **Thomas**
8. **Matthew**, the tax-collector.
9. **James**, known as the lesser, in contrast to the first James.
10. **Simon** the Zealot.
11. **Judas** (not the traitor).
12. **Judas** Iscariot (the traitor.)

Jesus gave the apostles power to heal the sick, cast demons out of possessed people, and even to resurrect the dead. Sometimes they traveled with Him, at which times He would teach them the most complete details of His teaching. At other times He sent them out alone, either to teach by themselves or to prepare the people for His arrival. These twelve men traveled all over the world spreading Jesus' teaching both during His lifetime and especially after His death. They were the founders of the Christian Church. These same apostles will also act as the jury during the dread Judgment Day at the end of the world.

CHAPTER 17

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT. THE BEATITUDES.

After choosing the twelve apostles, Jesus began to descend down the mountain. He was met there by many people. His fame had spread throughout the whole country and



even into the neighboring lands. People came from all directions to listen to His teaching. Those who were sick sought to touch Him because simply touching Him was enough to receive healing.

The sight of the huge crowd confirmed to Jesus that it was time to send His apostles out to help Him teach. But first He needed to give them His complete teaching about what people had to do in order to get to Heaven. Once the apostles possessed this knowledge, they would be able to teach others. Therefore, Jesus sat His disciples down and began to speak. This sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, is by far the most important of Jesus' sermons.

Jesus taught people to behave differently from the way they were required to behave before His birth

(in the Old Testament). The Old Testament had very strict laws which people had to obey. It did not require people to understand those laws, only to obey them. This was not enough in the New Testament. Jesus taught that people had to both understand and obey His teaching. Only by understanding it were people able to obey in a way that made them better people. Jesus wanted people to obey Him because they loved Him.

Loving God and other people gives us the strength to do good things and at the same time become better people. Loving correctly is very hard. For this reason, Jesus gives us invisible spiritual power from the Holy Spirit. This power is called Divine Grace. Through this power, we learn how to love God and other people. Our love makes us kind and gentle. The more love grows in us, the closer we get to God. The closer we get to God, the more we become like Him. This is what Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount.

The first part of the sermon is called the Beatitudes. These are nine commandments which work like a ladder leading to Heaven. Walking up this ladder brings people closer and closer to God. They become more and more like God. The major laws in the Old Testament were the Ten Commandments. These were given by God and still apply in the New Testament. The Beatitudes help explain how to correctly understand and live by the Ten Commandments as well as the rest of God's law.

Step One: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.* All people are sinners. People do a lot of wrong things. Sometimes this is because they do not know that what they are doing is wrong. Other times, they know but cannot stop themselves. Unless a person realizes that he is leading a sinful life which will prevent him from reaching Heaven, he will never change. Therefore, the first thing a person needs to do is to realize how poor his life is in good deeds. This is what it means to be poor in spirit. Only in this way is a person able to begin to improve and take his first step to Heaven.

When a person understands his true condition, he stops being proud. There is nothing to be proud of. He realizes how much he needs God to improve him, that he cannot do it by himself. In this way, he learns to be humble.

Step two. *Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.* A person who honestly sees his true sinful condition grieves because he is so far from God. He regrets that he is so sinful and knows that he will not go to Heaven without God help. So, he turns to God and asks for forgiveness and the strength to improve.

God truly loves all people no matter how bad they are. He is ready to improve anyone who asks Him to do this. When a sinful person repents, God immediately forgives him and begins to work on the person's improvement. As this person's sins are forgiven, his conscience stops bothering him. He begins to feel comforted, finding peace in his heart.

Step three. *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.* Once a person is forgiven and feels the comfort of a peaceful heart, he becomes very patient and does not anger easily. He does not want to lose his peace. Previously, he was a sinner, helpless in his sin. This helps him to appreciate the helplessness of sinners. He is able to feel compassion for them. How can he get angry when he too was a sinner? He becomes meek.

A meek person also has great patience with whatever troubles come to him. His closeness to God and the peace he has in his heart give him great strength. He loves God

and knows that if God allows something bad to happen to him, it is only to improve him even more. His great patience teaches other people. Through his example, they also learn how to turn to God and improve.

Step four. *Blessed are those that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.* The more a person improves, the more God comforts Him. The more comfort he gets, the more he improves. Experiencing how wonderful life is with God, he wants it more and more. Therefore, he tries even harder. His need for this life is as strong as thirst and hunger in other people.

Step five. *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.* A person who used to be a sinner understands how wonderful it is to be changed by God. He feels great gratitude to God and sympathy for people who are still sinners. Appreciating their difficulty, he tries to be kind to them and help them. When they are treated kindly, their hearts soften. They realize how wonderful it is to be a good person. They also then turn to God for help. And God rewards both the merciful person and the sinners this person brought to Him through his kindness. The actions of the merciful person cause God to treat him in an even more merciful way.

Step six. *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.* The more God changes a person the closer this person is to God. The closer he is to God, the more he understands God and God's commandments. God begins to occupy more and more space in his heart, freeing it from evil. While on earth, this person is able to see God with his heart. In Heaven, he will be able to see God face to face as did Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Step seven. *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.* By the time the seventh step is reached, the person has become holy. God has a very strong place in this person's heart, and he has great peace. He cannot tolerate any kind of evil between people. Whenever he sees one person hurting another, he has to stop it. He strives to convince the people to forgive each other and live together in love. Saving people from evil makes him just like Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ saves people from evil and sin. In his small way, this person is doing similar work. Through this, he becomes the adopted son of God.

Step eight. *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.* The devil hates holiness. Sinful people belong to him, and he does not want to give back a single soul to God. As a person becomes more and more holy, he becomes more and more of a threat to the devil. The devil does not give up the soul of this person willingly and tries very hard to return the person to evil. The persons' resistance only makes the devil try even harder.

God allows the devil to persecute this person to make him spiritually stronger. One has to defeat evil in order to be free of it. Only in this way will evil lose power over that person. Also, other people watching him defeat evil learn from him. They see that evil can be defeated, and they follow his example. God rewards this person for winning the war with evil and also teaching others by his actions by allowing him to live eternally with great honor in Heaven.

Step nine. *Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in Heaven.* God encourages us not to lose hope when the devil begins to persecute us. We should not get discouraged even when the devil uses people to do his dirty work. Yes, this can be very discouraging. We are trying to help other people, but they respond with evil and try to hurt us. However, this should only encourage us to be even more holy, to try even harder. We should remember that people did this same type of evil to Jesus Christ. They even killed Him. Through our tolerating evil, we become similar to Christ. And the more a person is like Jesus Christ, the greater will be his reward in Heaven.

CHAPTER 18

SERMON ON THE MOUNT: OTHER TEACHINGS

Providence of God.

God did not leave the world after He finished creating it. He continues to care for it. He continually provides the thing necessary in the world. God especially cares for His highest creation, people. He is always sending angels into the world to fix things. God takes care of His children, all people, many times better than a human father can take care of his children and family. He even promises people that if they concentrate on mostly spiritual things, He will supply them with everything that they need in the world: food, clothing, shelter, etc. We don't need to worry about these things as long as we spend all of our time trying to be holy.

Judging other people.

When we do something wrong, we always find an excuse for our behavior. We also find a way to justify ourselves. But when we see other people doing something wrong, we criticize them severely. Jesus warns us that He will judge us as severely as we judge other people. We should be very strict with ourselves and very merciful to others. In fact, it is better not to judge anyone at all. Then God will be very merciful to us.

Forgiving people.

Jesus warns us that He will only forgive the sins of those who forgive others. If we hold grudges and do not forgive other people, He will not forgive us our sins. There is no way that we can ever get to Heaven if God does not forgive us our very many sins.

Power of prayer.

Jesus promises us that our prayers will always be answered. Sometimes, He will wait before answering. When He does this, He is either testing us or waiting for the right time to answer. Therefore, we should never lose hope but continue to pray. The only time that God will not give us what we ask for is when it is bad for our salvation. God is our

loving Heavenly Father. He always listens to His children and gives them what they need.

Helping people.

God loves us and always takes care of us. At the same time, He expects us to do the same for each other. We too must love **all** people and help them when we can. And we should do this out of love, not for praise. If we do this for praise, then praise will be our only reward and, we will not receive any reward from God. But when we do it out of love, especially when we do it secretly, God will reward us both in Heaven and while still on earth.

Doing good deeds.

It is not enough to just believe in God. The devil also believes in God. To please God and get to Heaven, we have to also love Him. And as God tells us, loving God means obeying His commandments. In other words, we have to make our love be alive by doing good deeds.

God expects us to do good deeds for Him and for other people. By doing this we are showing our love to Him and other people. We are also giving an example to other people of how to live correctly. If we do this, God will reward us by letting us live with Him in Heaven.

CHAPTER 19 TEACHING BY PARABLES. PARABLE OF THE SOWER

When God created the first people, He used to come to them every day to teach them all about Himself, His laws, and the world in general. The first information man received was from God. After Adam sinned and had to leave the Garden of Paradise, God continued to appear, but did so much less frequently. Because of their sins, people also began to understand God less and less. To be able to see and understand God, a person has to be holy. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

As things became more and more confused, it became necessary for God's laws to be written down. The Holy Spirit then guided holy people to begin to record God's laws and history in books. These books, called Sacred Scripture, were gathered into one book called the Bible. The first author of Sacred Scripture was the prophet, Moses.

But even writing down God's law was not enough to keep people's understanding of it pure. Since most of the people could not read, they depended on scholars, called scribes, to explain God's teachings to them. This gave the scribes great power. Unfortunately, they became spoiled by this power. They often teamed up with the corrupt leaders of the people and misused Scripture. They misrepresented God's word in such a way as to allow themselves to become very rich, make themselves look like important and holy people, and keep the people under their control. And since most of the people could not read, they did not know how evil the scribes had become and how badly they were misusing Sacred Scripture.

By the time the Savior arrived, the spiritual condition of the people was so low that teaching them was very difficult. To make it easier for the people to understand what He was teaching, Jesus began to use parables. A parable is a story that uses real-life examples

to teach people important lessons. The first such parable was the parable of the sower.

A farmer went into the field to plant his crop. As he was sowing, (scattering seeds on the ground to plant them) some of the seeds fell by the road alongside his field. These were either trampled by people walking on the road or eaten by birds. Other seeds fell into the rocky part of the field where the soil was very shallow. When these seeds sprouted, the young plants could not survive because the sun soon dried up the soil, killing them. Still other seeds fell into the part of the field which was full of weeds. There, the newly sprouted plants were squeezed out by the thorny, stronger weeds. Finally, the remainder of the seeds fell on the good soil that was well tilled and cleared of rocks and weeds. These seeds were able to mature into strong plants from which the farmer was able to get a rich crop.

The type of farming work described by Jesus in this parable was very common in Palestine. Therefore, people who listened to it were able to understand the important message in it. Later, Jesus explained the full meaning of His story to His apostles. His explanation was as follows:

THE SOWER is someone who tries to teach people God's law. This could be a priest, a parent, a teacher, etc.

THE SEEDS are the teachings of God, His laws or commandments.

THE ROADSIDE stands for the people who hear the teaching but are not interested in it. Instead of following God's teaching, they allow the devil to take it away from them.

THE ROCKY AREA stands for people who receive the teaching with joy and begin to follow it, but as soon as it becomes difficult, they quit trying.

THE THORNY WEEDS stand for people who also accept God's teaching and begin to follow it, but who soon stop because their everyday cares are more important to them.

THE GOOD, RICH SOIL stands for the people who accept God's teaching and love it so much that they don't allow any difficulties or troubles to stop them from following it. Their lives are therefore very rich in good deeds.

In this parable, Jesus Christ shows that His teaching is not easy to follow, but requires continued hard work. Achieving salvation does not come easily. One cannot allow everyday cares and needs to stop him. One has to continue living according to God's teaching and be willing to suffer hardship and even persecution. However, the effort is well worth the reward. A person who lives according to God's commandments will have a life very rich in spiritual good things. And only this kind of person will get to Heaven.

CHAPTER 20

MIRACLES OF JESUS CHRIST

During His three years of teaching, Jesus Christ gave many vivid examples of His love for suffering people by doing miracles. Through these, He helped people in need and at the same time taught the very important lesson that it is not enough to say that we love

people. One has to do good deeds to show that his love is real. The miracles done by Jesus Christ also served to start and build faith in the people who witnessed the miracles.

The resurrection of the widow's son at Nain. Once when entering the city of Nain, Jesus and His disciples came across a funeral procession. The body of a child whose mother was a widow was being taken to the cemetery for burial. Having first lost her husband, the grief-struck woman was now following the funeral procession of her only child. Jesus was very moved by her grief and decided to help her. He stopped the procession, spoke to the dead boy, and commanded him to rise. To everyone's amazement, the dead boy sat up and began to talk. Jesus returned him to his overjoyed mother.

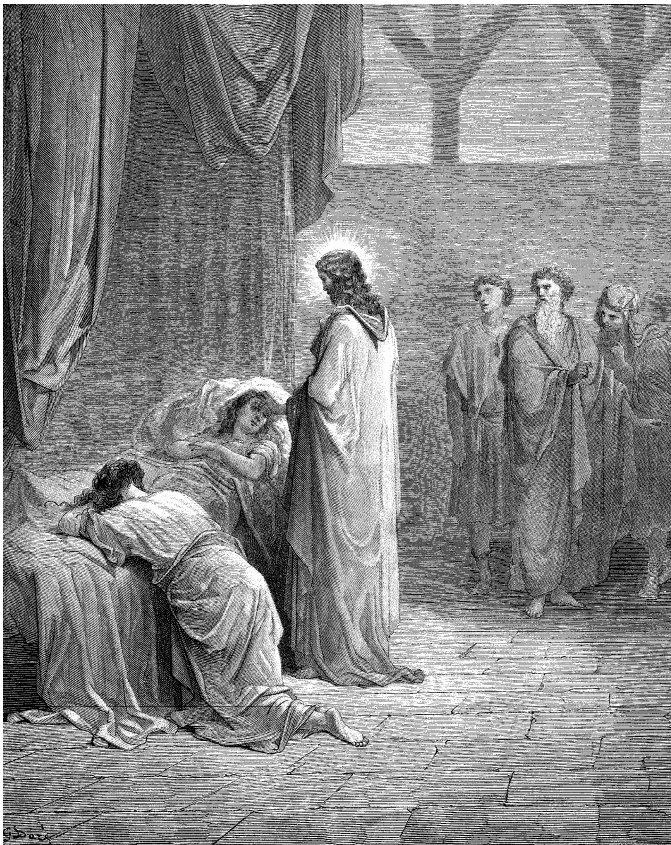
The stilling of the storm. Jesus and His disciples were traveling across the Sea of Galilee. During the trip, Jesus fell asleep in the front of the boat. All of a sudden, a huge storm struck. Large waves began whipping the boat, and it started to fill up with water. Even though they were experienced fishermen, the disciples could not control the boat. They thought that they were going to sink and called out in terror to Jesus who was still sleeping. Jesus got up and ordered the sea to become calm. Instantly, the sea grew still. Then He turned to His disciples and scolded them for their lack of faith. They knew that He was the Savior and should have never doubted that He would protect them.

The healing of the daughter of a Canaanite woman. Once near the cities of Tyre and Sidon, a Canaanite woman came to where Jesus was teaching a crowd of people. From a distance, she began to plead with Him to heal her daughter who was possessed by a demon. Jesus ignored her and kept on teaching, but this only made her plead more persistently. Tired of her cries, the apostles asked Jesus to send her away. When He refused to help her, she ran up to Him, fell on her knees and continued to beg. Then, Jesus gave her a very strange and seemingly cruel answer. He told her that He was sent to help the Jewish people and to help her would be the same as taking food away from children

(the Jews) and giving it to dogs (pagans).

Surprisingly, the Canaanite woman did not get insulted. Instead, she showed incredible faith by humbly telling Jesus that often dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the table where children are eating. Jesus praised her for her deep humility and faith, and rewarded her by healing her daughter.

This miracle was especially wonderful because it gave a very important lesson to the Jews concerning love and humility. They despised pagans and considering them to be less than people and more like animals. Yet this pagan woman had the faith and humility that few Jews possessed. Jesus treated her badly at first so that the Jews could learn from her. As God, He knew how she would respond. Once the



lesson was complete, He showed His love for her by healing her daughter. The healing was also done to reward her for her amazing spiritual qualities.

Raising the daughter of Jairus. Jairus was a Jewish elder and a ruler at one of the synagogues. He had a twelve year old daughter who became very sick. The doctors were unable to help her and said that she was going to die. Despite being an elder and belonging to the group that hated and persecuted Jesus, Jairus rushed to Him and begged Him to come to his house to heal the girl. Jesus agreed and started to go with Jairus when servants from Jairus's house ran up to them with the news that it was too late, that the girl had just died.

When Jesus heard what the servants were saying, He turned to Jairus and told him not to be afraid but to have faith and believe that his daughter would be saved. He went with the elder to his house. When they arrived, Jesus told all the people who had gathered there to mourn the girl that they should stop their weeping because she was only sleeping. They taunted Him, knowing that she was dead. Jesus then ordered all the people to leave the house, except for the parents and three of His apostles, Peter, James and John. He took the dead girl by the hand and with a loud voice ordered her to rise. This command was obeyed by her soul which returned to her body, and she got up and began to walk.

Jesus did many other miracles. Through them, He taught us to always do everything we can to help other people. As God, Jesus was able to help people by doing miracles. Even though we, as people, are unable to perform miracles, we can do many other things within our power to help those in need. In this way, we can follow the example of Jesus Christ and work out our salvation.

CHAPTER 21

THE BEHEADING OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

After Adam's fall into sin, God appeared to people less and less frequently. He taught mostly through especially appointed holy people called prophets. When necessary, God appeared to a prophet with a special message or teaching that the prophet would then pass on to the people. God also blessed His prophets with great powers. They performed great miracles, such as healing the sick or possessed, resurrecting the dead, stopping time, stopping the flow of rivers, and many others. God taught the prophets about what was to occur in the future, especially regarding the promised Savior. The prophets wrote down much of this revelation. Their writings were included in the Holy Scripture of the Old Testament.

The last and greatest of these prophets was St. John the Baptist. All the prophets prepared people for the coming of the Savior, but St. John did the most important part of this preparation. His duty was to make sure people were spiritually prepared for the actual arrival of the Savior. St. John taught people how to repent and change their way of life so that they would be able to purify their hearts and understand and accept the teachings of the Savior. God gave St. John the power to see through people. When a person came to St. John, he knew everything about that person, even those things that the person did not tell him. This power was very important to St. John as without it, he would not be able to correctly advise and improve the people who came to him. (God sometimes gives this same kind of power to holy men and women to help them give spiritual advice to the people who come to them for help. This spiritual power is called "clairvoyance".)

St. John did his work so well that his disciples grew to love him deeply. They

loved and respected him so much that even after the Savior's arrival, they found it hard to leave their teacher. Therefore, it became necessary for him to leave this world so that his people would feel free to follow the Savior. God rewarded St. John with a martyr's death, making his death his final lesson to his followers. St. John showed by his personal example that people had to stay faithful to God and His teachings even if it meant being killed for it.

The ruler of the place where St. John taught was King Herod Antipas. This king was equal in evil to his father, King Herod the Great, the murderer of the Bethlehem children. King Herod Antipas became attracted to his brother's wife, Herodiada, and sent his own wife away so that he could live with Herodiada. Such a sin could not be ignored by such a holy man as St. John who began to teach publicly against the king's actions. King Herod became upset, but he did not dare to punish St. John. He was afraid of the love that the people had for St. John..

Herodiada, on the other hand, could not tolerate St. John's criticism. This very evil woman kept demanding that the king kill St. John. To calm her anger, the king imprisoned the prophet but refused to kill him. Not only did he fear the people's anger, he also respected the saint and often went to him for advice. Herodiada had to wait for an appropriate time to get her evil wish.

St. John had been in prison for a year when the evil queen finally got her chance. The king made a big feast to celebrate his birthday and invited many guests. During the celebration after a lot of wine had been consumed and all were in a very cheerful mood, the queen sent her very beautiful daughter to dance in front of the guests. This dance so pleased Herod that he wished to reward the girl in a very big way. He asked her to name her prize and promised to give her whatever she wanted, up to even one-half of his kingdom. The girl ran to ask her mother for advice. The mother told her to demand that St. John's head be given to her on a specially prepared tray.

The king was very saddened when he heard her demand. However, he did not want to go back on his word in front of his guests and sent his bodyguard to the prison to cut off St. John's head. The bloody head was given to the girl, who gleefully handed it over to her vicious mother. Herodiada took the head and for a long time afterward continued to show her hatred by sticking pins into the tongue of the prophet. The disciples of St. John took his body away and buried it. Thus was ended the earthly life of the saint who is first in Heaven after the Mother of God.

St. John's murder shows us very clearly why Jesus Christ in His Sermon on the Mount taught that people should not make promises and oaths, especially foolish ones. If a person was as honest as he is supposed to be, he would never need an oath to convince people that what he was saying was true. What happened to Herod shows what can happen when one makes a foolish promise. If a person makes a promise to God and that promise is to do a bad thing, this person should sincerely ask for God's forgiveness and then **not** do the evil thing he had promised to do. Otherwise, that person will be like King Herod and wind up doing two evils, insulting God with an evil oath and doing the evil promised by the oath.

CHAPTER 22

FEEDING FIVE THOUSAND WITH FIVE LOAVES

When Jesus heard about the death of St. John the Baptist, He wanted to be alone with His disciples. He got into a boat with them and sailed to a lonely place. Along the shore, people saw them and ran following them in the direction that the boat was going. Along the way, more and more people joined the crowd. By the time the boat landed, thousands of people were waiting to greet Jesus. Seeing how much He was needed, Jesus went to the people. He spoke to them for many hours and healed many sick people who were brought to Him. Nobody noticed how quickly time was passing until it was late evening.

Seeing that night was at hand, the disciples came up to Jesus and suggested that He tell the people to leave so that they would have time to find food and shelter in the neighboring villages. But Jesus told them that they should feed the crowd. He instructed them to find out how much food was available. After checking in the crowd, the disciples returned and told Jesus that the only food that they could find was from a boy who had five loaves of bread and two fish. This was hardly enough to feed so many people. Jesus, however, commanded that the disciples bring this food to him and seat the crowd on the ground in groups of fifty and one hundred.



When all were sitting, Jesus took the food and began to pray. He blessed the food, broke it into pieces and gave it to the disciples to distribute to the people. The disciples obeyed and started to give out the food. Somehow, it turned out that there was enough food. Everybody in the crowd got his share. They ate as much as they wanted and were filled.

When the people were finished eating, Jesus sent the disciples to collect what was left over. To everyone's amazement, twelve baskets of bread crusts were collected from the crowd of five thousand (counting only the men). When the crowd realized what a miracle Jesus had just done, right there in front of them, they became very excited. Shouts were heard that Jesus was the long-awaited one. The excited crowd wanted to take

Jesus and proclaim Him as their king. Seeing the excitement of the crowd and knowing that it could get out of hand, Jesus immediately told His disciples to get into their boat and leave. In the meantime, He would get all the people to return home and then would go into the mountains to pray. The disciples obeyed and left in their boat.

Later that night as Jesus prayed, he was able to see from his place on the mountain

the boat with the apostles traveling in the middle of the sea. He noticed that a storm was starting and large waves were beginning to rock the boat. Seeing that the apostles were afraid and in danger, Jesus decided to go to them. He hurried down the mountain to the shore and continued to walk toward the boat on the water.

When the apostles saw Jesus approaching, they mistook Him for a ghost and cried out in fear. He shouted to them not to be afraid. Seeing Jesus walking on the water, Apostle Peter was so impressed that he asked if he, too, could walk out on the water to Jesus. Receiving permission, he climbed out of the boat and began to walk. Taking several steps, he suddenly realized where he was and that large waves were crashing down around him. He became frightened. As soon as his faith was shaken, he began to sink into the water and cried out to Jesus to save him. Jesus reached out, grabbed Peter by the hand, and lifted him out of the water. Jesus entered into the boat with him, then scolded him for losing faith. The storm calmed, and they were able to continue without further difficulty. Realizing the greatness of this last miracle, the disciples, praised Jesus as the true Savior.

What happened to Peter shows how important faith is. Jesus taught that the only reason people cannot do miracles is that their faith is too weak. When Peter did not doubt, he walked on the water. As soon as he doubted, he lost that ability. According to an example given by Jesus, anyone is able to move even a mountain if he does not doubt that he is able to do this.

CHAPTER 23

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE LORD

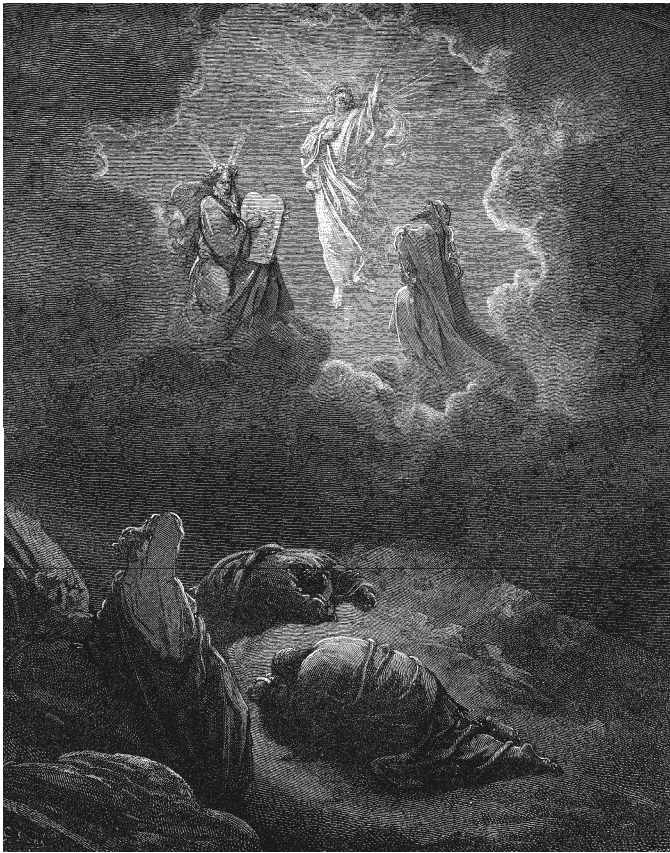
Being God, Jesus knew everything about His apostles, including their inner strengths and weaknesses. He knew how difficult it would be for them to accept the fact that He would allow Himself to be captured, humiliated, beaten, and killed in the most terrible way. He knew that when they would see this happening, their faith in Him as the Savior would be greatly shaken. Therefore, Jesus decided to show His full Godly glory to three of the strongest of the apostles, Peter, James, and John. Then, when all the apostles hear of the Resurrection and will not believe it, these three would be able to strengthen the others by sharing with them how they saw Jesus in His full divine glory before His death.

For this purpose, Jesus took the three with Him to Mount Tabor. He left them before reaching the top of the mountain and continued on to the top by Himself, here He began to pray. He prayed for such a long time that the apostles become tired and fell asleep on the ground. Suddenly, they were jolted awake by a very powerful light. Looking up to where Jesus had been praying, their eyes saw a wondrous sight. They saw Jesus as they had never seen Him before. He was shining in radiant light. Everything about Him shone, His body, His face, even His clothes. He shone so brightly that it was almost impossible to look at Him. He was brighter than the sun and whiter than pure snow. Watching this incredible sight, they felt their hearts fill with a powerful, peaceful, heavenly joy.

Jesus was not alone on the mountain. With Him were two of the greatest prophets, Moses and Elijah. The prophets were talking with Jesus about all the details of His approaching suffering and death at the hands of the Jews. Watching them, the apostles felt such happiness that they did not know or care where they were. This was why when the prophets began to leave, Peter cried out to them to stop. He offered to put up three tents for them if only they would stay. He said this not realizing what he was saying. He just

wanted everything to remain as it was.²

As all of this was happening, a Cloud appeared and covered them. A majestic



Voice resounded from the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him." The Most Holy Trinity had once again appeared to the world. The voice was that of God the Father; God the Son stood as the transfigured Jesus; and the Holy Spirit was present in the form of the Cloud (just as God appeared to the Hebrews as a pillar of cloud in the desert).

The Voice so frightened the apostles that they fell to the ground and covered their faces in fear. Jesus then walked up to them and told them not to be afraid but to get up. When the apostles obeyed, they saw that He had His normal appearance once again. As they walked down the mountain, Jesus instructed them not to tell anyone about what they had just witnessed until after His Resurrection.

CHAPTER 24

JESUS CHRIST'S TEACHING ON LOVE THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

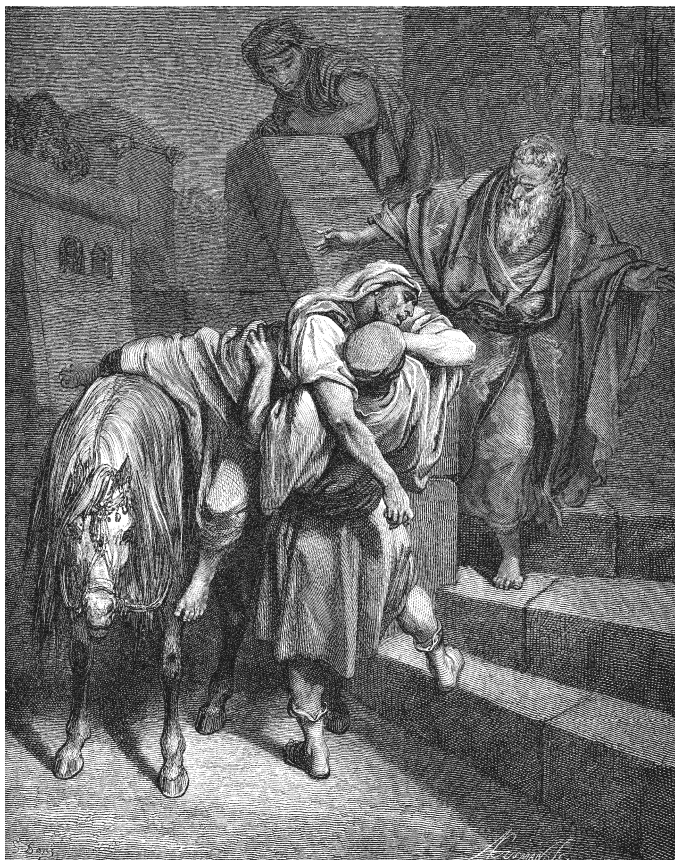
Jesus Christ was often asked which were His most important commandments, what a person needed to do to be sure that he would get into Heaven. Jesus always responded that love, true divine love was the only thing that was needed. His whole teaching was contained in just two commandments.

1. *"Love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength."* This is the major commandment.
2. *"Love your neighbor as much as you love yourself."*

Jesus explained that no other commandments would be necessary if people would learn to love correctly. All other commandments and teachings by the prophets only instruct how to follow and obey these two commandments. For example, if a person truly loves God, he does not need to be taught the importance of prayer. His love moves him to pray. A person would not need commandments to tell him not to steal, kill, or hurt anyone because love would not allow him to do these things. Love would make him want to help the poor and treat all people kindly. When a person loves correctly, he becomes more and more like God and no longer needs God's commandments to teach him how to live.

² What the apostles were experiencing was a foretaste of life in Heaven.

Once, a scribe who had heard Jesus teach how to correctly love according to these



two commandments, asked Jesus whom should he consider to be his neighbor. He asked this question because he did not want to part with the false understanding of love as taught by the Jewish elders and scribes. The scribes were evil and proud people who taught that only a person equal to them or better than they were should be considered a neighbor and worthy of love. They considered that all others were too low and not deserving of their attention. Jesus showed the scribe how wrong he was through the parable of the good Samaritan.

A Jew was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. During this trip, he was attacked by robbers. They stole everything he had and beat him so badly that he lay on the road unable to get up. As he lay there, he was passed over by first a

Jewish priest, then a Levite (a Jewish church official). They did not want to get involved and passed by, ignoring him. The third person who came by was a Samaritan (Samaritans were part Jewish and part pagan by religion, and were despised by Jews who considered it beneath them to talk to a Samaritan.) This Samaritan, seeing the suffering of the Jew, took pity on him. He stopped, treated his wounds with oil and bandaged them. Then lifting him up onto his horse, the Samaritan took the Jew to a nearby inn and continued to care for him. When he had to leave the next morning, he paid the innkeeper to continue caring for the injured man, promising to pay him back when he returns if the innkeeper needs to spend more money than he had given him.

Upon finishing the parable, Jesus asked the scribe who should be considered to be the neighbor to the injured man. When the scribe replied that it was the Samaritan because of the mercy he had shown, Jesus instructed him to do likewise.

Through this parable, Jesus taught the haughty scribe that a good Christian does not look at the nationality, race, religion, or even social position of those with whom he comes in contact. Anyone we meet, no matter who he is, is sent to us by God and is deserving of our love and care. Only love that includes all people is strong enough to get us into Heaven.

CHAPTER 25

THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON

The Jewish elders treated most people badly. They taught that people should care for only those who are either equal or superior to themselves. They especially hated non-Jews, but even the simple Jewish people or supposed sinners were treated with contempt. Especially hated were tax collectors, whom the elders considered to be the worst kind of people possible. Not only did the elders personally mistreat people, they looked at with disfavor on anybody who did not do this also.

Jesus Christ did not follow this incorrect teaching. He welcomed anyone who came to Him. As the Savior, he responded to anyone who needed His spiritual help. He would enter any house and eat with the worst sinner if He knew that this love would bring that person to repentance and back to God. Because of this, the Jewish elders mocked Jesus. They accused Him of being a sinner, because He associated with sinners. They did not understand Him, nor did they wish to. They did not want to part with their wrong teaching. To give these hard hearts a chance to repent and return to God's true understanding of love, Jesus reached out to them many times. During one such attempt, Jesus gave them the parable of the prodigal son in which he showed that God accepts joyously any sinner who repents.

In the parable, Jesus talked about a man who had two sons. One day, the younger son came to the father and asked him to divide up his property and give him his portion. At first, the father refused, but when the son kept begging him, he agreed. The son took his portion of the money and moved away to a distant land. There, he began to live freely, carelessly spending all of his money. Soon the money ran out, and he had to find a job to support himself. The only job that he was able to get was to work as a swine-herd.³

Soon, the country was hit by a severe famine. Because of the famine, the son was unable find food. He would have gladly eaten the food given to the pigs if only someone would have given him some. He began to remember how wonderful life had been in his father's house where even the lowest servant lived so much better than he was living now. This made him realize how seriously he had offended both God and his father. Repenting of his evil, he decided to try to return home. He did not dare to hope that his father would accept him again as a son, but maybe his father would agree to hire him as a servant. With this hope, he began his trip to his father's house

As the son was approaching his father's house, the father spotted him. With great joy, he ran out to meet him and began kissing and embracing him. The son fell to his knees and told the father that he realized how much he had sinned and that he was not worthy to be a son. He asked the father to allow him to work for him as a servant, but the father would not hear of it. He ordered his servants to dress his son in the finest clothes, put a ring on his finger,⁴ and kill the fatted calf for a feast in celebration of the son's return.

In the middle of the celebration, the older son returned from his work in the fields. As he neared the house, he heard the festive noise asked the servants what was going on. When he told of the reason for the celebration, instead of rejoicing, he became angry and refused to join the feast. His father had to come out to him and beg him to join them.

³ A swine-herd is a person who takes care of pigs. Pigs were unclean animals and anyone who touched them was an outcast.

⁴ A ring was a symbol of membership in the family and gave authority over all the servants.



In this parable, the father symbolizes God. The younger son is any sinner who leaves God and begins to live in an evil way, which causes him to lose God's protection and blessings. This way of life places the sinner in great danger as without God's protection the person is easy prey for the devil. God honors the person's free will and does not interfere with his choice. He patiently waits for the person to come to his senses and repent. If this sinner repents, as did the son in the parable, and seeks to return to the protection of God symbolized by the father's house, God, as a loving father, accepts him. The return of the sinner is a great joy to God and is shared by the members of God's household, the angels. Just as the father did to the prodigal son, God even returns to this repentant sinner all His mercy and blessings that the

sinner enjoyed before his fall into sin. This parable shows us how merciful and forgiving God is to us no matter how deeply we fall into sin. All we need to do is repent.

At the same time, the parable also gives us a warning. If God and the angels rejoice at the repentance of a sinner, so should those Christians who remained faithful and never left God. Unfortunately, this is not always so. Very often, faithful Christians envy the love that God gives a repentant sinner. They consider the sinner to be unworthy. They believe that since they never left God's presence, they are the ones who should be getting His blessings and love. Such Christians look down with contempt on repentant sinners and are symbolized in the parable by the older brother. The parable teaches us that they are wrong. We should want salvation for all people, including those that fall away from God and do evil things. If such a sinner repents, the faithful Christian should rejoice along with God and all the angels.

CHAPTER 26

THE PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

Another very important part of Jesus Christ's teaching on love concerns what people should do with their riches. To correctly obey the commandment to love others as one loves himself a rich person is required to use his riches not only for himself, but to help others in need. God expects the rich person to use his wealth to do good deeds. This is the reason God gives large wealth to people. If a person uses this wealth only for himself, he is not doing what God expects and will have to answer to God for this. This truth is very clearly shown in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

The parable told of a rich man who lived only for his own pleasure. He wore the most expensive clothes and feasted daily at a very rich banquet. Meanwhile, outside the gates of his house lay a very sick man by the name of Lazarus. He was so weak that he could not even chase away the dogs that licked the sores covering his body. This poor man would have been happy to get just the crumbs that fell from the banquet table of the rich man.

Having endured much suffering, which he bore with great humility, Lazarus died and was carried by the angels into Heaven, onto the bosom of Abraham. Soon the rich man also died and was buried. His uncaring soul wound up in hell in great torture. From there, he looked up and saw Abraham with Lazarus in Heaven and called out to them. He asked Abraham to send Lazarus to dip his finger in water to cool his burning tongue.



Abraham denied the rich man his request. He explained that between Heaven and hell lay a great distance which could not be crossed in either direction. He reminded him how selfishly he had lived, never paying attention to Lazarus who lay in great suffering outside the gate of his house. Not once did he offer him any help despite seeing him every time he entered or left his house. This was reason that Lazarus was rejoicing now in Heaven and the rich man was suffering in hell.

When the rich man realized that he could not be helped, he remembered his brothers who were still alive. Not wanting them to share his terrible fate, he asked Abraham to send Lazarus to warn them to change the way they lived while they still had a chance. Abraham replied that they already knew how they should live because they had the teachings of Moses and the other prophets to teach them. The rich man pleaded that this was not enough, that if someone were to come to them from the dead to tell them what awaits them, they would change. But Abraham sadly replied that even that would not change them. A person who ignored God's

teaching would not be moved even by a person coming to him from the dead.

This parable demonstrates how strict God is with people who refuse to live according to His commandments. If He was so strict with the rich man who had only the Old Testament prophets as teachers, how much more strict will He be with us who have the Savior, Jesus Christ as our teacher. It is not sinful to be rich. It is only sinful to use the riches selfishly. We must share what we have with others. Also, suffering alone does not get us into Heaven. If we accept our suffering with patience, without complaining, without blaming God, and without being jealous of those that do not suffer. Only then does God reward us with Heaven.

CHAPTER 27

HEALING THE TEN LEPERS

The most terrible disease during the time that Jesus lived was leprosy. It was a disease from which a person's body would become covered with open sores and begin to rot. As the disease progressed, the infected parts of the body would begin to fall off. The sick person was doomed to a slow and very painful death.

Since the disease was incurable and highly contagious, a person sick with leprosy was not allowed to live with other people. Lepers lived in colonies outside of town and depended on the mercy of family members or other kind people for their needs. They were forbidden to get close to healthy people, let alone touch anyone. If, by a remote chance, a person was cured, he was allowed to return to society only after being examined by a priest.

Once, when Jesus was entering a village, He was approached by ten lepers. These poor sufferers called out to Him from a distance to help them. Feeling mercy toward them, Jesus told them to go see a priest. Showing remarkable faith, they obeyed without a single question. On the way, they realized that the leprosy had left them and that their bodies were clean of any trace of the disease. Despite this great miracle and obvious mercy given to them, nine of the lepers continued on their way without returning to thank their Savior. Only one of them, who happened to be a Samaritan, found it necessary to return to Jesus to thank Him. Expressing surprise at the ungratefulness of the other nine, Jesus praised the Samaritan for his faith.

This passage of the Gospel is read during special private services done for someone who wants to thank God for a special blessing. It reminds us that God loves us so much that He always answers our prayers. It also shows how important it is to not only ask God for help, but also to thank Him when He responds. People seldom hesitate to ask God for help. Very often though, they forget to thank Him when He does help them. Both this Gospel passage and common courtesy remind us that this is something we must not forget to do.

During His life on earth, Jesus Christ healed many people. He did these healings in different ways, depending on the strength of the faith of the person who was being healed. For those with weak faith, Jesus would heal by touching them on the part of the body that needed healing. For a person with stronger faith, it was enough to simply say that he was healed. Jesus even healed sick people from a long distance if their faith was strong enough. Such was the faith of the ten lepers. Other people were healed by touching Jesus or some part of His clothing, without even speaking to Him. That is how strong

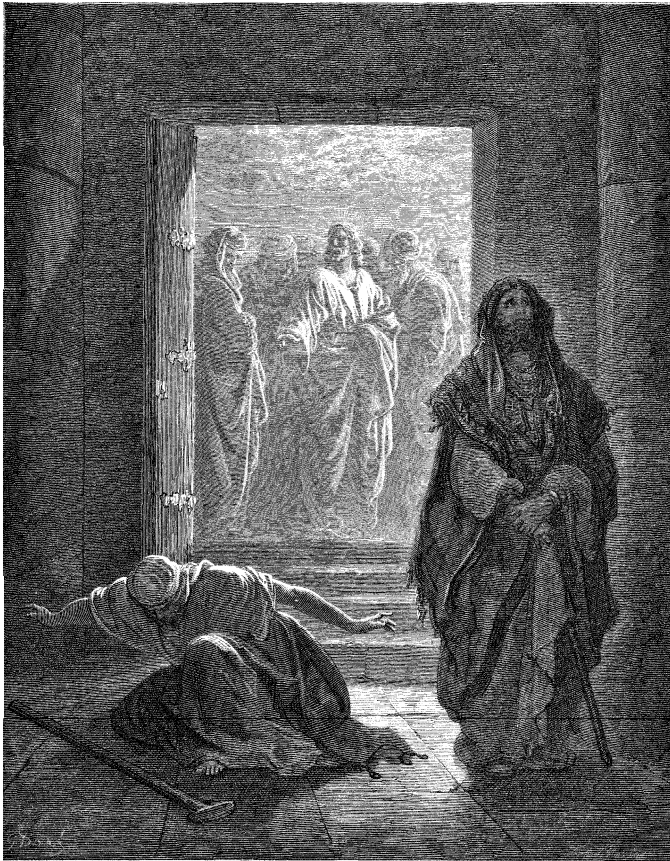
God's love is for suffering people. And when we remember that people get sick because they are sinful, God's love and mercy becomes even more remarkable.

CHAPTER 28

THE PARABLE OF THE PUBLICAN AND THE PHARISEE

Two men went to the Temple to pray. One of them was a Pharisee. As a Pharisee, he belonged to the elite class in Jewish society. The Pharisees were very educated in Hebrew law and experts in Holy Scripture. Along with the scribes, they were the teachers and leaders of the generally uneducated mass of people. Unfortunately, their privileged position corrupted them, and they became very proud and hypocritical. Although they liked to appear holy in front of people, their hearts were hard and unloving. And they were not shy about twisting God's law to cover up their criminal behavior, greed, and love of power.

The other man was a publican. The publicans were the tax collectors for the Roman government and were very corrupt people. They misused their position to collect much more in taxes than they were required to and kept the difference for themselves. Because of their dishonesty and because they worked for a pagan government, the publicans were considered to be the worst kind of sinners, and nobody would have anything to do with them.



When the Pharisee entered the Temple, he went straight to the front and began to pray in the following manner: "Thank you, God, that I am not like other sinners, like the publican standing in the entrance. I do all my required prayers, fast the two days a week, and give the tenth of my earnings to the Temple as required by law." His prayer was very typical of his spiritual condition. He ignored his sins and boasted of his accomplishments. Because he did everything required by law, he considered himself to be holy and better than other people. He did not care that his accomplishments were external and did not change him into a better person. In fact, he did not want to improve himself at all. What he did not realize was that his boastful prayer offended God instead of pleasing Him.

The publican came to the Temple in a very different spiritual condition. He was very aware of his grave fault. In fact, he was so ashamed of his life that he did not dare to enter into the Temple, but stood at the entrance. He even feared to look up but kept his

eyes glued to the ground and beat his chest in despair, pleading for forgiveness, "Lord, have mercy on me a sinner." His sincere, repentant prayer was very pleasing to God. Unlike the Pharisee, he received great benefit from his prayer that day in the Temple.

Jesus gave people this parable as a lesson in humility and repentance. All people sin. But all sin, no matter how minor, is hated by God. God warns people not to be fooled into thinking that small sins are not so bad. Pride prevents people from seeing the harm of their sins, and they then do not correct their lives. Because of this, pride is a fault that angers God immensely and separates a person from God.

When sins are not corrected, they grow into bigger and bigger ones. The only way to weed out sin is through repentance. And repentance is possible only when a person has humility. This is why humility is such an important quality. It allows a person to see and understand his sins. He is able to realize how evil his life is in the eyes of God. His humility also makes him understand that he is unable to resist sin without the help of God. Only then is it possible to plead as did the publican for forgiveness. In response, God readily forgives and helps the sinner to become a better person.

At the same time, asking God for forgiveness is only the beginning. The person still needs to use God's help to try to improve. Repentance is complete, effective, and sincere only when the person makes a real effort to improve. This is the last step in repentance, but one without which repentance is meaningless.

Finally, the Pharisee also committed the grave sin of condemning another person. Jesus Christ died on the cross and resurrected in order to save all people. Because of this, only He can judge the people He has saved. Only He knows the true hearts of all people, all the problems in their lives. We are very quick to forgive ourselves for our own faults because we know and understand our weaknesses. We do not know and understand the weaknesses of other people. Also, the person we are condemning may have already received forgiveness from God, through deep repentance, that we do not know about. In condemning him, we are only angering God. God saved all people and wants us to be like Him and love all people.

CHAPTER 29

THE BLESSING OF CHILDREN

As much as Jesus loved all people, He was especially devoted to children. He enjoyed their innocent, simple, goodness. When the people saw how much Jesus loved their children, they began to bring them to Him. And Jesus would lay His hands on the children to bless them and pray for them. One time, He even used children to teach how people should treat each other.

This happened when Jesus was surrounded by a large crowd of people. Everyone was trying to get closer to Him. There were mothers in this crowd who tried to bring their children to Jesus for His blessing. Wanting to control the crowd, the apostles stopped them. When Jesus noticed this, He became upset. He scolded His apostles and told them to let the children come to Him. He reminded them that all should learn from watching children. A child's faith is simple and complete. A child trusts his parents fully and believes in them without question. People must also have such a trusting, unquestioning faith in God. Without this pure, childlike faith, it is impossible to get into Heaven.



On another occasion, Jesus also spoke about children but this time in a very different way. He reminded people that children are innocent and helpless. They need adults to take care of them and teach them the difference between right and wrong. This innocence and helplessness places children in great danger from evil people. Jesus sternly warned that all children have special protection. Angels invisibly watch over them. Anyone who hurts them or teaches them to do evil things will be severely punished by God.

These two lessons on children should never be forgotten by anyone. The first one describes how much we must change in order to be able to live in Heaven. God is our heavenly, loving Father who takes care of all of our needs. As our Father, God knows exactly what is

good for us, and what will hurt us. All we need to do is to trust Him completely and accept whatever He decides is necessary. This is the way a child in his innocence trusts his parents and never questions their decisions. Unfortunately, all people are damaged by sin and have lost that loving trust. We think that we know what is good for us better than our Heavenly Father. We don't trust Him and try to do things our own way. This is sinful pride. And as we are told again and again in the Bible, God resists the proud. This lesson tells us very clearly that if we don't change, God will not let us into His kingdom which is Heaven.

The second lesson is a warning to evil people who might want to take advantage of the trust a child has in adults and use it for evil purposes. A person who does this very terrible thing will sooner or later be severely punished by God. God has faithful servants, His angels, who obediently do everything God tells them to do. They watch all children and report to God whenever someone does an evil thing to a child. That person will have to face God and suffer a very big punishment. Jesus Christ said that if a person wants to tempt a child, he should first hang a millstone around his neck and drown himself. In other words, a person who kills himself will suffer less in hell than a person who hurts a child. This is the very wonderful protection God gives little children.

CHAPTER 30

The Raising of Lazarus

Not far from Jerusalem there was a small town called Bethany. In this town lived three people, two sisters, Mary and Martha, and their brother, Lazarus. They were especially dear to Jesus, and He loved to spend time with them. In turn, they were very devoted to Him and loved to have Him visit them and teach at their house.

Once during one of Jesus' visits to their house, a large crowd gathered to listen to Him speak. Mary, a very sensitive and deep thinker, also wanted to listen. Therefore, she sat down at His feet and listened to every word with complete attention. In the meantime, Martha was preparing the meal for all the guests. When she saw that Mary was sitting down and not helping her, she became upset and asked Jesus to tell Mary to help her.

Jesus answered Martha by gently scolding her. He explained that Mary had chosen the best possible food. This was food for the soul, God's teachings. This kind of food was much more important than the food that she was preparing. What Jesus meant was that food for the body is eaten and is gone. But when a person gets food for the soul, it never passes away but remains with the person forever. Martha did not need to spend all her time in the kitchen preparing a large meal. It was more to her benefit to prepare a simple meal and still have time to listen to Jesus as He was teaching. This is a very important lesson to us. We should never let our cares for material things become so strong that we are not left with any time for our spiritual life.

The last trip that Jesus made to Bethany was a week before He was to go to Jerusalem for the last time. He was teaching in a place far away from Bethany when servants of Martha and Mary arrived with bad news. They told Jesus that Lazarus was very sick and gave Him a message from the sisters in which the sisters begged Jesus to come to Bethany to heal their brother. But, Jesus did not go right away. He stayed where He was for two more days, saying that Lazarus's sickness was meant to show God's glory. Only on the third day did Jesus finally say to His disciples that He was ready to go to Lazarus.

When the disciples heard what Jesus was planning to do, they became frightened. They reminded Him that the Jewish elders were planning to kill Him and would surely be watching for Him in Bethany. But Jesus insisted, telling them that Lazarus had died and that what they would see in Bethany would serve to greatly strengthen their faith. Seeing that they could not talk Him out of going, the disciples reluctantly decided to go with Him, knowing that they too could be killed.

By the time that they arrived near Bethany, Lazarus had already been dead and buried for four days. Jesus did not enter into the town, but stopped outside of it. Martha was the first person to hear of His arrival. Telling no-one, she quickly ran out to meet Him. She fell at His feet and wept, saying to Him that if only he had come earlier, Lazarus would not have died. "But," she added, "even now, I believe that God will give You whatever You ask for." Jesus comforted her and said that her brother was going to rise from the dead. She did not understand Him and thought that He was talking about Judgment Day when all people will resurrect. Jesus explained to her that as the Savior, He had the ability to resurrect anyone who believed in Him. She then told Him that she fully believed in Him, that He was the Son of God, and she went to call her sister.

When Mary heard that Jesus was waiting for her, she also ran out to meet Him. The guests, who had come to comfort the sisters, followed her. They thought that she was going to the tomb to grieve. Mary ran up to Jesus and fell down at His feet. With tears

streaming from her eyes, she told Him how much she wished that he had come earlier because then her brother would not have died. Seeing her grief and the tears of the guests, Jesus felt a deep grief in His own heart and also began to cry.⁵ He asked to be taken to the tomb. Seeing Jesus' tears, the guests, were moved by His love for Lazarus, but wondered why He had not come to heal him.

At the tomb, Jesus commanded that it be opened. Martha cried out to remind Jesus that the body already smelled because Lazarus had died four days ago. Jesus answered her by telling her to have faith because she was about to see the glory of God. When the tomb was opened, Jesus began to pray out loud to the Heavenly Father. Then in a loud voice, He called to Lazarus to come out. To everyone's amazement, Lazarus walked out of the tomb, alive. What was even more amazing was that he did this despite having his face covered and his feet and hands tied by the burial cloth

Resurrecting Lazarus was Jesus' greatest miracle. After being in hell for four days, Lazarus' soul returned to his body, which already had begun to decay. The effect on the people watching was so strong that many who did not believe in Jesus before this miracle, began to believe. Others, however, ran quickly to the elders to tell them what had happened. As the news of this incredible miracle spread all through the country, more and more people became followers of Jesus. This frightened the elders so much that they decided that along with Jesus, they would have to also kill Lazarus.

CHAPTER 31

ZACCHEUS

During His last trip to Jerusalem, Jesus stopped to teach in the town of Jericho. One of the residents of this town was a very rich man named Zaccheus, who was the chief publican. Jesus' arrival made something stir in the heart of this sinful man, and he felt a strong need to see the Savior. Zaccheus hurried to the place where Jesus was teaching, but when he got there, he was unable to see Him. The crowd that had gathered to listen to Jesus teach was so large that it prevented him from getting close enough. Also, his short height did not allow him to see over the crowd. Seeing that there was no way that he could get through the crowd, Zaccheus hurried past the place where the crowd was gathered and climbed up a tree which overlooked the road. There, he waited for Jesus to pass.

When Jesus finished teaching, He started to walk up the road. Coming to the tree that Zaccheus was sitting in, Jesus stopped and looked up at him. With His divine eyes, He saw a man whose heart was on the verge of a major change in his life. Jesus knew that a small act of kindness was all that was needed to bring about this change. Therefore, Jesus told the publican to come down from the tree and go home to prepare for dinner because He wished to be his guest that evening.

The publican could not believe what he was hearing. How could it be that Jesus would want to have dinner with him at his house! Not only was he a publican, he was the chief of the publicans, and everybody hated him. Yet, here was the Savior wishing to be his guest. Zaccheus immediately rushed home to prepare for Jesus' arrival.

Jesus came and had dinner with Zaccheus. And this small act of kindness was all that it took to change this man's life forever. The mercy shown to him so affected him that he decided to undo all the wrong he had done in the past and completely change his life.

⁵ We see through Jesus' tears the fact that He was a true human being, who felt human emotions in that same way as all people do.

With deep emotion, he promised Jesus to give away half of his wealth to the poor and pay back anyone he had cheated four times the amount he had cheated that person out of. Seeing his deep repentance and his firm resolve to change, Jesus praised him as a true son of Abraham and promised salvation to his house.

Jesus' next words were very important. He added that what had happened in Zaccheus' house showed exactly why He had come into the world. His mission was to find and save sinners such as Zaccheus. Jesus' last words were directed to the Pharisees who had been watching Him. They were very unhappy that he had dinner with the publican. To them, it was a great dishonor to associate with sinners. Their cold hearts were too closed to understand what a tremendous act of mercy Jesus had just done.

This Bible story gives us a beautiful example of what true repentance really is. True repentance has to lead to a change for the better in the life of the repenting person. Also, he has to try to undo whatever harm he had done in the past. This is the only way that he can prove to God and to himself that his repentance is sincere. In this story, we can also see why God wants us to be kind to even the worst sinner. It may be that he, too, is on the verge of a major change in his life, and something as simple as a kind word from us might just be what gives this person the spiritual strength to go through with his intention.

CHAPTER 32

THE ENTRY OF THE LORD INTO JERUSALEM

Jesus Christ resurrected Lazarus six days prior to the most important Jewish holiday, the Passover. Through this miracle, His greatest miracle, He showed in a very strong way that He was the true Savior. Now it was time for Him to enter the Holy City and finish His work of Salvation.

The way He was going to enter the city was important. It was necessary for the people to see Him as the true Savior and God. At the same time, they also needed to understand that Jesus was going to His suffering and death voluntarily because He had come to serve people. Therefore, His entry had to be made in both a grand and humble manner. He had to ride into the city as a great king instead of walking like He usually did. At the same time, to show His humility, He had to ride on something more humble than a horse, the animal used by kings in royal processions.

When Jesus was near the village of Bethpage, He stopped and sent two disciples ahead with special instructions. He told them to go further down the road where they would find a young donkey colt tied to a fence with its mother. He instructed them to bring the two donkeys to Him. If anyone should question them why they were taking them, they had to tell that person that the donkeys were needed by the Lord. The disciples went ahead and found everything as described by Jesus. They brought back with them the mother donkey and the colt which had never been ridden on. They covered the colt's back with their coats, after which Jesus sat down on the colt. The group then continued onto Jerusalem.

When Jesus was just outside of Jerusalem, word of His coming quickly spread throughout the city. A great crowd of people ran out to meet Him. They wanted to see the Person who had resurrected a man who had been dead for four days. The crowd greeted Him with joyous shouts of "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! King of Israel! Hosanna in the highest!" Some of the people greeted Him as a triumphant king returning from battle by cutting down palm branches and laying

them on the road in front of Jesus. Others took off their coats and covered the road with them. The whole city became the scene of a great celebration.

But Jesus was not celebrating. As He neared the walls of the city, He felt a deep grief overcome Him. This grief was so deep that He even began to weep. He was the Son of God and had become a man in order to save people. Thousands had been helped by His amazing miracles. His message was one of love, forgiveness, and peace. He was offering people eternal life in complete happiness with God. But despite all that He had done for them, in just several days, these same people who were now greeting Him with such joy, were going to have their joy change into intense hatred. They were going to raise their frail human hands against Him who is God. They were going to mock Him, beat Him, spit on Him, and torture Him. Finally, they were going to kill Him in the most shameful method known to them, by crucifying Him. Tearfully, Jesus spoke of the terrible punishment that awaited this city after His death. It would be attacked and destroyed. No building would be left standing. The buildings were going to be leveled so badly that not a single rock would be left laying on another rock. Thousands would be killed. And all this would happen because they had turned away from God and filled their hearts with the evil of the devil.

Upon entering the city, Jesus went straight to the Temple. There He found once again great disorder. Just as He had done in His first visit, He chased out the animals, the money changers, and merchants along with their goods. With the words, "It is written that My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have turned it into a den of thieves."



Jesus restored order and dignity in the Temple. Many of those who were sick, lame, or blind came up to Him begging for His help, and He healed all of them. Seeing the great things that were happening, the people could not stop themselves from praising Him. Even the children joined in with cries of, "Hosanna in the highest!" This was too much for the elders, and they demanded that Jesus quiet the children. Jesus answered, telling them to remember the psalm of the great prophet, King David, who sang, "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast Thou perfected praise."

This magnificent, triumphant entry of the Lord into Jerusalem is remembered by the Church as a major holiday called Palm Sunday.

It is always celebrated the Sunday before Pascha. Remembering how the people triumphantly met Jesus as the King of kings by cutting down palm branches to lay at His feet, the Church gives out blessed palms to the faithful during this holiday. In Russia, however, the holiday is celebrated in a different way. Since there were no palm trees in

Russia, people honored the holiday with pussywillows. The pussywillows were the first plants to bloom in spring. They symbolized the victory of spring over winter. Spring is new life which overcomes winter which is death. In this way, the pussywillow branches are a symbol of Christ's victory over death through His resurrection.

CHAPTER 33 THE LAST JUDGEMENT

During His last days on earth, Jesus Christ devoted much of His time to give His final teachings. One of the things He taught about concerned the Last Judgment. Jesus revealed that He was going to return to our world a second time. His second coming will be completely unlike His first, when He came as a humble Person whose purpose was to serve all people. In His second coming, He will come in His full glory as God. He will be accompanied by His angels who will gather before Him all the people of the world. The angels will separate the people into two groups similar to the way a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats in his flock. The first group will be sent to the right side. They will be the good people (sheep), who had been washed clean of their sins through repentance. The other group (goats), consisting of unrepentant sinners, will be sent to the left.

Jesus will praise the people on the right and invite them to live with Him in blessed happiness in Heaven. He will tell them that he was rewarding them for always responding to His needs. For example, they fed Him when He was hungry. When He was thirsty, they brought Him drink. They clothed Him when He had nothing to wear. They visited and comforted Him when He was sick or in prison. Jesus' words will confuse these people. They will say that they do not understand why He was rewarding them. They never helped Him when He was hungry, thirsty, or without clothes. They never came to Him in prison or visited Him when he was sick. They never did these things for Him because He was God and they never saw Him needing those things. Jesus will then explain to them that when they did these things for other people, it was the same as if they had done them for Him. Their acts of mercy were done to His children for which they were now being rewarded with Heaven.

Turning then to the group on the left, Jesus will scold them and send them away to live eternally in great suffering in the fires of hell. He will tell them that He was rejecting them because during their lives they did none of the acts of mercy to Him for which He had just praised the good people. These unfortunate people will also protest, saying that they didn't understand. They will claim that they never helped Him not because they had rejected Him but because they never saw Him in need. Jesus will remind them that when they did not do acts of mercy to other people, it was the same as rejecting Him. Therefore, since they chose to separate themselves from Him through the way that they had lived, He will now honor their choice.

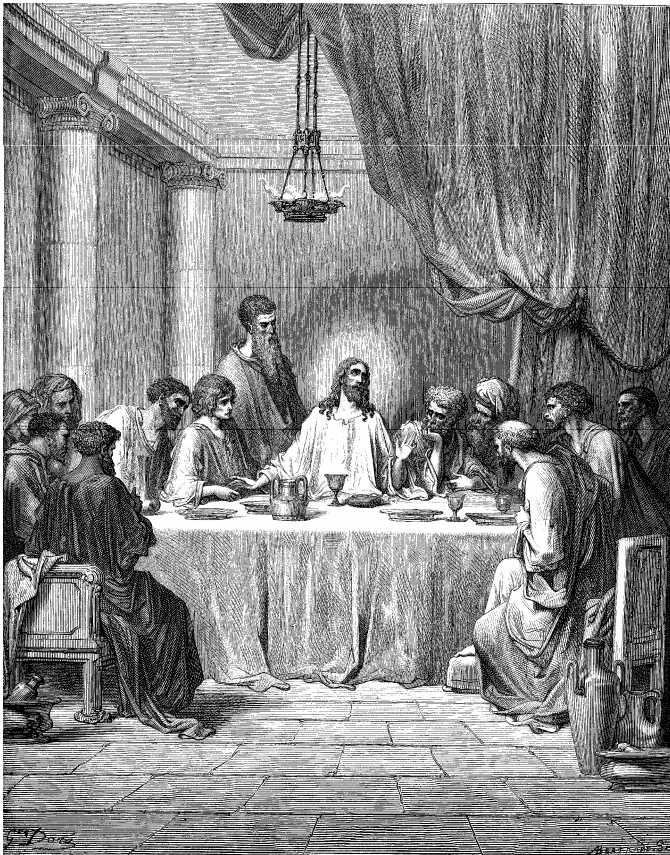
The Last Judgment will be a terrible day for people. Everything that anyone ever did, said, or even thought about will be made known to the whole world. This is what Jesus Christ was talking about when He said that no secret will remain a secret forever. People who had managed to fool other people, or commit crimes that they got away with, will have all this revealed during the Last Judgment. What is even worse, they will have to suffer the punishment for these things in eternal life, when forgiveness is no longer possible. How much better it is to be caught, punished, and forgiven while still in this life, than to suffer forever with no chance for forgiveness. This is why this judgment is also called the Terrible Judgment.

One of God's qualities is that He is all-just. God has perfect justice and cannot accept excuses for unrepented sins. This is why it is so important to repent of all our sins and change our lives for the better while we are still alive. It is only possible to receive forgiveness from God during our life on earth. After our death, it is too late.

CHAPTER 34 THE MYSTICAL SUPPER

After His entry into Jerusalem, Jesus Christ spent the next four days giving His final teachings. Each morning He came to the Temple but always left the city at night. He knew that the Jewish elders had decided in a secret meeting to capture Him when He was alone in order to have Him killed. They wanted to do this secretly because they knew that the people loved Him and would resist them. Jesus was also aware that one of His apostles, Judas Iscariot, had offered to help the elders to find a good time to capture Him. The elders were thrilled to accept his offer and paid him a small amount of money, thirty silver coins. Judas was so greedy that he was ready to do his evil deed for this very small payment. Although Jesus was not afraid of being captured, He first needed to finish His teaching. This was why He always left the city each evening.

When the fifth day came, Jesus told Peter and John to go to an especially prepared place to organize the Passover meal. This meal had special meaning to Jesus because it was to be His last meal with His apostles before His capture. The Passover meal consisted of a lamb prepared with bitter herbs. The lamb was a reminder of the lamb whose blood was used to mark the door posts of the Hebrew houses during the Egyptian captivity to



save the Hebrew firstborn from the tenth plague. In this way, the lamb was a foreshadowing of the Savior. It was an innocent sacrifice in the same way that Jesus was to become an innocent sacrifice to save all people. The herbs were a reminder to the Jewish people of their bitter life in Egyptian captivity before Moses freed them.

That night, Jesus came to the dinner with all of His apostles. Before beginning the meal, He did something that surprised the apostles. He took off his outer garments and tied a towel around His waist. Then, He took a basin and a pitcher of water and began to wash the feet of each apostle. It was customary in those days for guests to have their feet washed when entering someone's house, but this was something that was always done by the lowliest servant. Because of this,

Peter resisted when Jesus came to him to wash his feet. He thought that it was improper for

Jesus to do such a lowly task. When Jesus insisted, Peter wanted to make the task less embarrassing and asked Jesus to also wash his head and hands. Jesus responded to Peter that this was not necessary because he and the other apostles were already clean. Then He added, "But not all of you." These last words were directed to Judas Iscariot. Jesus was telling him that He knew of his plans and was giving him a chance to change his mind.

After completing the washing of the feet, Jesus put on again His outer garments and returned to the table. He explained to His apostles that, by washing their feet, He wanted to give them a very important example of love and humility. Since He was their Lord and teacher and had washed the feet, they should take His example and always show love and care for each another. Rank and status should not matter. No one should consider it beneath him to care for another person who is lower than he was in society.

During the meal, Jesus tried a second time to get Judas to change his mind. He openly announced that one of the apostles was going to betray Him that night. Horrified, each apostle asked Jesus if he was the one. Judas also asked. Quietly, so that the others would not hear Him, Jesus told him that he was the one. But even this did not move Judas. He loved money more than he loved God.

It was during this meal that Jesus performed for the first time the most holy sacrament of Holy Communion. He took a loaf of bread. After praying and blessing the bread, He broke it and gave each apostle a piece with the words, "Take this and eat. This is My Body which is broken for the remission of sins." He followed by taking a cup of wine and giving each apostle a drink from it, saying, "Drink of it all of you. This is my Blood of the New Covenant (Testament) which is poured out for you for the remission of sins." By giving the apostles His actual Body and Blood in the appearance of bread and wine, Jesus was giving them the greatest spiritual power to help them fight their sins and receive forgiveness. Jesus ended by instructing the apostles to always repeat this sacrament in His memory. Because this sacrament was given for the first time at this supper, the meal is called by the Church "the Mystical Supper."

Throughout the evening Jesus continued His discussion. He told His apostles that in order to be His apostles, they had to have love for everyone. Showing this love would be what identifies them as His disciples. He revealed to Peter that he would deny Him three times that night. He warned all of them that they would suffer intense persecutions, but encouraged them not to be afraid because He had conquered evil and would always help them. Finally, He explained to them that He had to leave them for good in order to send them another Lord and teacher, the Holy Spirit. Under the direction of the Holy Spirit, they would achieve a complete understand of the full teachings of God.

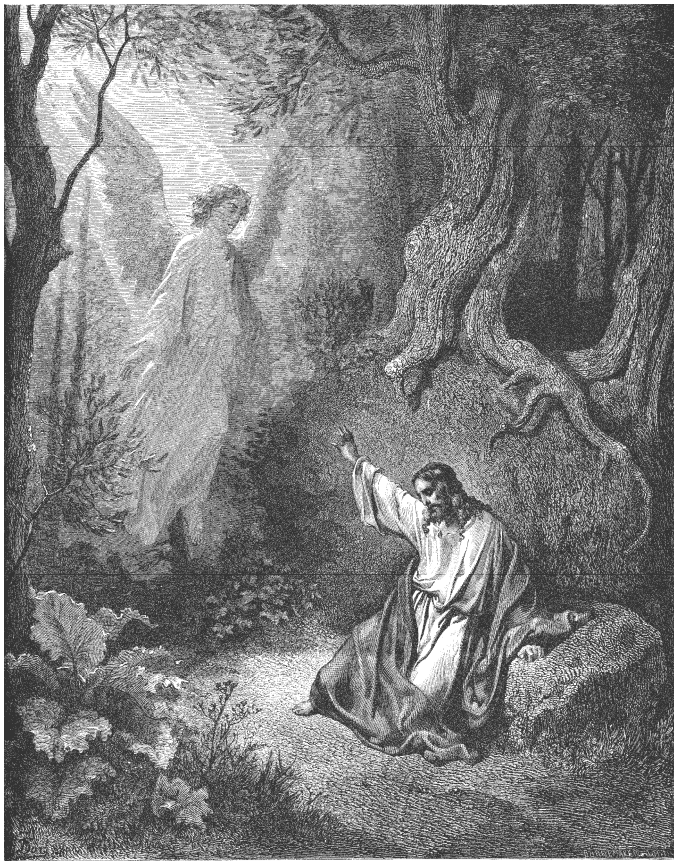
Having finished, Jesus then departed with the eleven apostles and went to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane. When they departed, there were only eleven apostles as during the supper, Jesus had sent Judas away. Jesus had tried several times to convince Judas to reconsider what he was planning to do. Unfortunately, by then, Judas was so much under the power of the devil that he did not stop.

CHAPTER 35

PRAYER IN THE GARDEN AND CAPTURE

The Garden of Gethsemane was the place where Jesus decided to go for His final prayer before His capture. This very dense and woody park was His favorite place for personal prayer when in Jerusalem. The garden was located at the foot of the Mount of Olives, outside the city walls. Coming to the garden, Jesus left eight of His apostles outside and entered with His three chosen ones, Peter, James and John. These three were the apostles Jesus had with Him at His most important moments.

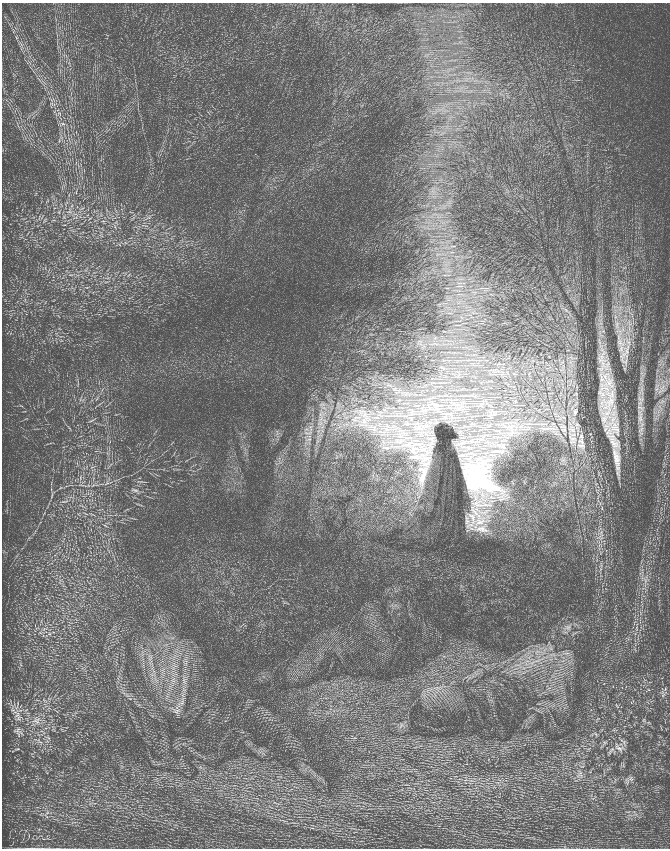
Jesus was already beginning to suffer from sorrow, pain, and shame. He was God, a morally perfect and sinless Being who hated even the most tiny sin. Yet, at that moment, He was the most sinful person who ever lived. He had taken upon Himself all the sins of the world. Every sin of every person who had lived previously, who was alive at that time or who was yet to be born lay like a great weight on Him. He shared His agony with the three apostles and asked them to pray with Him. Then, going ahead of them, Jesus fell down with His face to the ground and began to pray intensely. In His prayer, He wished that it were possible to escape the terrible suffering which had already begun. At the same time, He was ready to do whatever the Father willed. "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will but as Thou wilt."



After a while, Jesus stopped His prayer and went back to see the three apostles. He sadly saw that they were sleeping instead of praying with Him. They had tried to pray but were so overcome by all that had happened that day they were unable to stay awake. He knew what terrible things were awaiting them. They should be praying also, if not for Him, then at least for themselves. Gently, He scolded them, "Couldn't you watch with Me even one hour? Be careful, not to fall into temptation."

Going back to His place of prayer, Jesus began to pray again. Returning a second time to the apostles and seeing that they were again asleep, He resumed praying for a third time. His prayer was so intense that sweat flowed from Him like blood and fell to the ground. He was beginning to tire and weaken,

so an angel appeared to strengthen Him. Finally, He was finished, and the hour of His capture had arrived. He went to the three apostles and wakened them, saying, "Awaken, for the time has come for the Son of Man (the Savior) to be betrayed into the hands of sinners."



Approaching them was a large crowd carrying torches and weapons. Leading the crowd was the traitor, Judas Iscariot. He boldly walked up to Jesus and greeted Him with a kiss. This was his secret signal which told the crowd who it was that they had to capture. Jesus tried for the last time to get Judas to repent and asked him, “friend, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?” But even this last gesture was not enough to save Judas. Jesus then turned to the crowd and asked them who they were looking for. They responded that it was Jesus of Nazareth. He told them that He was Jesus. Stunned by His brave and unexpected answer, the crowd fell back, stumbling over each other. Jesus asked them a second time and again admitted that He was the one they were looking for. In their

confusion they began seizing the apostles. Jesus stopped them by saying that He was the one that they wanted and that the others should be let go.

At first, the apostles tried to protect Jesus. Peter used his sword to attack the soldiers and cut off the ear of a man called Malchus, who was a servant of the high priest. Jesus calmed the apostles. He reminded them He was willing to suffer to free people from the devil. Had He wanted to be saved, He would have called on His Father (God), Who would have sent many angels in His defense. Then He healed Malchus.

After tying Jesus up, the crowd took Him away to the house of the high priest. Terror gripped the apostles, and they scattered, just as Jesus had warned them that they would. Only two of the apostles, Peter and John, followed the crowd at a distance as it led Jesus away. Apostle John’s family was a prominent family and well known by the high priest. Because of this, he was able to enter into the high priest’s house and arrange for Peter to also be admitted. Once inside the house, they waited in the courtyard to see what was going to happen to their Teacher.

Chapter 36

THE TRIALS OF JESUS

After His capture, Jesus had to endure several trials right away. Even though the Jewish people were in captivity to Rome, they were allowed to have their own courts to try their people accused of a crime. However, if a death sentence was given, it had to be reviewed by the local Roman authority. After reviewing the trial, the Roman Governor would order his soldiers to carry out the execution if he agreed that the sentence was just.

In an earlier secret meeting, the Jewish elders had already agreed to kill Jesus. Now they had to make it appear that they were following the requirements of the law by trying Him in court. They also needed to show the Roman governor why Jesus had to be executed. Therefore, despite the fact that it was night-time, they were gathered together and waiting for Him to be brought to them. They wanted to question Him and find something that would justify killing Him.

The first trial took place in the home of the retired high priest, Annas. He questioned Jesus about His teachings. Jesus responded that He always taught openly at the synagogues and in the Temple, and that He never taught secretly. He told Annas that if Annas wanted to know what He taught about, he should question the people who listened to His teaching. This response angered a servant of Annas, who struck Jesus across the face for being, as he claimed, disrespectful to the high priest.

After questioning Jesus, Annas sent Him to face the Jewish High Council. The members of this council were gathered in the house of the then high priest, Caiaphas, who was the son-in-law to Annas. This was where the second mock trial was to take place. Many false witnesses, who had been paid by the elders, were waiting to speak in order to give the hearing the appearance of a fair trial. The mock trial began and the false witnesses gave their statements. Jesus listened to everything but did not respond to any of the charges made against Him.

Despite all the statements made by the false witnesses, the elders could not get what they wanted. Nothing that Jesus was accused of justified His being killed. In desperation, the high priest, Caiaphas, demanded that Jesus answer under oath to God whether or not He was Christ, the Son of God. Because of the oath, Jesus had to answer, and He confirmed that He was the Son of God. This answer was what the elders needed. According to Jewish law, it was a blasphemy, punishable by death, for a person to call himself God. They rejected that Jesus was the Son of God. Therefore, in their eyes He had committed this blasphemy and had to be punished by death. This completed the mock trial, and Jesus was condemned to die. The elders now could get rid of their hated opponent. In evil glee, they mocked Him, spit at Him, and beat Him. Jesus bore all of this abuse in silence.

While all of this was going on, John had brought Peter into the courtyard of the house of the high priest. The night was cold, and the soldiers stationed at the house built a fire in the middle of the courtyard to keep warm. Peter also approached the fire to warm himself. It was there that the terrible prediction that Jesus had given him during the Mystical Supper came true. Three times Peter was approached and accused of being a follower of Jesus. Peter became frightened and each time denied that he was Jesus' disciple. The third time he even swore with an oath that he did not know Jesus and called Him a man. By calling Jesus a man, Peter was not only denying that Jesus was his leader, but also that Jesus was God and the Savior.

At each moment of Peter's denials, a cock crowed. The third denial was also the

moment when Jesus was being led through the courtyard from Anna's house to the house of Caiaphas. Jesus glanced at Peter as He was walking. The glance tore through Peter's heart, and tears flooded his eyes. Peter returned home in agony over what he had done. For the rest of his life, he never forgot his betrayal. Every single morning when Peter was awakened by the crowing of cocks, he would fall out of bed to his knees, and begin weeping. He did this even after Jesus had forgiven him, and returned him to the rank of apostle. Peter's eyes were always red because of his weeping.

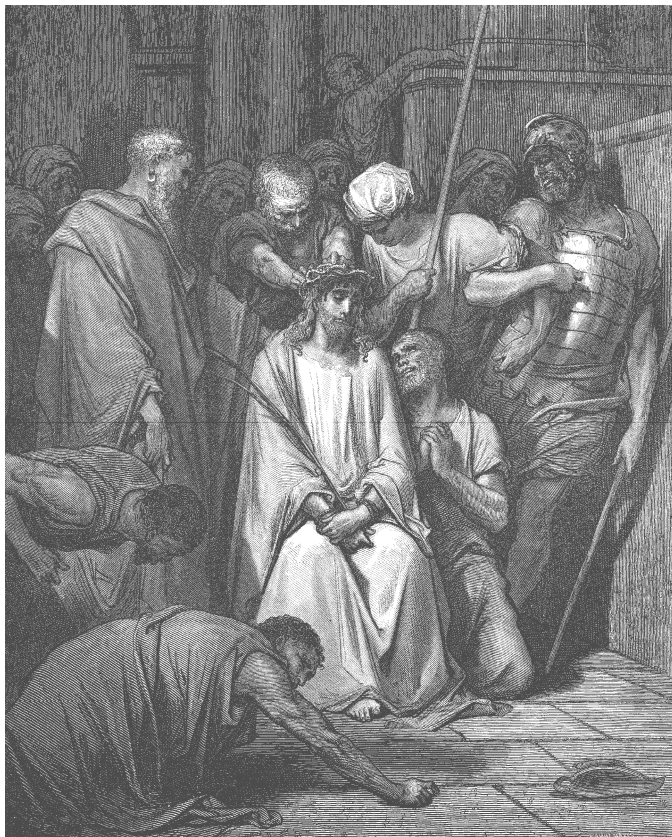
After the conviction, Jesus was taken to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. This was the man that the Jewish elders needed to convince to permit the execution. They were so impatient to carry out their evil intent that they brought Jesus to Pilate at the first light of the new day.

CHAPTER 37

THE CONVICTION AND CRUCIFIXION OF CHRIST

The last trial that Jesus had to endure was before Pontius Pilate. As the Roman governor of Judea, Pilate had the power and the responsibility to verify if Jesus was guilty and deserved death. Pilate saw through the mock trial right away and understood that Jesus was innocent. Because of this, he tried to find a way to free Him without upsetting the Jews.

The first thing that Pilate did was to send Jesus to King Herod, the Roman governor of Galilee, the place where Jesus had lived and done most of His teaching. This was the same Herod who had killed St. John the Baptist. Pilate hoped that Herod would take over and free him from the need to decide. Herod was thrilled to have Jesus brought to him. He



had heard that Jesus was a great miracle worker and hoped that Jesus would do a miracle for him. After examining the case, Herod also realized that the Jewish elders had convicted Jesus unfairly, that Jesus had not done anything wrong. Therefore, he found Jesus not guilty of any crime. However, he did not free him, but returned Him to Pilate.

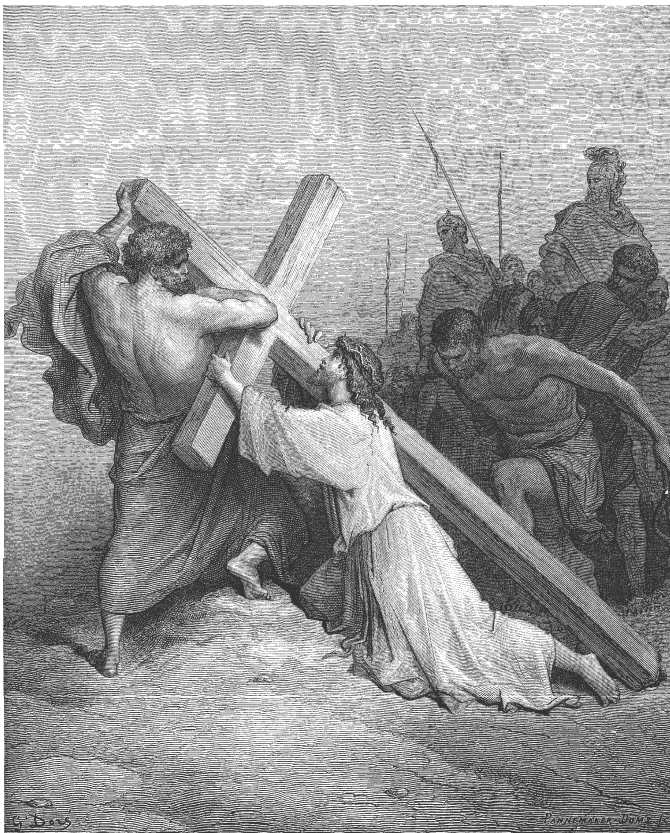
The next thing that Pilate tried was to offer to release Jesus because of the holiday. Every Passover, the Roman governor freed a Jewish prisoner as a gesture of good will toward the Jews. Pilate understood that it was only the elders who hated Jesus and was hoping that the people would agree to let Jesus go. The people, however, had been stirred up in the meantime by the elders into an angry mob and demanded that Pilate free a

murderer, Barabbas, instead of Jesus.

Then, Pilate ordered his soldiers to beat Jesus. He was hoping that when the crowd would see Jesus suffering, they would take pity on Him and agree to let Him go. The soldiers took Jesus and beat Him severely. To mock Him, they placed a crown of thorns on His head, then beat on His crown with sticks to drive the thorns more deeply into Jesus' head. After the beating, Jesus was then led out to the crowd in this bloody condition. But the suffering did not affect the mob. They only became more angry and screamed for Jesus' death. They threatened to turn the Roman emperor against Pilate if he freed Jesus. Knowing the suspicious nature of the emperor, Pilate became frightened. He washed his hands in front of the mob, as a sign of his innocence in the death of Jesus. The mob responded with a terrible curse on themselves. They also included their children in this curse, saying, "His blood is on us and on our children."

Unable to convince the mob and fearing for his career, the cowardly Pilate agreed to the execution. He gave Jesus over to his soldiers to be crucified. The soldiers, very hard, cold, and primitive men, first amused themselves with their prisoner. They beat Him, mocked Him, and abused Him in any way their cruel, animal-like natures desired. When they tired of their "fun", they took Jesus to the place of execution. The final insult was to make the prisoner carry his own cross to the place of execution.

As the soldiers were leading Jesus to His execution, a great many people followed. Exhausted by all the abuse that He had suffered, Jesus did not have the strength to carry His cross very far. He repeatedly fell under its weight and finally was not able to lift it. Seeing that He was unable to go any further with the cross, the soldiers looked around and noticed a man watching this terrible scene with pity in his eyes. They grabbed him and made him carry the cross the rest of the way. Among the people following Jesus were



women who wept. Jesus stopped and told them not to weep not for Him, but for their children and themselves. Terrible misfortune was going to hit Jerusalem because of the crime that the Jews were committing by killing their Savior.

When they reach the hill outside the city walls which was used for crucifixions, the soldiers stopped. This hill was called Golgotha, the Hebrew word for skull, because the top of the hill was bare rock and resembled a human skull. The soldiers took off Jesus' clothes and offered Him a special sour wine and vinegar drink which deadened the physical pain suffered by the person being crucified, but He refused. They then laid Him on the Cross and nailed Him to it. Metal spikes were hammered through His hands and feet into the cross. The

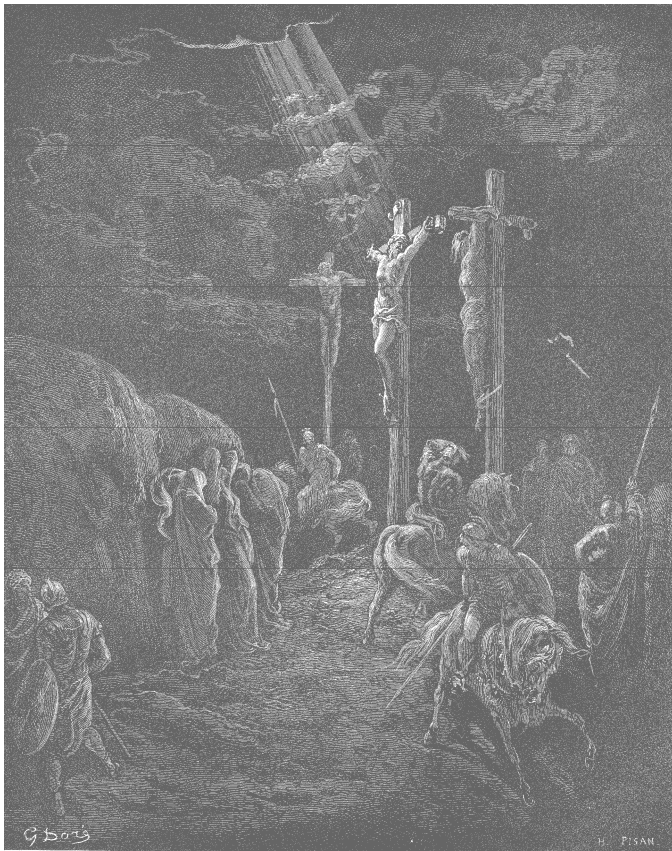
cross was lifted up and put into place. Two thieves were also crucified with Jesus. One

thief was placed to the left of Jesus, and the other one was placed to His right. And even then, as He hung on the cross and suffered great pain, Jesus did not lose His amazing love. He prayed for His tormentors, saying, "Forgive them, Father, for they do not know what they are doing."

CHAPTER 38

DEATH AND BURIAL OF CHRIST

Execution by crucifixion was such a horrible death that words could not adequately describe the terrible physical suffering that the convicted person had to endure. At the same time, he also had to bear the taunting and mocking of those watching him die. Death came slowly, sometimes not for several days. Because it was such a horrible death, it was reserved for the worst kind of criminals and considered to be a shameful way to die. Jewish scripture also considered the crucified to be cursed. Condemning Jesus to die in this manner was the final insult to Him by His enemies.

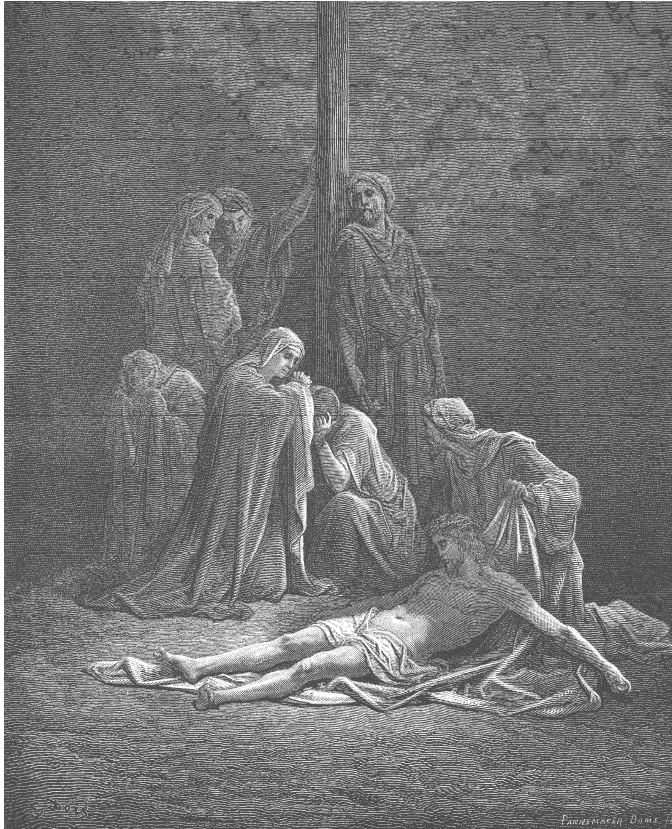


As Jesus hung, His enemies gathered at the cross to mock and taunt Him. The Roman guards and the two robbers crucified with Jesus also participated. Then something amazing happened. One of the robbers grew silent. He began to think about and understand the evil of his life. This recognition and the fact that he was about to face God for judgment moved him to feel deep regret and repentance. He scolded his partner for mocking Jesus. Then, with the deepest humility and the sincerest repentance possible, he asked Jesus to accept him in His Kingdom. This was an act of incredible courage because he was openly accepting the Savior in front of the enraged, agitated, and animal-like mob. And the ever-compassionate, loving, and always forgiving Jesus, even in the moment of His own tremendous

suffering, reached out to the thief. He comforted and rewarded him by making him the first person to enter into Heaven.

When people, the crown of God's earthly creation, turned against their Creator to torture and kill Him, the rest of creation could not watch. Although it was the middle of the day, the sun stopped shining and total darkness covered everything. Jesus' suffering lasted for three hours. Then, gasping that all was now complete, He called out to God the Father saying, "Father, into Thy hands I give up My Spirit." With these words, He died. Many amazing and terrible things started to happen at that moment. The curtain in the Temple

that separated the Holy of Holies from the Sanctuary split open, showing that Heaven was now open. A terrible earthquake shook the city and opened the tombs of the dead. The bodies of Old Testament saints left the tombs and were seen by many as they walked around the city. Witnessing all of these frightening events, a Roman soldier guarding the place of the crucifixion understood that a terrible tragedy had happened. He cried out that in truth Jesus was the Son of God. This experience turned him into a believer, and he later proved his faith by accepting a martyr's death for Jesus.



Night-time approached, and the elders could not leave the bodies on the crosses for the Sabbath. Therefore, they went to Pilate and asked him to order the guards to end the lives of the crucified men so that they could be buried. The guards finished off the two robbers by breaking their kneecaps. But, when they came to Jesus and saw that He appeared to be dead, one of the soldiers stabbed Him in the side with his spear to make sure that He was dead. Water and blood flowed out of this wound.

Pilate was then approached by a secret follower of Jesus, Joseph from Arimathea. Even though he knew that he risked incurring the wrath the Jewish elders, Joseph showed great courage by asking that Pilate give him Jesus' body for burial. After confirming with the soldier guards that Jesus had died, Pilate agreed. Assisted by Nicodemus, the Theotokos, and others, Joseph took the body of Jesus off of the cross, anointed it with myrrh and wrapped it in a shroud. The body was then placed in a new tomb that Joseph had bought for himself. The taking down of the body was witnessed by several women who loved Jesus. They were sad that the burial had to be done so quickly and decided to return to the tomb to anoint the body again with more myrrh after the Sabbath rest. What they did not know was that after they had left, the elders had the tomb sealed to prevent it from being opened. Soldiers were also placed at the tomb to guard it.

While the body of Jesus lay in the tomb, His human soul descended into Hades. Waiting for Him there were all the Old Testament saints. St. John the Baptist had been preparing all the souls in Hades for Jesus' arrival, and at last He was there to free them from Adam's curse. The righteous people who had died were now free to leave Hades with their God and Creator and live with Him in His new kingdom in Heaven.

CHAPTER 39

THE RESURRECTION

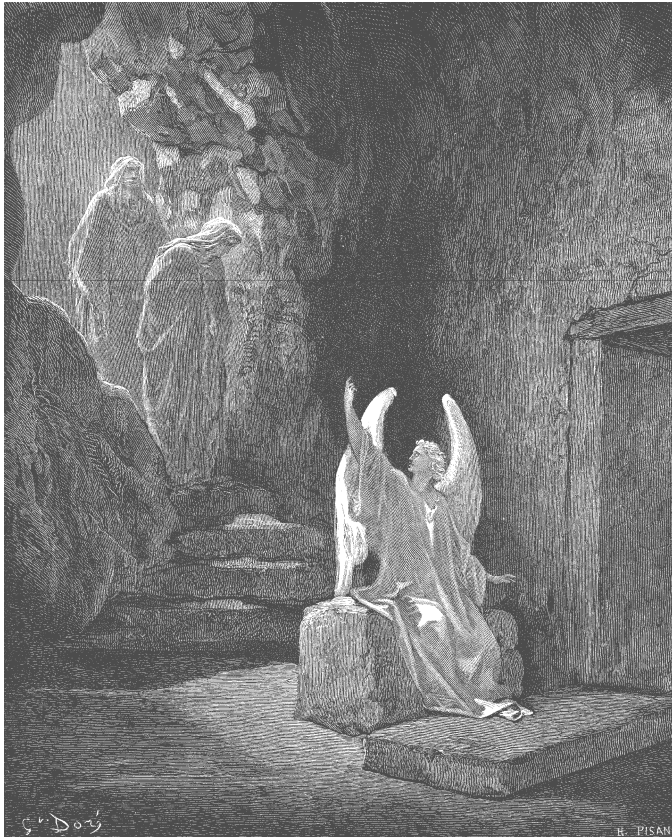
On the third day of His death, some time between Saturday night and dawn, Sunday morning, Jesus used His divine power through the Holy Spirit to rise from the dead. His human soul returned to His body, and it came back to life. The body however changed through the resurrection and now possessed new and amazing spiritual qualities. Jesus was invisible and left the tomb through the stone wall. The rock that served as the door to the tomb remained unmoved, and the seal placed by the elders on the rock remained unbroken. Therefore, the guards were unaware of what had happened, and continued to guard what was now an empty tomb.

The fact that Jesus had arisen was revealed to the world when an angel opened the tomb. He caused a large earthquake which made the rock fall away from the opening to the tomb. The angel then sat down on the rock. The earthquake, the falling rock, and finally the appearance of the angel had so frightened the soldiers that they fell down with their faces to the ground. They then fled the scene and ran to report what had happened to the Jewish elders.

The Jewish elders now had a serious problem. Everything that they had done during Jesus' life to turn the people against Him had failed. The only thing left to do was to kill Him. And just when it appeared that they were finally rid of Him, this happened. They knew that He had risen, but their proud, stubborn, and defiant hearts did not want to accept that fact. Instead of admitting that they had done a terrible wrong, they tried to cover up the truth. They bribed the soldiers into saying that they had fallen asleep on duty, during which time, the disciples of Jesus stole the body to fool the people into thinking that Jesus rose from the dead.

The elders attempt to deceive was bold but futile. There was too much proof that Jesus had in fact risen. The first point that disproved the elders' story was that it is impossible to imagine that all the guards had fallen asleep at the same time. These guards were Roman soldiers, members of the most disciplined army in history. It is hard to imagine for even one soldier could fall asleep while on guard duty, let alone all of them. Secondly, if the soldiers had fallen asleep, how did they know what had happened to the body during the time that they slept. Also, it would have been impossible to move the large rock away from the opening to the tomb without making enough noise to wake up the guard. There was a third point that revealed the lie of the elders. The funeral shroud that the body was wrapped in and the towel that covered the face under the shroud had been taken off the body, neatly folded up and placed at opposite ends of the stone table on which the body lay. Why would the people stealing the body spend so much time unwrapping it, neatly folding and placing the wrappings in different parts of the tomb, then carrying out the naked body? This would have taken up too much time and risk with the soldiers sleeping a very short distance away. All of these facts strongly disproved the elders' story.

Further proof that Jesus had risen can be gotten from what the myrrh-bearing women witnessed when they came to the tomb early Sunday morning to anoint the body. They woke up while it was still dark and set out to the tomb carrying their vials of myrrh. They did not know that the tomb had been sealed and was being guarded by soldiers. The only thing that concerned them was who was going to open the tomb for them. They were too weak to move the large rock by themselves. One of them, St. Mary of Magdalene, was so anxious to see the body that she ran on ahead of the others.



When she reached the tomb, she noticed in horror that it was open. Thinking that the body had been stolen, she immediately ran back to Jerusalem to tell the apostles. Meanwhile, the other women reached the tomb and seeing that it was open, they stopped, wondering what was going on. It was then that to their amazement, they saw an angel sitting on the rock. He told them of the resurrection and instructed them to step into the tomb to see where the body had been laid. The women entered the tomb and were startled by a second angel inside who also told them of the resurrection and instructed them to go and report what they had seen to the apostles and to Peter. It is important to note the way the angel spoke about Peter separately from the other apostles.

This was because after his denial of Christ, Peter was no longer an apostle. Only after Jesus Christ later reinstated him three times did Peter become an apostle again.

The women were at first too stunned to move. And when two other angels appeared to them, they were overcome and fell down to the ground in fear. The angels calmed them by reminding them that Jesus Christ had spoken about the fact that He was going to suffer, be crucified and rise again. The fear of the myrrh-bearing women was then mixed with new feelings of joy, and they ran out of the tomb to tell the apostles. Along the way they spoke to no-one because they were too afraid to discuss their experience with anyone. Only when they reached the apostles did they describe everything that they had seen. The apostles, however, did not believe them. In their confusion on how it was possible for the Son of God to have been tortured and killed, they had lost their faith and could not accept that He had risen from the dead.

CHAPTER 40

THE APPEARANCES OF THE RESURRECTED SAVIOR

Holy Tradition tells us that after the Resurrection, Jesus first sent an angel to comfort His Most-Holy Mother. Although this appearance is not written about in the Gospel, there cannot be any doubt that she was the first person to be told that the Resurrection had happened. The Savior then visited His apostles and other disciples many times in the forty days that He remained on earth.

The first appearance that is written about in the Bible was Jesus' appearance to St. Mary of Magdalene. When Mary was going with the other myrrh-bearing women to

anoint the Body of Jesus, she ran ahead of the others. Coming to the tomb, she saw that it was open and empty and ran back to tell Peter and John. The three then rushed to the tomb to check out what had happened. To their amazement, they did not find the body; only the shroud and the cloth which had covered Jesus' face remained in the tomb. The two cloths were neatly folded and lying separately from each other on opposite ends of the table on which the body had been placed. Peter was bewildered and could not understand what had happened. John, on the other hand, understood that Jesus had risen. When the apostles left, Mary remained behind. She was crying because she thought that the body had been stolen. Suddenly, a bright light lit up the tomb, and Mary saw two angels. In her surprise, she looked away and saw a man standing near her. The man asked Mary why she was crying. This man was Jesus, but she did not recognize Him. Thinking that he was the cemetery gardener, she asked Him if He had taken the body, and if He had, to give it back to her so that she could bury it. Jesus then called her by her name, and Mary recognized Jesus' voice. In her joy at seeing Him, she forgot about everything that had happened. She forgot that He had died and therefore, did not realize that He was standing in front of her in His resurrected form. Because of this, Jesus would not allow her to touch Him but sent her to tell the apostles that she had seen Him.

After this first recorded appearance, Jesus continued to appear many times to His apostles and other disciples. To reinstate Peter as a apostle, Jesus appeared to him and made him swear his love for Jesus three times which voided the three times that Peter had denied Jesus in the courtyard of the high priest. Jesus came twice to the apostles when they were gathered together for prayer in a room in which all the doors and windows were closed and locked. When Jesus appeared to them, He allowed them to touch him. He even ate with them, to show them that He was real and not a ghost. There were also numerous other appearances.

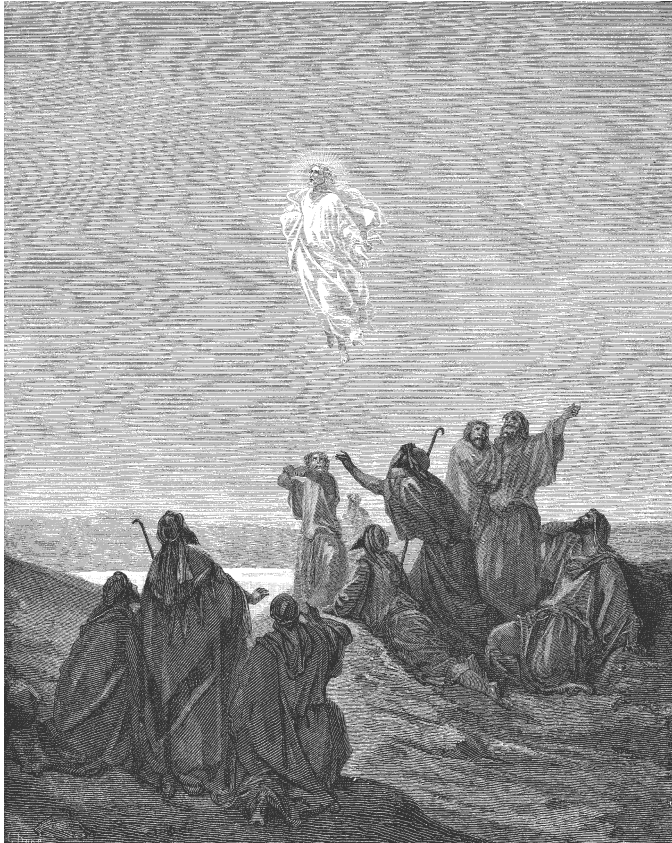
In His appearances, Jesus prepared the apostles for the work they were expected to do after His departure from this world. And after each appearance, Jesus would always leave the apostles and disappear. He did this in order to encourage them to be independent, to think about what they needed to do and not to expect Him to always be there to guide them. Their mission was to travel to all nations, teach people the message of the Gospel, and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In other words, they had to establish the Christian Church. Jesus promised to always protect them and revealed that the Church that they were going to establish would last until the very end of the world. It was through this Church that salvation would be given to all people.

CHAPTER 41

THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD

On the fortieth day after His Resurrection, Jesus Christ appeared to His disciples for the last time. This happened in a house in Jerusalem where the apostles had gathered to celebrate the holiday of the Pentecost. During this appearance, Jesus gave them His final instructions and reminded them that they had been personal witnesses to His life and teachings. Now the time had come for them to go to all nations to teach people that which they had seen and heard themselves. After teaching in each place, they should baptize the people who accepted and believed their teaching. Jesus advised that all those who would believe would be saved. He also warned that those people who would not believe would perish. To help them in their work and protect them from their enemies, Jesus promised to

give the apostles the power to do great miracles.



As they talked, Jesus and the apostles left the house and began to walk out of Jerusalem toward the Mount of Olives. Here, the apostles heard His last words to them which instructed them to not leave Jerusalem until they receive the Holy Spirit. Jesus then lifted up His arms to bless the apostles and began to float up into the sky. The apostles watched Him rise until He was a tiny speck. Then a cloud moved over to cover up the place of His ascent. The apostles did not leave even after He had completely disappeared, but kept looking up into the sky. Finally, two angels appeared and told them to go back to Jerusalem to wait for the Holy Spirit. The angels added that some day, Jesus was going to return to earth the same way that He had left it.⁶

Jesus ascended to return to the place He had come from in order to save people. But, He was different now from the way He was originally. When He first came, He was God. While on earth, He received a human body and soul. These, he took back with Him into Heaven. Jesus' human nature united with His Godly nature forever and can never again be separated. He is forever God incarnate.

When Jesus ascended, He did not leave the world forever. As the angels told the apostles, Jesus is going to return. When He does however, He will come back in a very different way from the way that He came the first time. The purpose of the first coming was to save people. Jesus needed to teach them how to live correctly and to make them understand how vital humility was for salvation. Because of this, He came in a very humble way. He was born and spent His whole life in very humble conditions. He even died in a very shameful way, on the cross. His second coming will be very different. He will return in His full glory to judge all people. The people who believed in Him and had lived according to His commandments will be allowed into His new world to live in eternal happiness. The people who rejected Him and His commandments will live forever in suffering with Satan and his devils in hell.

Once they were back in Jerusalem, the apostles had to finish a very important task before the arrival of the Holy Spirit. They had to name a replacement for the traitor, Judas and fill the twelfth apostolic position. For this purpose they cast lots. The lots fell on Matthias, and he became the twelfth apostle. Now all was ready, and the apostles began their wait for the Holy Spirit to come so that they could begin their mission.

⁶ The angels were predicting the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. His coming back the same way that He had left meant that He ascended with His human body and will return the same way, with His human body.