

THE CHRIST MYSTERY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Introduction

What does Catholicism have to offer people today? It offers a person, at once divine and human, who gathers all persons and all creation into himself. This mystery is fully set out in the New Testament. The present work shows how the mystery is portrayed there.

A. The Christ Mystery

Catholics believe that the personal Creator of this world has spoken to mankind in a human being who has risen from the dead and lives as man forever. The rising from the dead of this man, Jesus Christ, is understood as the beginning of a new creation in which all men and women are offered a like resurrection. Jesus' death was a reconciliation of mankind to its Creator, whom mankind had rejected, refusing to acknowledge its dependence on him (the story is told in the third chapter of the Book of Genesis). Man had tried to become his own god instead of receiving his life as a gift and seeking to order it according to the Creator's will. Jesus obeyed the will of the Creator, carrying out his will (Rom 5:19, 21, John 6:38, 8:29, 14:31, Heb 5:8-10, Luke 22:42), so that henceforth, in Jesus, mankind is pleasing to God. By freely acknowledging Jesus as risen Lord of life, any human person can receive his gift of eternal life (Rom 10:9-10). We say that Jesus has broken the power of sin, i.e., man's refusal of God, which had brought death into the world. With the destruction of the power of sin, the way is open for man to enjoy eternal life. Jesus came "that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10); he invites us to "come" to him "for life" (John 5:40).

This message about Jesus has resounded through humanity since the resurrection itself. It was preached by those who had witnessed him after his rising. Their conviction was communicated to people all over the world and has been accepted by millions down through history. The simple core of Catholicism is contained in Saint Paul's summary of the message he preached: "I taught you what I had been taught myself, namely that Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the Scriptures; that he was buried; and that he was raised to life on the third day, in accordance with the scriptures; that he appeared first to Cephas and secondly to the twelve" (1 Cor 15:3-5). A man died and rose to take away human sin in accordance with the Creator's plan revealed in the Hebrew scriptures; the apostles of Jesus are the witnesses to his resurrection. It is adherence to their message which makes one a Catholic. The body of adherents to the message preached by the apostles and their successors is the Catholic Church.

There is much in this brief summary that needs development and explanation. The core or "kerygma" of Catholic belief has infinite ramifications. One will need to explore each distinct element. First of all we must look at the person of this man, whose activities and words are recorded in the four Gospels and whose significance is spelled out in these and other writings of the New Testament, a gathering of 27 books dating from the first century after the death of Jesus. The Gospel of Mark, the earliest of the gospels, portrays Jesus as a mighty wonderworker whose power was that of God himself. He spoke with authority, effectively commanded the wind and waves and evil spirits, asserted the power to forgive sins, referred to himself as the "bridegroom," identifying himself with the God of the Hebrews who had espoused Israel to himself. The Marcan Jesus saw himself as destined to be rejected by the people he came to save and saving them by that very death. Jesus was identified by God as his

“Son,” who enjoyed particular intimacy with his Father and reflected his Father’s very authority.

In the later Gospels this divine way of being and acting came to be explicitly recognized as the divine nature itself subsisting in this human person. Jesus came to be recognized as God, yet distinct from God his Father, two persons sharing the one godhead. The divinity of the person of Jesus was experienced from the beginning and soon found expression in words. The author of the Letter to the Colossians would write, “In his body lives the fullness of divinity” (2:9), and Saint John reports the confession of Thomas when Jesus appeared eight days after his rising, “My Lord and my God.” Catholics believe that Jesus is the Son of God in the sense that while he is fully human, his humanity is exercised by a preexistent divine person who took human nature at a certain point in time. For this reason the mother who gave him birth can be called the Mother of God. Having died in that human nature, he rose to eternal human life by the power of his Father and his own power. He reigns over the world as “true God from true God, consubstantial with the Father.” His risen humanity, joined inseparably with his divinity, is the hope of the universe, since all men and women are invited to share that divine-human unity and so triumph over death.

The offer of this divinized humanity, this eternal life in the Son, is made to all persons and has only to be freely accepted. What is involved in this acceptance? One simply assents to the message preached about Jesus by those who first believed and their successors. This assent is faith. Faith says, “Yes, it is true. I believe. Jesus is Lord. He died and rose for me and gives me a share in his life.” In accepting Jesus as Lord the human person signifies his acceptance in a corporeal as well as spiritual way, since the human being is a composite of spirit and body. A whole response to the God-man involves both the assent of the mind and the touch of the body. Jesus established physical signs to transmit his risen life. The first of these is that baptism with water which in the New Testament books always accompanied faith in the risen Lord. Reception of this ablution assimilated one to the body of believers, whose unity was so complete and visible that they came to be called the Body of Christ, with whose new and risen life they were living. Baptism was incorporation into the community of believers who constituted the Church. Full adherence to the risen Lord was signified by communion with those entrusted with preaching his message.

Baptism was the communication of the risen life of Christ. Those who received it were saved from death by the free gift of God, not by any achievement or good works of their own. Yet the new life of Christ needed to find expression in their lives. It needed to transform their ways of thinking and acting until they resembled Christ as his brothers and sisters. Such a transformation needed a second sign, an anointing for Christian maturity. The sacrament of Confirmation communicated to the Christian the energy of the Lord for living a new life. It was very early realized that this divine energy was itself a person who dwelt first in Christ and was then poured out on his followers. This was the Holy Spirit, a third divine person, absolutely equal in divinity with the Father and the Son yet distinct. This Trinity of persons was manifested at the Baptism of Jesus, and the New Testament writings often speak of the three persons acting in the world and in the Christian in distinct but united ways. Baptism in joining a person to Christ indeed gives the Holy Spirit, but this Spirit’s energy is released in a dynamic way by the sacrament of Confirmation.

But the sacrament which chiefly builds up the Church’s union with its Lord is the Eucharist, in which the ministers of the Church (again the successors of the apostles who received this power at the Last Supper by a sacred action of the Lord now referred to as the sacrament of Ordination) offer again to the Father the sacrificial death and rising of the Son for the salvation of the world. Christ’s

sharing of his own life with men empowers them as “a kingdom of priests” (1 Peter 2:9) to make this self-offering with Christ and to partake in his body and blood offered for them. This body and blood is daily nourishment for the life of Christians. By the power of the Holy Spirit it deepens the union of the Christian with God and impels him or her to live conformably to the Father’s will.

Living as a child of the Father in the Son by the power of the Spirit, the Christian nonetheless continues to experience this world’s pain, his own tendencies to sin and finally death. He carries the new life in hope. He possesses God yet his life has not yet been completely transformed by the new life, which is often referred to as “grace.” He lives in a tension between the great gift already given and the full deployment of the energies of that gift which will be evident, as it was in Christ, only after death. Thus the faith of the Christian flowers in hope as he experiences the pain of conversion.

As the new life works in him more deeply he comes to the perfection of his Christian life, the fullest imitation of his Lord in love or charity. Love is the fruit of the Holy Spirit in the Church, in Christians. This is because love is the essence of God, and the Christian shares the life of God. It was love for his creation that impelled the Father to send his Son when he saw the plight of humanity turned away from God. Love led him to redeem us from sin and death by the death of his Son. By love he raised us up to eternal life in raising his Son (Eph 2 4-6). The human vocation is to be in the image of God, which means to reflect his nature in the world, that nature which is love. Catholics are empowered by the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of love (Rom 5:5), to lay down their lives for their friends (John 15:12-13), even for their enemies (Matt 5:44).

And so we come to a new sacrament. Catholics do not always live up to their vocation in Christ. They do not always reflect this divine love which has been enjoined on them. Their avowal of this falling short of love to the ministers of the Church has been made by God the means of a new gift of forgiveness. The sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation is a deepening of the bond between the Catholic and Christ. A similar source of grace is the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick in which human weakness itself becomes the channel of divine grace.

And so the Catholic is one who accepts the loving offer of Christ to share in his eternal life as passed on through his Body the Church. The reception of the sacraments strengthens the bonds of love among the members. The final sacrament, Matrimony, raises human marital love to a participation in the love uniting Christ and his Church. It draws human sexuality into the very life of God, helping the couple to participate in the divine creative love. Catholics continue to sin until they die, but at the same time in their cooperation with the freely given divine life they show forth the transforming power of the risen Christ. The saints are signs of this power, showing us who we are called to become. In our day the Church continues to proclaim the power of the Gospel to change the world, to replace war with peace, to alleviate the hunger and poverty of the human family. Only a divine power, the power of the Creator, can create the human heart anew, overcoming selfishness with the power of love. To recognize this is the virtue of humility, a prerequisite for the act of faith.

The various elements of the Catholic life are but the manifestations of a very simple encounter of the human person with Jesus Christ as preached in his believing community. The complexity of the elements that make up, for example, the 2865 paragraphs of the Catholic Catechism is but a carefully articulated rendering of the fullness of a single life, the life of the God-man, Jesus Christ, dwelling in his people.

The Main Elements of Catholic faith are therefore as follows:

Revelation (God discloses himself to man)

Incarnation

Resurrection
 Trinity: Father, Son, Holy Spirit
 Forgiveness of sins (Redemption, Salvation)
 Church (visible community of believers in Christ)
 Sacraments (actions by which the divine life is distributed to believers)
 Faith, Hope, Love
 Eternal Life

B. The New Testament

The Hebrew Scriptures are the record of the Creator's dealings with a particular people to whom he chose to reveal himself. They were formed during the 1000 years before the birth of Christ. They recount the liberation of this people from slavery in Egypt, the making of a Covenant with them by God, the gifts of a Law and of a particular land, the admonishings of prophets, the promise of a definitive salvation. They teach the Creator's will to save his human creatures, his seeking of intimacy with them, the account of their repeated failure to respond to his love, the intention to raise up a human being who would bring his salvation to his people and to all mankind. The life and career of Jesus only makes sense in the context of this prehistory recorded in the Hebrew writings. In particular, as Jesus says in a great parable, it was the repeated failure of God's chosen people to respond with love to his love for them that necessitated the sending of his Son to accomplish the obedience which man had shown himself unable to give (Matt 21:33-43). In Saint Paul's words, the Law (the revealed will of God in the Hebrew scriptures) only convicts us of sin, thus showing the need for a savior.

The New Testament is the set of divinely inspired writings that provide us with our fullest understanding of the Christ mystery, that is, the union of men with God in Christ described above. The New Testament, with its roots in the Hebrew scriptures, which Catholics refer to as the Old Testament, gives us images, words, and truths for understanding and relating to that Christ mystery. The mystery, ineffable in itself, is made accessible to us in words. The "words" of the Scriptures mediate to us the Word made flesh, Jesus, Son of the Father. Through our meditation on them, our study of them, we can grow in perception of the mystery and deepen our unity with it, or rather with Him. This book will attempt to show the richness of the Christ mystery as presented to us in the New Testament. The method consists in reading the New Testament as a whole book. Starting at the beginning, we read each passage or text with an eye to what new information or insight it gives us with respect to the Christ mystery. With each passage we build on what we have already learned, and so gradually we come to an appreciation of a spiritual world which transcends what can be contained in any given passage. The presence of the whole Christ mystery in each text is clearly inexhaustible. The present work is simply one reader's attempt to draw out what he sees in each pericope. Chapter headings are avoided so as not to break the continuous flow of the narratives and letters. But a reader can easily find what passage is being explicated by referring to the chapter and verse numbers of the relevant book in parentheses within the text.

THE CHRIST MYSTERY IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Saint Matthew will present to us the *genesis* of Jesus Christ (**1:1**), which we might take to be either his birth or the beginning of the Christ mystery itself which continues in the Church, that is, the life and death of Christ himself. "Jesus" will be the name of this man, as the angel tells Joseph in 1:21. "Christ" is

not a name but a title meaning “Anointed One” or Hebrew “Messiah”; it designates the role of this man in God’s plan. In the Old Testament the term designated the anointed king of Israel, as in Ps 2:2, 18:51, 1 Sam 24:11, 2 Sam 23:1. The king was expected to save his people by upholding justice within the kingdom and defending his people from attack from outside. He was to be both righteous and victorious. When kings failed in their mission and especially when the monarchy itself fell with the Babylonian invasion and exile, the hope for a descendant of David who would fulfill the role of the anointed one persisted. As “son of David” (cf. 1:6, 17, 20:30-31, 21:9, Rom 1:3), Jesus was seen as the long-awaited Messiah. He was the one who would save his people by providing justice and defeating enemies (cf. the program outlined in Psalm 72); in this way the title “Christ” coincides with the meaning of the personal name “Jesus,” meaning “Savior” (cf. 1:21). Saint Peter on Pentecost morning specifically identifies as “Christ” the Jesus who was crucified and is now risen. The New Testament will present how Jesus fulfilled the task of the Anointed One.

In adding the title “Son of David” to the name Jesus Christ, Saint Matthew is underscoring what was already contained in the title “Christ.” With the final title, “son of Abraham,” he is calling attention to the prophecy that Abraham was to be the source of blessing to all nations (cf. Gen 12:3 LXX), the “father of a multitude of nations” (Gen 17:4-6). Jesus would be the one through whom God’s blessings to Israel would be spread to all nations of the world, as Saint Matthew emphasizes at the end of his Gospel: “Make disciples of all nations” (28:19; cf. 8:11, Lk 2:31-32, Ac 28:28). Saint Paul will emphasize that not physical descent but faith in the God who reveals himself to man makes one a descendant of Abraham, no matter what one’s nationality (Gal 3:8-9, 14). Through Christ the privileges of the children of Abraham are spread to all peoples.

With these four names/titles of Jesus the evangelist has already made a major theological statement: Jesus is both the promised king of Israel (cf. Jn 1:49) and the instrument by which the pagans enter the people of God. He brings about the fulfillment of the prophecy that all nations will worship the God of Israel (cf. Zech 14:16, Isa 56:6-7). Not content simply to state Jesus’ descent from Abraham and David, Matthew feels the need to give the name of each person in the line of that descent, relying on the Book of Genesis for Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and Perez (**1:2-3a**), and on the Book of Ruth (Ruth 4:22) for the eight names from the son of Perez to the father of David (**1:3b-6a**). He takes pains to note irregularities in the lineage: Judah became the father of Perez through intercourse with Tamar with whom he was not married and whom he took for a prostitute (Gen 38). The mother of Boaz is reported to be Rahab, the Canaanite prostitute who protected the spies sent by Joshua to reconnoiter the country before leading the Israelites across the Jordan (Josh 2). Ruth, the wife of Boaz, was a foreigner from Moab. Even Solomon was born of a woman with whom King David had committed adultery and whose husband he had had killed (**1:6b**). Although sinless and born of a sinless mother, Jesus entered a humanity with a history of sin. At the same time his heritage already hinted that he was for all nations. He would transform the sinful lump of humanity with his own purity. As Matthew will say, quoting Isaiah, “He took on our weaknesses and bore our diseases” (Matt 8:17).

From David to “Jechoniah and his brothers” (really three brothers and a grandson) Matthew follows the order of the kings of Judah in the Books of Kings, equating Ahaziah with Uzziah and so omitting Ahaziah, Jehoash, and Amaziah (**1:7-11**). This will enable him to have an equal number of names from David to the Exile as from Abraham to David. He is concerned to indicate that Jesus’s descent followed an orderly plan in the mind of God, a concern growing out of the element in the kerygma, “according to the scriptures.” As for the deportation to

Babylon which concludes the second threesome of fourteen generations, its significance is as important as that of King David. It marks the end of the reign of David's dynasty which had received the promise of never coming to an end (cf. 2 Sam 7:16, 23:5, Ps 89:4-5, 30, 37-38, 132:12), it awakened the hope that a future descendant of David might someday reestablish the monarchy, and it highlighted the sinfulness of Israel which Jesus himself was to take away.

Jechoniah (Jehoiachin), the penultimate king of Judah, was exiled to Babylon in the first deportation (598). After the fall of Jerusalem he lived as a captive/guest in the palace of the king of Babylon (2 Kings 25:27-30). In recounting the return of the exiles to Jerusalem, the Book of Ezra mentions Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel (Ezra 3:2) as one of the two leaders of the community; the book of Haggai will identify him as "high commissioner of Judah" (Hag 1:1). Matthew makes the father of Zerubbabel to be a son of King Jechoniah and therefore a bearer of the royal blood (**1:12**). After Zerubbabel the next nine names in the series are unknown outside this chapter: the house of David continued "underground" to emerge in Joseph, putative (cf. Luke 3:23) and legal father of the definitive son of David and king of Israel (**1:13-16a**).

The last descendant to be mentioned is Joseph, the husband of the one who gave birth to Jesus. Outside the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke, Joseph is referred to as the father of Jesus by the people of Nazareth (Luke 4:22), the disciple Philip (John 1:45), and by the Jews at Capernaum (John 6:42). Through the legal understanding of the time, it is Joseph who mediates to Jesus the descent from David. But in describing the parenthood of Jesus, the evangelist does not follow the pattern of the rest of the lineage. He does not say Joseph became the father of Jesus, but that Joseph was the husband of Mary who brought him forth into the world. The writer refers back to the beginning of the genealogy by giving both the name of Mary's son, Jesus, and the title by which he had become known, "Christ" (**1:16b**). That title is reiterated without the name Jesus in the passage summarizing the orderly series of three sets of fourteen names (**1:17**).

The reason for the shift in describing the paternity of Jesus is to be made clear in the account of the manner of his birth. The child was conceived in the womb of his mother Mary before she had had relations with her fiancé, and this was the work of the Holy Spirit (**1:18**). The Holy Spirit indicates a divine agency. The term is found in only three places in the Old Testament, Ps 51:13, Isa 63:10-11 and Wis 9:17. In the first passage it is a principle of moral regeneration. In the second the holy spirit is an emanation from God that empowers Moses to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt; in the third it accompanies the divine gift of Wisdom and gives man the power of understanding the divine will. The more common designation of the holy Spirit in the Old Testament is "spirit of God," or "Spirit of the Lord." This mysterious power is present and active at creation (Gen 1:2, Ps 104:30), in the judges of Israel (Judg 3:10, 6:34, 11:29, 13:25) to whom it communicated superhuman strength (Judg 14:6, 19), in kings and prophets where it caused ecstasy (1 Sam 10:6, 10, 11:6, 16:13), in the craftsman of the ark shrine and its furnishings and in the builders of the temple (Exod 31:3, 35:31, Hag 2:5), and in prophets where it enabled men to speak for God (Isa 61:1, a passage that connects the spirit with anointing as in 1 Sam 16:13; Ezek 2:2, 3:12-14, 24; and Joel 3:1-3 where all mankind are to be given the spirit of prophecy).

Three passages were especially significant for the New Testament. In Isa 42:1-6 God promises to put his spirit on his "servant" who will bring justice on earth and be the light of the nations. The passage was seen by the early Christians to be fulfilled in Jesus (cf. the accounts of Jesus' baptism). Secondly, in Ezekiel 36:25, 27, 37:14 God promises to put his spirit in the hearts of his

people so that they may observe his commandments; this is the principle of inner renewal and regeneration seen in Ps 51:13; for Ezekiel this gift of the spirit of God is connected with a washing by water. Finally in Joel 3:1-3 God promises to pour his spirit on all mankind to make them prophets. In attributing the conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary to the Holy Spirit, Matthew is drawing on the spirit's association with generation, with power, and with holiness. The Holy Spirit is the divine power that creates life and fits human persons for intimate communion with the mind of God. The miraculous birth of Jesus is seen as at once in continuity with his ancestry and as a distinct break in continuity through a new creation "from above" (John 3:31).

God's angel (lit. "messenger") informs Joseph in a dream (cf. the dreams of the Old Testament Joseph, Gen 37:5-10, the "man of dreams," Gen 37:19-20, 41:12-13, 25-32) of the divine origin of Mary's child, addressing him as "son of David" to underline his role in the transmission of Davidic sonship to Jesus (**1:19-20**). A "just" man, he is expected by God to accept this role and he does so without demur. The child is to be called by a name meaning "Yahweh saves" (**1:21**), since his mission is to save the people of his nation from their sins, fulfilling a prediction from Psalm 130: "Israel he [Yahweh] will redeem from all its iniquity" (Ps 130:8). The word "redeem" in the Psalm is taken as a synonym for "save" (*yasha*), the Lord's profoundest and most characteristic activity with respect to the people he chose. "This God of ours is a God who saves," says the psalm (Ps 68:21), and by saving is meant "leading out from death." The Lord saved his people from Egypt (Exod 14:30, Ps 106:8, 10), from many enemies in Canaan (Deut 20:4, Judg 2:16, 18, 1 Sam 9:16, Ps 44:8), from accusers (Ps 109:31), from the wicked (Jer 15:20), from every distress (107:13, 19), from defilement (Ezek 36:29). Often God is simply the "savior" without any specification of what he saves from (cf. Isa 43:3, 45:15, 21, Hos 13:4). He is simply "my salvation" (Ps 27:1, 35:3, 62:3, 7, Exod 15:2, Isa 12:2).

By the end of the Old Testament it had become clear that what Israel and all mankind most needed saving from, the source of all their ills, was human sin. Despite the Law and the consistent teaching of the prophets, and despite occasional periods of repentance and conversion, biblical man had proved himself incapable of responding to the love of his creator with a corresponding love. The magnificent account of man's creation found in the second and third chapters of Genesis, showed how suffering and death were introduced into the world by our first parents' refusal to acknowledge their dependence on God and to obey him. The profound meaning of the name of Jesus is that finally, in Jesus, God is performing his greatest act of salvation, salvation from sin. So important is this purpose of Jesus' mission that it entered the kerygma itself in the phrase "for our sins" (1 Cor 15:3). Matthew will underline this mission of the savior in his account of the Eucharist, where he has Jesus say that he is to pour out his blood "so that sins may be forgiven" (Matt 26:28). Saint John's formulation is that Jesus as Lamb of God will "take away" the sins of the world (John 1:29). In one of the Pastoral Letters we read, "Here is a saying that you can rely on and nobody should doubt: that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim 1:15).

The name Jesus was also borne by the Old Testament hero we know as Joshua. The word is a compound of the word for Yahweh and the word for save, and it has the meaning of a declarative sentence: Yahweh saves. In Jesus the name does not simply testify to an attribute of God but is that very divine saving in action.

Those to be saved by Jesus are called "his" people for three reasons: he is of their stock, he is to be their king, and he is the God who made and chose them as his own (cf. the phrase "his people" often in the Old Testament, e.g.,

Deut 26:18, Ps 100:3, 105:43). He saves mankind as their representative, their head, their priest, and their God.

At twelve points in his Gospel, Matthew will pause to point out how a certain event is a fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy. The formula introducing the text usually runs, "All this happened to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet when he said...." The citation of the Old Testament passage shows Jesus as the culmination of a plan in the mind of God, a plan hinted at at various places in the Hebrew scriptures. Matthew finds such a hint of Jesus' miraculous birth in Isaiah's prophecy to King Ahaz that a young girl was about to bear a son whose name would be Immanuel, a prophecy that the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, interpreted as birth from a virgin (**1:22-23**). But the more striking import of this text is the name of the child thus conceived: he is to be called "God with us." If the prophecy originally referred to the birth of a son to the reigning king, it would have meant that in a time of threat to the kingdom, the birth of a son to the royal house was a guarantee that God was still with his people, who could then rest secure. In accordance with what has already been said of the divine nature of Jesus, the prophecy has an unexpected literal meaning since Jesus is truly God dwelling among men. Here is another example of continuity and discontinuity in Jesus' relationship to Israel. He fulfills the prophecy in an utterly unexpected way that opens the ancient text to a new depth of meaning.

The citation is a clear example of the mutual relation between the two Testaments: the New Testament throws light on the meaning of the Old, and the Old provides a vocabulary which deepens the understanding of the New. The fullness of the message about Jesus cannot be grasped without its Old Testament roots, just as the Old Testament has ramifications that only appear in the light of the New. Close reading of this pericope shows how Matthew has modeled his account on the very language of the Isaiah passage: the phrases "to be with child" (1:18), "to bring forth a son" (1:21, 25), "call his name" (1:21, 25) are all found in the Isaian citation of 1:23. Similarly Matthew writes that Joseph "took his wife to himself" using the very same expression used by the angel in telling him to do this. Here the point of the repetition is to show the absolute obedience of Joseph to the divine command, an obedience which truly shows him to be "just" (1:19). This use of exact repetition to show the fulfillment of a command will be found often in the Gospel.

The appearance on earth of the Messiah Savior, conceived by the Holy Spirit, cannot go unrecognized by the nations he came to save. He through whom the nations will be joined to the children of Abraham (see on 1:1) is at his very birth sought out by "wise men" from the East (**2:1**). The Babylonians had developed the study of the stars; these magi interpreted the appearance of a particularly bright heavenly body as the sign of the birth of an important "king of the Jews" (**2:2**) whom they wished to worship. In adding to the phrase "in the time of Herod" the title "the King," the author is underlining from the beginning the opposition between the temporary king and the true king of the Jews. Herod's unease (**2:3**) is therefore quite understandable. His and the city's worry will be echoed by the "quaking" of the city at the entrance of Jesus on Palm Sunday (21:10). Herod knows that it is the Messiah ("the Christ") that the magi are looking for (2:4). The "chief priests and the scribes," later to be the chief enemies of Jesus, are here presented as the authoritative interpreters of the Scriptures, citing the prophet Micah for the Bethlehem origin of the awaited son of David (**2:5-6**). In addition to locating the birth of the Messiah in Bethlehem, the citation identifies Jesus as leader and shepherd of God's people Israel, applying to the king a common Oriental metaphor for the king and one particularly apt for the boy-shepherd David (cf. 1 Sam 16:11, 17:15, 34, Ps 78:70-72, Ezek 34:23).

Jesus will refer to the “scattering of the sheep” on the eve of his Passion (26:31), quoting the prophet Zechariah.

Herod’s hypocrisy in pretending to want to worship the Messiah **(2:7-8)** and his rage at being thwarted by those he intended to deceive prefigure the hypocrisy and fury of the leaders who will put Jesus to death. Already innocent children will suffer at the coming of the Messiah, but behind the scenes the “angel of the Lord” (2:13, cf. 1:20) is ensuring that no harm will come to the Anointed of God (cf. 4:6). Providence works also through dreams (cf. 1:20) to prevent the Magi from reporting back to Herod **(2:12)**. The great joy of the magi at seeing the star indicate the place of the child’s birth prefigures the joy of those foreigners who will accept the Messiah **(2:9-11)**. Their offering of gold fulfills the promise of gold being brought from foreign lands to the son of David (Ps 72:15) and to Jerusalem, along with incense (Isa 60:6); the third gift, myrrh, is connected in John’s gospel with Jesus’ burial (John 19:39). In the two Old Testament passages it is kings who bring the gifts to the king and to Jerusalem respectively, whence comes the tradition that the magi were kings. Like the foreign kings who fall prostrate before Yahweh (Ps 22:28) and before Zion, dwelling of Yahweh (Isa 49:23, Ps 96:7-9), like the kings who fall prostrate before the Messiah (Ps 72:11), these magi fall in worship of him who is to be king of all the earth (cf. Matt 25:34, 28:18).

The joy of the magi is especially explicable if the star is seen as the one foretold by the non-Israelite prophet Balaam, who sees it rising from Israel as a symbol of a divine king (Num 24:17). The star would then be not merely a sign indicating the way to the Messiah but a sign of the Messiah himself.

Herod’s intent to “seek the child to destroy him” on the return of the magi becomes clear in the angel’s second dream-message to Joseph **(2:13-15)**. Since Herod knows the child is born in Bethlehem, it makes sense for Joseph to move south from Bethlehem in the opposite direction from Jerusalem. That he should go as far as Egypt is an opportunity for the evangelist to introduce a third major correspondence with Old Testament prophecy. In the prophet Hosea, God speaks of his rescue of his people from Egypt as “calling [my] son out of Egypt” (Hos 11:1; cf. Exod 4:22, Jer 31:20). If Jesus, whose birth is “from above,” goes down to Egypt and then is called back, he can be shown to be the real “son” of the prophecy and at the same time identified with the whole people Israel. In Christ the whole people of God has been liberated from slavery to sin and death. Joseph’s compliance with the angel’s instructions (2:14) is again reported in the same words used by the angel (2:13). The first reference to Jesus as God’s “son” will be followed by at least forty more in the course of the Gospel.

Herod’s fury at being outwitted by the magi is unleashed in the slaying of all the children under two years old in the region of Bethlehem. We now see why Herod needed to “ascertain the time” (2:7) of the star’s appearing to the magi; to judge from his ruthless order, it must have appeared to them for two years **(2:16)**. The Messiah enters his kingship not without the shedding of blood, and his people will participate in his fate, sharing the cup of suffering he must drink (Matt 20:22-23). The innocence of these children is a sign of his own innocence. The grief of their mothers is seen by the author as a participation in the grief of the matriarch Rachel at seeing her descendants massacred in the Assyrian destruction of the northern kingdom **(2:17-18; cf. Jer 31:15)**. The connection is strengthened by the fact that in one tradition Rachel’s tomb was near Bethlehem (cf. Gen 35:19-20). Similarly in most of Matthew’s citations of the Old Testament there is a somewhat “external” point of correspondence along with a more profound theological correspondence. The coming of the Messiah provokes the hatred of worldly powers and consequent suffering for his followers (cf. John 15:18-20, 16:20-22), a suffering that participates in the suffering of the people of

God in the past and at the same time gives that suffering its true meaning as the gateway to life. Jeremiah's evocation of Rachel's sorrow ends in the promise of a restored people: "Stop your weeping, dry your eyes, your hardships will be redressed: they shall come back from the enemy country. There is hope for your descendants: your sons will come home to their own lands" (Jer 31:16-17). The Messiah will triumph in suffering, he transfigures the meaning of suffering. This is the fourth of the solemn Old Testament citations in the Gospel of Matthew.

In a third dream the angel of the Lord tells Joseph to return to Israel since Herod and the persecutors have died (**2:19-20**). Paradoxically similar language was used to notify Moses that it was safe for him to return to Egypt since "those who wanted to kill you are dead" (Exod 4:19). The Gospel of Matthew will have frequent occasion to identify Jesus with Moses. As before, Joseph's compliance with the angel's command is expressed in the same words as the command (**2:21**; 12 of 13 words are identical). Through fear of Herod's son Archelaus and the warning of yet another dream, Joseph takes his family from Judea to Galilee, settling in the town of Nazareth (**2:22-23**). For Matthew this is one more fulfillment of an Old Testament tradition according to which the Messiah would be called a Nazarene. The specific passage he alludes to is not known; the closest text would be Judges 13:5, 7, in which Samson is called God's "nazirite," i.e., one vowed for special service to God. Matthew wishes to show that the Galilean residence of Jesus was as much part of the divinely revealed plan as the birth of Emmanuel in Bethlehem.

By the end of this magisterial introduction to his Gospel, Matthew has established the divine sonship of Jesus, his royal Messiahship, his solidarity with a sinful humanity, his mission to save from sin, his acceptance by the nations, his suffering. He has put firmly in place five of the twelve pillars from the Old Testament that will present Jesus as the culmination of God's plan revealed in Israel's history. It will now be necessary to show how this Messiah began and completed his messianic work.

Jesus' entry into his public ministry is announced by a figure who both sums up the past and points to a radically new future. He is introduced by Matthew in a phrase reminiscent of archaic tales of Israel: "In those days..." (cf. Jdg 17:6, etc.). The voice of John the Baptist is raised in the wilderness of Judea (**3:1**), the precipitous barren hills between the Judean mountains and the Dead Sea valley. The words of his message will also be the first words of Jesus' preaching: they are a summons to a change of heart in view of the coming reign of God (**3:2 = 4:17**). John summons men and women to recognize that they have been wrong in not submitting to God. "Repent" is the call to a realization that one has been closed to God. It is a call that carries its own authority and is immediately followed by a justifying clause, "for the kingdom of heaven has come near." This kingdom is the rule of God over human affairs, a rule which Israel and all mankind had thrown off through sin. It is the state of affairs in which human beings can enjoy the fullness of divine blessings because they have accepted to receive them as a gift. If sin is trying to become one's own God (cf. the devil's promise to Adam and Eve, Gen 3:5), a rejection of God which forfeits his gifts, then God's reassertion of his reign over humankind will require man's voluntary submission to the authority of God. Man must freely assent to the sovereignty of God. He must directly reverse the state of refusal of divine love in which he finds himself; hence John uses the term *metanoete*, meaning "undergo a change of heart," "turn back to the God from whom you strayed." The common Old Testament call for this conversion was "Return," "turn back," (cf. Jer 3:12, 14, 22, 18:11, Hos 12:7, 14:2, 3, Joel 2:12, 13, Zech 1:3, 4). It comported an acknowledgement of sinful pride and a renunciation of the wicked behaviors springing from that pride. While the phrase "kingdom of God," found in the other

gospels, focuses on God as agent and ruler of the kingdom, the synonymous “kingdom of heaven” focuses more on the state of affairs in which earthly realities are permeated with the will of the one who dwells in heaven—cf. the petition of the Our Father, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (6:10b).

John the Baptist saw himself (**3:3**; cf. John 1:23) as a “voice in the desert” (to use the common translation of the word that means “a deserted region”), influenced by the Greek reading of Isa 40:3 in which the phrase “in the desert” modified “cries” rather than “prepare,” the original passage reading: “A voice cries: Prepare in the desert a way for the Lord.” For (Second) Isaiah the desert was that between Babylon and Judea, through which a way was to be created for the return of the exiles to Jerusalem. In John’s interpretation, to “prepare the way of the Lord and make straight his paths” is not so much to open a physical highway but to open the door of one’s heart so that the living God may enter. This more interior reading of the prophecies will characterize the New Testament in general.

If John’s voice and message recall the Old Testament, so also does his appearance (**3:4**). His hair cloak and leather loincloth are reminiscent of Elijah (cf. 2 Kgs 1:8), the uncompromising champion of Israel’s God against the incursions of Baal worship. Jesus himself will draw the parallel of John with Elijah: Matt 17:12-13, even calling him “the Elijah who was to return,” (11:13-14), referring to the prophecy of Malachi 3:23. John’s meager diet of “locusts and wild honey,” fare easily found in the wilderness, attests to his total preoccupation with the things of God; he cannot be pampering himself with fine foods like those who live in palaces (cf. 11:8). His fasting and that of his followers will be the cause of comment early in the Gospel (9:14). John, like Elijah, will be wholly at the service of God and his word. His way of life and his message were forceful and distinctive enough for him to attract Jews from both sides of the Jordan.

Those who were touched by John’s call to repentance signified their response to the call by receiving baptism from him (**3:5-6**). This rite which will give John the name by which he is always known involved a going down into the water of the Jordan as a symbol of dying to one’s former way of life characterized by sin. It signified a repudiation of sin as well as a “preparing of the way” for the Lord in one’s heart. It evoked echoes of Old Testament passages through the sea, especially the Exodus of Israel from Egypt through the Red Sea and many references to being “drowned beneath the waves” of the Lord (Ps 88:8; cf. Ps 69:2-3, 15-16, 144:7) and to the Lord’s rule over the mighty waters (Ps 93:4, 29:10). This is not yet a baptism that forgives sins, but it signifies the willingness of the baptized to accept the forgiveness when it is offered by the sacrifice of Jesus. Saint Mark (Mark 1:4) and Saint Paul (Acts 19:4) will call it a “baptism of repentance” that will need to be complemented by baptism “in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:5) which accompanies faith.

Saint John is immediately aware that for many who come to him baptism is merely an outward form that does not signify genuine turning from sin (**3:7-10**). In the harshest language, he addresses these members of the Pharisee and Sadducee parties as “offspring of vipers.” These parties represented the religious leaders of Judea at the time: the former consisted mainly of scribes or experts in the Law, the latter mainly of members of the priestly class. They followed this popular leader to remain in favor with the people but were not prepared to acknowledge their own sin. This group of people with this fault will become the core of the opposition to Jesus, who was able to do little to convert their stubborn hearts. Jesus will excoriate them in language every bit as violent as John’s and at greater length (Matt 23:13-36). John knows that the coming of the kingdom of heaven which he announces is going to be for them an experience of God’s anger, which is the way the holiness of God is experienced by the man who

rejects it. The day of reckoning is near, the day when men will receive the fruit of their actions and choices in this life. This is the anger forecast by the prophets: Zeph 1:14-18, 2:1-2, Isa 13:9-13, Ezek 7:19. If baptism is to be effective, these men must “bear the fruit of repentance,” i. e., their change of attitude must be manifested by a changed behavior. Throughout the New Testament Christians will be called to produce good works as the fruit of a healthy plant (cf. Matt 7:16-20, 12:33-34—a passage in which Jesus takes up John’s designation of the Pharisees as “offspring of vipers,” Matt 13:23, John 15:5, 8, 16, Gal 5:22). The Pharisees’ reliance on their descent from Abraham will protect them as much as the reliance on “the temple of the Lord” by the sinners of Jeremiah’s time (cf. Jer 7:3-4, 14-15, 20). Mere hereditary participation in the people chosen by God is no guarantee of God’s good pleasure. Stones can be made into people acceptable to God (there is an Aramaic pun here between the words for “stone” and “son”), but stony hearts have to be broken if they are to receive mercy (cf. Ezek 36:26, Ps 51:19, Joel 2:13). Plants that do not bear the fruit of repentance are about to be chopped down, their wood thrown onto the fire (see the same imagery in Jesus’ parable of the vine and the branches, John 15:2, 6); they are like useless and dangerous desert thorns to be burnt in the fire (2 Sam 23:6-7).

John grounded his call for repentance and the baptism that signified it in the approach of the kingdom of heaven (3:2). He now reveals that that kingdom is embodied in a person who is about to appear (**3:11**). So much more powerful than John is this person that John is not worthy even to carry his footwear, the covering of the lowliest part of his body, the part that contacts the dust of the earth. Such a figure must be the Christ whose divine human birth we were told of in the introductory chapters of the Gospel. John tells that this figure, too, will baptize, but with a baptism that does not merely signify repentance but bestows that Holy Spirit through whose power this man was conceived in his mother’s womb (cf. 1:20). Jesus is presented as the giver of the Spirit to mankind. Jesus himself did not baptize (cf. John 4:1-2) but he could be said to baptize with the Holy Spirit when his apostles baptized others in his name, thereby conveying the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), which could only be given when Jesus had been glorified through his death and resurrection (cf. John 7:37-39). Jesus will bestow on others the very Spirit who was responsible for his conception in the womb of Mary. It will thus be a Spirit of sonship, making those who receive it participants in the sonship of Christ himself (Rom 8:15-17, Gal 4:4-7). All of this remains somewhat veiled at this point in the Gospel.

Jesus will baptize also with fire. On Pentecost morning as tongues of fire appeared over the disciples “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:3-4). The fire is a purifying one that burns up sin (Zech 13:9, Mal 3:2-3, Sir 2:5) and kindles love in the heart (Rom 5:5, Luke 12:49). The destructive aspect of the fire is in line with John’s preaching about the axe laid to the root of trees that do not bear fruits of repentance. It is part of apocalyptic imagery for the establishment of the reign of God (2 Pet 3:7, Rev 14:9-11, 18:8, 20:9-10). In four clauses (**3:12**) John portrays Jesus as winnowing of grain, clearing his threshing-floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

The reader’s expectation is now met as Jesus appears on the scene, yet to our surprise he comes from Galilee to the Jordan to John not with a show of power but “to be baptized by him” (**3:13**). John is troubled by this initiative of Jesus: he recognizes him as the one “more powerful” whose sandal straps he is unworthy to loose, and cannot understand how this scourer of sin can submit to the sign of repentance from sin. The roles should be reversed (**3:14**). Jesus gently commands, “Permit it now,” giving the enigmatic explanation that it is proper for the two of them to “fulfill all righteousness” (**3:15**). The latter word is a favorite one with Matthew; we have already seen it in the characterization of

Jesus' foster father Joseph (1:19). It denotes man's conformity with the divine plan. As yet we do not understand this plan. It will only become clear when Jesus is seen as the one who willingly let himself be taken a sinner that by his obedience to the Father he might remove the sin of mankind. In baptism he will submit to the waters of death that are the punishment of sin so that through his complete willingness to submit to the Father's "righteousness" he may renew mankind from within. He will die whom death cannot kill. It is in "dying to sin" (Rom 6:10) that he will restore our life. Matthew indicates John's complete compliance with Jesus' wish by using the word Jesus used: "He permitted him."

On emerging from the waters Jesus sees the heavens opened and the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming upon him (3:16). We know already that Jesus was conceived in his mother's womb by the Holy Spirit. Now he receives a special gift of the Spirit as a direct consequence of his humble obedience to the Father's plan. This Spirit will empower him for his saving mission among men. As an invisible force the Spirit had to be represented in some appropriate visual way. The dove's gentle but substantial motion provided a good evocation of the Spirit as wind or breath, an invisible but powerful force. In addition, the Spirit of God was depicted at the creation of the world as "hovering" over the chaotic waters like a bird hovering over its nest (cf. Deut 32:11), bringing forth life. The Spirit of God in Jesus will give new life to the world.

As the Spirit of God emerges from the heavens so does a voice declaring: "This is my son, the beloved, in whom I am well pleased" (3:17). God from heaven gives public witness that the one who has been baptized and on whom the Spirit has descended is his own Son, corroborating what the reader already knows from the story of his conception by the Spirit, the appellation "Emmanuel," and the application of Hos 11:1 to Jesus in 2:15. While the Spirit was given for Jesus to see, the voice was given for the benefit of the crowd, since Jesus is designated Son in the third person, not in the second person as in Mark and Luke, which are closer to Psalm 2:7. The mention that the son is beloved echoes God's command to Abraham, "take your only son, whom you love and...offer him as a burnt offering" (Gen 22:2). In both cases a Father must offer a loved son in sacrifice.

In expressing his good pleasure in the Son the Father is echoing the first song of the suffering servant in Isaiah. God introduces his servant, his chosen one with whom he is pleased (Isa 42:1), whose career and mission will be developed in the series of four songs. Thus already in the three titles given at the Baptism we can see that Jesus is the divine and beloved son of God who will please the Father by doing the Father's will and giving his life in sacrifice. At the same time the Messiahship of Jesus is affirmed, since the anointed son of David had the privilege of being called God's son (see 2 Sam 7:14, Ps 2:7). Finally the manifestation of the Son is intimately connected with the coming of the Spirit; similarly at Christian baptism "the Father grants sonship by bestowing his Spirit" on the baptized (John Meier; cf. Rom 8:14-16). Jesus thus emerges from his baptism in the intimacy of sonship with his Father and in the power of the Spirit of God.

The Spirit has come upon Jesus to empower him to undertake his messianic mission. That mission is to break the power of sin over human beings (1:21). The chosen people throughout the Old Testament had shown themselves rebellious to the rule of God. This refusal of divine love was an inheritance from the first parents who had allowed themselves to be seduced from God by a created spirit embodied in the serpent. The Bible identifies the serpent as "Satan" (in Greek, *diabolos*, devil), the adversary of God who entices men and women to oppose themselves to God (cf. Rev 12:9). Nowhere does the Bible recount a rebellion of pure spirits against the Creator, but the existence of spirits hostile to

God and led by an Accuser (the meaning of the name Satan) is presumed everywhere in the New Testament. Jesus must cast out demons; Christians must “resist the devil’s tactics” and struggle “against the Sovereignities and the Powers who originate the darkness in this world, the spiritual army of evil in the heavens” (Eph 6:11-12). Human beings, having succumbed to the enticements of Satan were under his sway. By separating men from the creator Satan had “brought death into the world” (Wis 2:24) as their punishment. To be freed from sin would be to be freed from Satan’s dominion and from death (Heb 2:14). A background figure in the Old Testament (cf. 1 Chr 21:1, Job 1:6, Zech 3:1-2), Satan comes to the fore in the New as the principal Adversary of the Lord. The Spirit who empowers Jesus to destroy the power of sin begins his work by leading Jesus up into the rocky Judean desert west of the Dead Sea for direct combat with this adversary **(4:1)**.

In conformity with the humility he showed in submitting to John’s baptism (3:15), Jesus will counter the devil by submitting to his temptations, so that he may be “share our human nature in all things but sin” (Eucharistic Prayer IV), “tempted in every way that we are” (Heb 4:15). He will experience all that a sinful humanity experiences, all of its weakness and proneness to sin without ever deviating from complete adherence to his Father’s will. The Letter to the Hebrews will see in this condescension the expression of divine compassion: “Because he has himself suffered temptation he is able to help others who are tempted” (Heb 2:17-18).

One who is to engage in spiritual combat with the devil cannot be weighed down with corporeal delicacies which blunt the strength of the spirit. Jesus needs an alert spirit to counter Satan, and for this he fasts even to the point of hunger **(4:2)**. Fasting from earthly food opens one to spiritual nourishment. Jesus’ aloneness in the desert is accompanied with a direct reliance on the Father in prayer. His baptism made him intensely aware of communion with the Father in the Spirit. It was that communion that would fortify him for the struggle against the diabolic tempter. The forty days and forty nights recapitulate Moses’ two sojourns of forty days and forty nights on Mount Sinai in the presence of Yahweh (Exod 24:18, 34:28, Deut 9:9, 18), the forty day journey of the prophet Elijah in the desert (1 Kgs 19:8), and the forty years of desert wandering in which the children of Israel were continually tempted to reject the love of their God (Ps 95:10).

The devil tempts Jesus to use his Messiahship to satisfy bodily hunger by a miracle **(4:3)**. Such an action would have meant deflecting the power of self-giving love and service of mankind to his own personal satisfaction. It would have meant serving self instead of serving God, and this would have been to sin. Jesus shows his knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures **(4:4)** by citing a verse that identifies man’s true food as the express will of God, that is, “every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Deut 8:3). As Jesus will say in another place, “My food is to do the will of the one who sent me” (John 4:34). True nourishment comes from conforming one’s behavior to the will of the Creator: he wishes only to give life; our acceding to his will is the acceptance of that life. This is the reason that Psalm 1 compares the man who busies himself with the express will of God as bearing fruit and unwithering foliage. Man’s “Yes” to God allows God to fill man with the blessings he intends for him. A “No” to God like that of Adam and Eve excludes these blessings. Jesus here indicates his radical decision to say Yes to the Father’s will in everything and not to deviate into self-serving miracles.

The devil then takes Jesus, either literally or in spirit, to a highly public place, the center of Jewish religion, the temple in Jerusalem **(4:5)**. He perches Jesus on the temple roof and invites him to throw himself down so that God’s angels, in accordance with a passage in the psalms (Ps 91:11-12), might bear

him up lest he be harmed **(4:6)**. Such a wonder would convince the people that Jesus was from God and would win their allegiance. For Jesus such an action would again be to misuse his messianism: he would attract attention to himself by appealing to the crowd's craving for wonders, but he would not have accepted the Father's will that he save mankind by suffering. Jesus would not attract glory to himself but only to his Father (John 7:18), while men looked to one another for glory (John 5:44). Jesus will not "put God to the test" **(4:7)** as the Israelites did in the desert (Exod 17:7, Deut 6:16, Ps 95:8-9) even though they had had ample proof of God's loving care. To do so would be to set up human criteria that God must meet if he is to be believed. The temptation is equivalent to dictating to God how he should behave as opposed to surrendering to him in trust. The Pharisees will do something similar in demanding a sign that will prove that Jesus has divine authority (cf. Mk 7:11-12).

Finally the tempter presents Jesus with a view, as from a high mountain, of all the kingdoms of the world with their splendor, offering Jesus authority over them if he worships the devil **(4:8-9)**. Again Jesus is being asked to set a creature above the Creator for worldly gain. Jesus knows that all the riches of creation are nothing compared to the Creator himself, from whom he will not withdraw his allegiance. He roundly rejects the devil, whom he now calls Satan, again citing the Book of Deuteronomy: "The Lord your God you must adore [Deut 6:13 has "fear"; "adore" comes from Deut 5:9] and him you must serve" **(4:10)**

Christ has shown that he is sinless, not susceptible to the persuasions of Satan. He is grounded in the word of God which he must have learned in his upbringing in Galilee. He has withstood the temptation to use his sonship to gratify the desire for food, fame, power and possessions and demonstrated his utter allegiance to the will of God. His inward triumph over the devil will be externalized in the coming miracles of his public ministry where the "strong man's" hold over humanity will be smashed (cf. 12:29). The devil's "coming" (4:3) to Jesus is now replaced by the "coming" of angels who minister to him **(4:11)**. Ironically by obeying God and not Satan Jesus is helped by the very beings whose help Satan had promised in the second temptation. Nowhere else in Matthew's Gospel will this attendance of angels upon Jesus be shown, although these spiritual beings will often figure in his teaching (cf. 16:27).

At this point occurs the arrest of John the Baptist by King Herod of Galilee for a reason that will be given later (14:3-4). The disappearance of John from the public scene leaves a vacuum which is to be filled by Jesus. Leaving Judea for his hometown of Nazareth, he then departs for the shore of the Sea of Galilee to reside in the town of Capernaum. For Matthew this is the bursting of the great light on the region of Galilee prophesied by Isaiah **(4:12-16)**. The man of integrity completely committed to the will of God will shed over people in the darkness of sin the radiance of salvation through his miracles, exorcisms, and teaching. This "Galilee of the nations" at the crossroads where highways to the great nations met was home to Jews and gentiles alike. The Savior who had come to save all men from sin would choose Galilee as the meeting place with his apostles after his resurrection (26:32, 28:7, 10, 16). Jesus' coming will be associated with light also at the beginnings of the Gospels of Luke (1:78-79, 2:9, 32) and John (1:4-5, 8-9; cf. also Matt 2:2, 9-10).

In Isaiah the passage quoted by Matthew referred to the restoration of the lands devastated by Assyria in the years before the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel. The prophet envisaged the return to Galilee (home of the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali) of the Israelites exiled by Assyria. While this literal fulfillment did not take place, Jesus fulfills the prophecy in an unexpected way by making Galilee the place from which will radiate the message that restores all men to their true homeland, the kingdom of God.

This kingdom is what Jesus inaugurates in his first public words after his baptism, words that are a direct citation of the message of John: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (4:17). Jesus continues John’s call for conversion, a change of heart, as a prerequisite for receiving the reign of God. One can only accept the sovereignty of God by a willingness to renounce the idolatry of self. A real shift of allegiances is necessary, an acknowledgement that one has sinned by preferring self to God. John had prepared people by focusing on the preparatory repentance; Jesus will introduce the reign of God in his own person and invite others into it.

After proclaiming his two-part message, Jesus loses no time in recruiting cooperators for his mission. Before there is even any mention of miracles or teaching of the crowds, he summons two fishermen to follow behind him so as to become “fishers of men” (4:18-19). They are called as apostles (ones “sent”) even before they are disciples (ones “learning”). The Church is inseparable from Jesus’ mission even before that mission begins. The task of apostles will be to draw men and women out of the engulfing waters of sin and death in which all human beings find themselves. They will share in Jesus’ mastery over the waters of primitive chaos. The first two apostles are brothers: Simon, here called also by the name Jesus will give him later in the Gospel, and Andrew. The response of these has two aspects: a leaving behind and a following. They leave behind their nets (a more generic word than the large net of vs. 18) and their livelihood without hesitation in order to come after him (4:20), that is to be schooled by him for the task of sharing in his mission of rescuing men from sin. This pattern of turning from and turning toward is a paradigm for the appropriate response to Christ (cf. 19:21, 27); see the similar pairing of “repent” and “believe” in Mark’s version of Jesus’ opening message (Mark 1:15). Committing oneself to Christ always involves a renunciation of rival attachments (16:24, 19:29, Luke 14:26). Christ must become one’s supreme focus and everything else be ordered in subordination to him. Christ gives man a worthy object for man’s total gift of himself: losing himself for Christ is the way to finding his fullest self (cf. 10:39, 16:25), of developing to the fullest extent his capacity for love. This is a rule for all Christians, although the pattern will be lived out in different states and contexts. The immediate response of the two fishermen is a testimony to the intrinsic authority manifested in the person of Jesus.

The pattern is repeated in the call of a second pair of brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, whom Jesus finds in a boat mending their nets (4:21-22). This time Jesus’ direct words are replaced by the verb, “he called” them. The brothers’ response (4:22) mirrors that of the first pair (4:20) with the substitution of “their ship and their father” for “their nets” as object of “leaving.” Three of these first four apostles will form an inner circle among the twelve, admitted to special intimacy with Jesus at key moments in his life (cf. 17:1, 26:37).

As if to explicate the symbol of the “great light” shining on Galilee (4:16), Matthew summarizes in a rich vocabulary the beneficent impact of Jesus on those living in various kinds of darkness in “all Galilee” (4:23-25). The light will attract followers not only from Galilee but from the pagan “Ten Cities” to the southeast, from Jerusalem and Judea, and from the other side of the Jordan, who come in “many crowds.” First Jesus is reported as “teaching” in the synagogues of the Jews, then as “heralding the gospel of the kingdom.” “While the teacher speaks of what a man is to do, the herald proclaims what God has done” (J. Meier, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 35). Perhaps Matthew puts teaching before heralding because he will present Jesus as the new Moses teaching the behaviors that will govern life in the kingdom of God. “Heralding” was also John the Baptist’s activity (3:1). The particular theme of Jesus’ heralding is simply “the kingdom,” a shorthand form of the kingdom of heaven (4:17). Jesus is

announcing that God's reign has begun. Immediately Matthew shows this reign in action: Jesus "heals every disease and every infirmity among the people" (4:23). The most visible manifestation of the presence of God's reign is the restoration of the body to its original wholeness. God is on the side of life: his will is that his human creatures should have life to the full, with nothing missing. Blindness, deafness, lameness, fever, paralysis, hemorrhage, leprosy, death itself—none of these are willed by God, and Jesus inaugurates the kingdom by demonstrating God's intention to give full physical well-being wherever he goes (note Matthew's emphasis on "every" disease and infirmity).

The report of these wholesale healings will quickly spread through all of "Syria," that is, Galilee with its surrounding areas. People will naturally want to bring to the healer "all" those who are "unwell" from various diseases or constrained by torturing pain, those possessed by demons, lunatics, and paralytics. The middle member of these five categories reminds us that some human ills are caused by the influence of supernatural powers hostile to God. Possession by demons is usually indicated in the New Testament by violent destructive behavior (Mark 9:17-18, 20-22, 25-26, 5:1-5, 13, Acts 19:16). The Satan who tempted Jesus is prince of a host of lesser devils who seek to wrench human beings away from the fullness of life God intended for them. The "evil spirits" turn men against themselves and against others. Jesus will see his principal work as the overthrow of the power of the demons over man (Mark 3:27). His exorcisms are a middle ground between the physical healings and the destruction of the hold of sin over man (cf. Col 2:14-15).

Of the three activities mentioned in 4:23, Matthew now develops the first, giving us an extended discourse that contains the essence of the new law taught by Jesus. While the crowds seem to have flocked to him principally because of his works of healing, the Lord wishes to instruct them on what they must do to obtain the life beyond death which he wishes to give. The healings, even the raisings from the dead, will not destroy death itself or sin, its cause. This more profound "healing" will require an adherence to the will of God far more profound than that spelled out in the old law. To indicate that Jesus is proclaiming a law that will replace, or rather fulfill, the law of Moses, Matthew reports Jesus' ascent of a mountain like Sinai, site of the giving of the Law, where he will adopt the sitting position of a teacher and "open his mouth" in a formal teaching (5:1-2). The new Moses hinted at in 2:20 now begins his teaching of the law.

In giving this first detailed account of Jesus' teaching even before the narrative of specific miracles, is Matthew making the religion of Jesus a matter of keeping a law, albeit a new law? If the Gospel of Jesus is a freeing from the burden of a Law which no one could keep, as Saint Paul taught (e.g., Rom 7:22-23) and Saint Peter confirmed (Acts 15:10), why does the first Gospel open the public life of Jesus with a long account of the demands of the Gospel? In other words, how is a series of commandments, some of them seemingly impossible (e.g., "Love your enemies," 5:44, "Turn the other cheek," 5:39) to be considered "good news"? Perhaps the answer to this question lies in the fact that even more than a collection of difficult commands, the Sermon on the Mount is a treatise on the nature of the Father. The Sermon reveals that the God of Jesus, the God of the Old Testament, is a God whose love for man is so great that it extends to good and bad alike and does not repay evil with evil but with good. This is the brilliance of the new "light" shone on Galilee and the world by Jesus, the revelation that God loves those who sin against him even to the point of suffering for them, and that we will find our true nature as his children by imitating him. The Sermon is not explicitly Christological in that Christ speaks hardly at all, at least overtly, of himself, but everything he says points toward the mystery of divine

sacrificial love which he will embody, being both the God of love and the child of God par excellence who mirrors that love in a human life.

The effect of the Sermon on the Mount can be disquieting since its standards are so high. This disquiet is beneficial because it makes us realize the utter poverty of our ability to respond to these standards and to look for help in carrying them out. It is here that we find the essence of the Gospel: By confessing our inability to carry out the law of Christ, we encounter the offer of his merciful forgiveness and his gift of the Holy Spirit, who is precisely the power to keep the law of Christ. It is only when we know that the demands of God are “high as that” (G. M. Hopkins) that we are going to reach out for the help that Jesus brings. In the terse expression of Saint Leo the Great: *Ideo datur praeceptum ut praecipientis quaeratur auxilium* (“For this reason the command is given, that we might seek the help of the one commanding”, *Sermo 49, 11th of Lent*, PL54, 303). Jesus will offer to be our righteousness (1 Cor 1:30), that is, a healing of the spirit that fits us for living like God, as his dear children. At the same time that Jesus is revealing to us the nature of the Father and of his demands, he is implying that the salvation he offers will consist in a renewal, indeed a recreation, of the hearts of men and women that will empower them to live a divine life on earth.

Jesus speaks as one who knows the heart of God from the inside.

Jesus’ introductory words already suggest that he brings something beyond the reach of men, a wealth that will make them “happy” but only if they recognize their need for it. The “poor in spirit” (**5:3**) are those who know their need for the mercy of God, know that they are sinners who need salvation, know that only God’s graciousness can make them happy. From the beginning those who flocked to him for healing are challenged to transfer their sense of need from the physical and psychic level to the spiritual, to the “heart” (cf. 5:5:8, 28, 6:21), where the real healing must take place. They must recognize the need for spiritual healing, for salvation from sin, for forgiveness. Those who are humbly aware of their need before God, a group already blessed in the Old Testament, (cf. Isa 66:2), are poor in their need for forgiveness and their longing and pleading for it. The “poor in spirit” are those most likely to respond to Jesus’ opening call to “repent” (cf. 4:17). Their willingness to accept the offered forgiveness of their sins grants them possession of the “kingdom of heaven” whose coming Jesus proclaims and inaugurates. Those who admit that they have rejected God’s rule over them, and that that rejection is the source of all their misery, are the ones who will benefit from the restoration of that rule.

The second beatitude makes explicit the awareness of sin implied in the first: those who mourn (**5:4**) are those who know that man is in a sorry state for having in some dimly felt way rejected the love of his creator. In Cardinal Newman’s words, the human race is involved in “some terrible original calamity. It is out of joint with the purposes of its Creator.” This is a dilemma from which man cannot free himself but in which he might hope for a liberator. Those who mourn know that the world is not right. They know that death puts an end to even the happiest earthly life, and that toil and suffering are the normal lot of man since the fall of Adam (cf. Gen 3:16-19), that the violence in the human heart needs healing. Jesus himself would mourn for the people he loved in their refusal of him (Matt 23:37-38), would mourn for the pain caused by the death of loved ones (John 11:35). As long as one child on the earth is starving or one human being is abused by another, there will be need for mourning. Only when sin is felt as a reality can we be open to the salvation of Jesus and the comfort it offers.

A sense of need and a sense of sin ought to produce an attitude of meekness or gentleness, the third quality of those who are “happy.” But the third beatitude (**5:5**) is the only one of the eight that is a direct citation from the Old

Testament: it is found in the Septuagint of Psalm 36:11a, where *praus* is a translation of the Hebrew *ʿanawim*, so that the third beatitude is nearly identical with the first. Yet the word “gentle” acquires in the New Testament a particularly Christian flavor where it denotes the warmth and fellow-feeling of those who love with Christian charity (cf. Col 3:12-13, Eph 4:2). Those who know they owe their lives to the forgiveness of their sins by God will be gentle to their fellow sinners, eager to communicate to them the forgiveness which they themselves have received. This is a point Matthew will return to in a parable recorded only by him (Matt 18:23-35). Such an allowing of God’s forgiveness to flow through oneself to others identifies us so closely with God that we could be said to “inherit the earth,” i.e., receive the fullness of life for which God created human beings and their world.

The sense of need extolled in the first beatitude continues into the fourth beatitude where it takes the form of hunger and thirst for righteousness (**5:6**). The desire for the right order of creation in accord with the divine will (cf. 3:15) must be as important to the disciple of Jesus as food and drink. It must be what he lives for. It is not enough to mourn one’s sin and be gentle in the treatment of others; one must urgently long for the coming of the kingdom of God on earth (cf. 6:10). Such was the hunger and thirst that animated the psalmist, cf. Ps 42:2-3, 63:2, 6. Indifference to the misery on earth is not the way to happiness. To hunger and thirst for justice is to hunger and thirst for God himself. Jesus will supply that hunger by becoming the bread of life (John 6:35, 51, 53-55), that thirst by offering living water (John 4:10) and his blood to drink (John 6:53-55). To consume the body and blood of Christ is to make his righteousness one’s own (cf. 1 Cor 1:30). To partake of the righteousness of Christ is to be part of the new creation in which all the members are in right relationship with God, with one another, and with the world. This Christological import of the fourth beatitude will only gradually become clear as the Gospel unfolds.

With the fifth beatitude Jesus takes further the quality lauded in the beatitude of the meek. The merciful (**5:7**) are those who not only treat others, even sinners, gently, but who actively compassionate them. Their hearts are moved by the misery of others to the extent that they show their pity in practical ways. In the Old Testament the righteous man “showed pity” (*eleēmōn*) to the needy by giving to them (Ps 112:4, 5, 9). We are faced with the paradox that the happy man is both needy himself (first beatitude) and responsive to the needs of others; perhaps he is the latter because of the former. He gives not out of his abundance but out of his poverty (cf. 2 Cor 8:2, 9). One thinks here of the parable of the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee: while the former hoards the water it receives without passing it on, the latter passes on into the lower Jordan River what it receives from the upper. As a result the Sea of Galilee is full of life while the Dead Sea supports no life. It was written of the City of Joy, the poorest region of Calcutta, that it was the most impoverished who were most ready to share what they had with a beggar: “The more extreme the destitution the warmer was the welcome” (laPierre 116). Saint Paul will affirm that the readiness to give will always be met with generous gifts from the Lord (2 Cor 9:8-11).

The sixth beatitude contains Jesus’ first mention of the “heart,” the human organ that is the principal target of his mission. The Sermon on the Mount teaches that the morality God is looking for involves a change of heart, a “new heart” as it was called in the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek 36:26). The human effort to keep the commandments of Sinai proved ineffectual for carrying out of the will of God. If man were to be pleasing to God a re-creation of his heart was necessary (cf. Ps 51:12): the human heart must be made capable by God of loving God with its whole strength (cf. 22:37). It must be completely cleansed or purified from sin

(5:8). As Matthew has already stated it was the mission of Jesus to save men from sin. He would do this not simply by removing blame from man, not holding his sin against him, but by refashioning the human heart, making it capable of a divine kind of love. In calling for a “clean heart,” Jesus is asking for more than ritual purity: he is asking for the loving obedience of a heart from which the selfishness inherited from Adam has been rooted out (cf. 1 Pet 1:22). The pure heart will be the work of Jesus’ suffering and death. It will be created in us by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5) sent by the risen Christ (John 15:26, 16:7). In uttering this beatitude at the beginning of his career, Jesus is inviting his hearers to hold their hearts in open readiness for the transforming power of his work. Only the purified heart can see God, that is, take him in in the way proper to a spiritual being. We can only see God by in some way becoming “like” him (1 John 3:2; the outline of the idea was already contained in Ps 24:3-4).

The pure heart creates peace. If the pure heart participates in the divine love, it is capable of reconciling those who are divided. The love of God enables people to accept their place in his plan and help others to find their unique place in that plan **(5:9)**. It is the plan of God that all the parts united as members of the Body of his Son work harmoniously together for the good of all and for his glory (Eph 4:12-13, 15-16). He is “the peace between us” (Eph 2:14-17). In accepting the grace of his Spirit, we become members of the Body of the Son, “sons in the Son” according to the expression of the Second Vatican Council (GS 22), and so are rightly called “children [sons] of God.” Already Jesus implies that his disciples will share in his own status of divine sonship (cf. 2:15, 3:17). Christians make peace in the world by their communion with the one who “brought peace by the blood of his cross” (Col 1:20).

Finally we arrive at the ultimate identification of the disciple and Jesus: the shedding of blood. Happy are those persecuted for the sake of righteousness **(5:10)**. Righteousness will cost. In a world where men have turned from God to seek self, the reorientation of an individual’s heart toward God will go against the trend. The selfish heart will hate the righteous heart directed toward its God. The righteous heart will be called on to persevere in the midst of pain. The martyrdom of the Maccabees who defied the imposition of pagan laws even to the shedding of blood (cf. 2 Macc 6:18-7:42) brought this idea to the fore at the end of the Old Testament period. Jesus himself, following the pattern of the innocent servant of Isa 50:5-7, 53:1-2, would be persecuted even to death in order to establish righteousness on the earth by his obedience. Those who accept his lordship will find themselves persecuted as he was (John 15:18-20, 17:14), carrying their cross after him (Mark 8:34). These sufferings will be precisely the birth pangs (John 16:21-22) of the kingdom of God. Those who share the Lord’s passion will enter his kingdom. The first and last beatitude are held together by the concept of the “kingdom of heaven,” the fourth and eighth by the word “righteousness.”

If the kingdom of God is a temple made of living stones, the beatitudes give the qualities that characterize each individual stone. They have in common the idea of relatedness. If to sin was to withdraw into the isolation of the ego, then membership of the kingdom of heaven is going to entail a rediscovery of dependence on God and interdependence among his children. The heart that lets itself be wounded by the world’s pain is the heart that finds healing and reintegration into the kingdom, that network of relationships of love and mutual service between persons human and divine. Jesus is offering a happiness that is the freedom from isolation.

Matthew has followed the eighth beatitude with a beatitude in the second person developing the same theme, specifying some aspects of the persecution Christians can expect to suffer. They will be reviled, evil things will be said against them by men who lie, all on account of their allegiance to Christ **(5:11-**

12). Such treatment should make them rejoice and be glad, since it was the lot of all who truly spoke for God, the prophets (cf. 1 Kgs 22:23-28, Jer 11:19, 15:10-11, 20:7-10, 26:20-23, 38:6), the suffering good man (cf. Ps 35:11-12, 19, 59:13, 69:5), indeed Jesus himself (Matt 26:59-60, 27:44). The joy of being on the side of truth will be confirmed by a “great reward” in heaven.

Jesus intends his disciples to have a transforming effect on the world. They are to be like salt **(5:13)**, a stimulus that brings out the true flavors in foods. Since what gives them the character of salt is not their own effort or good will but simply their reception of his word, they can only fulfill their function of being salt by continually attending to his word and drawing in his life. It is his transforming word within them that makes them able to transform the earth. Similarly their adherence to Jesus and his word will make them “the light of the world” **(5:14-15)**, reflecting the light of Jesus himself which has broken over Galilee (cf. 4:16). To have Jesus and not to radiate him is impossible. The image of light is associated with that of a city on a mountain, just as the restored Jerusalem was to radiate God’s light for the nations and kings of the world (Isa 60:1-3). The new human attitude made possible by Jesus (cf. the beatitudes) is to reveal to mankind what genuine human life is and the happiness to which it leads. Living by Jesus’ word will reveal the nature of the true God to men and bring them to glorify him **(5:16)**. Again Jesus insinuates that that God is a father to them just as he has already been revealed as the father of Jesus (cf. 2:15, 3:17 and already 5:9). This fatherhood of God will be a major theme of the Sermon.

We have already seen Jesus as the correct interpreter of the Old Testament (4:4, 7, 10). The newness that Jesus brings must not be conceived as abolishing the Law of Moses or the teaching of the prophets but as in line with them, bringing them to their fruition **(5:17)**. In the light of violations of the sabbath of which he will be accused, Jesus is at pains to indicate that he is fulfilling the ultimate purpose of the Law, that is the establishment of obedience to God in the human heart. Here is his revolution: not in the throwing off of external commandments but in the creation of a heart that is capable of obeying them in the right spirit, the spirit of love. Jesus sets himself apart from a mere literal fulfilling of the Law to insist that the spirit of loving obedience which he brings is the fulfillment of what the Law was summoning mankind to **(5:18)**. Jesus gives the heart which makes possible the fulfillment of the commands at the level of heart and motivation. Only the “poor in spirit” will be open to receiving this transforming gift. We will see that in fact his law is far more demanding than the Law of Moses and can only be carried out by divine grace.

The precepts of the Law of Moses guaranteed that the rights of God over human life would be respected. Honoring God, the Sabbath, one’s parents, the lives and rights of others—these commands pointed man in the direction that would ensure his conformity with the mind of God himself. Man must respect the God of life by respecting the life he created. What the Jewish people could not know was that the divine Law would go farther than simple respect for the rights of God and man. It would call for a self-giving love that would be demonstrated by the man/God himself as he gave his life for the sins of men. This would be the kind of love Jesus would ask of his disciples. It would fulfill the Law of Moses by stretching it to an unimagined length. Jesus would demand of man a divine love that could only be exercised if he gave us a share in his heart. For the moment he simply indicates with six specific examples the manner in which his demands both complete and transcend “the Law and the prophets.” He shows that he is already planning that some disciples should have the role of teaching others **(5:19)**.

For the first time in the Gospel are mentioned the two principal groups of enemies Jesus will encounter: the “scribes and Pharisees” **(5:20)**. Jesus takes

the initiative in distinguishing his teaching from theirs. The scribes were expert teachers of the Law of Moses; the Pharisees were a religious party characterized by a zeal for meticulous observance of the Law and of additional commandments by which they specified exactly how the Mosaic Law was to be observed. Most of the scribes belonged to the Pharisee party, although the two groups did not completely overlap. We have already met the scribes in 2:4. Jesus claims that membership in God's kingdom requires a "righteousness" "abounding" beyond that of these two groups of teachers. His righteousness will be a matter not merely of correct observances but of a purified heart (cf. 5:8). This he will spell out by illustrating his interpretation of six Old Testament precepts.

He begins with the fifth commandment: "You shall not murder," adding a rider suggested by the Scriptures: a murderer is to be brought before the law court (**5:21-22**). With astonishing self-assurance ("But I say to you...") Jesus proceeds to widen the application of the law. It is not enough not to murder a fellow human being; even giving way to anger against a "brother" is a crime for the court. As sons of a heavenly Father the members of the kingdom are brothers of each other. Displays of anger violate the mutual love Jesus is going to require of his followers. Angry movements arise in the soul without our control and need to be felt and acknowledged, even expressed to a wise listener. Jesus himself felt and expressed them (cf. Mark 3:5), but they must be directed against actions not persons. To condemn a person as "empty-headed" or label him "fool" is to condemn as bad a human being who as the image of God is essentially good, however bad his actions. The punishment for the angry use of these two labels is successively more severe: being brought before the Sanhedrin or Great Court and being consigned to Gehenna, the smoldering fire which consumed the waste of Jerusalem in the Vale of Hinnom and came to stand for the eternal punishment of the wicked. The violence of Jesus' denunciations of harm deliberately done to human persons who are the property of God will be frequently encountered. In his very condemning of anger he shows the right use of anger. He needs to make absolutely clear that by violating the divine love for any person we separate ourselves from him and his kingdom. Anger against persons is something for which we need to repent.

The importance of fraternal relations is emphasized by a further example in which anger is not specifically mentioned (**5:23-24**). Worship of God in community is of no value if a brother has not made the effort to remove a grievance against him from a brother's heart. As in the Old Testament sacrifices not accompanied by righteous behavior are not acceptable to God (cf. Ps 50:5, 8, 16-20, Isa 1:11-17, Amos 5:21-24). Jesus drives home the importance of reconciliation with the image of the gift left unoffered at the altar while the worshipper seeks out his brother to win him over. Saint Anthony the Great, the first monk and lifelong hermit, thoroughly understood this importance of reconciliation: "Our life and our death is with our neighbor. If we gain our brother, we have gained God, but if we scandalize our brother, we have sinned against Christ."

In yet a further example of reconciliation Jesus portrays an accused brother on the way to the judge with his accuser; the guilty one is to make restitution "quickly" before the law exacts a greater punishment (**5:25-26**).

Jesus moves to the sixth commandment: "You shall not commit adultery" (**5:27**). Jesus' kind of righteousness demands not only that one not commit the act but that a man not desire a woman lustfully: to do so is an adultery of the heart (**5:28**). Again we ask if Jesus is labeling involuntary sexual attraction as bad. The attraction between the sexes is a divine gift, part of the nature of man. Man cannot fulfill himself in isolation but needs to give and receive love from other embodied persons. Jesus asks for a purified heart (cf. 5:8) from which the

desire for the selfish use of another person's body for one's own gratification is eliminated. The human body is not an object to be used but the "substratum" (John Paul II) for spiritual communion between persons committed to one another according to the plan of God. Human beings must fight against the lust in which "the subjectivity of the person gives way to the objectivity of the body" (John Paul II: *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, 259). Such a purification is an asceticism which generally costs a good deal of pain, as Jesus indicates with the examples of the plucking out of the eye and the cutting off of the hand (**5:29-30**), but it is not beyond the power of the man redeemed by Christ. The outcome will be the saving of the whole person from Gehenna (cf. 5:22) and the achievement of true personhood.

A third precept of the Law is associated with the second: a man who divorces his wife must give her a written certificate asserting that she is free of her commitment to him (**5:31**). For Jesus any divorce and remarriage is equivalent to adultery (**5:32**). He will show later in the gospel that his teaching is a restoration of the Creator's original plan of a lifelong commitment between man and woman in the marriage vow. His ministry will remove the "hardness of heart" for which Moses apparently granted the possibility of divorce (cf. 19:3-9). The grace of Jesus will make possible a lifetime fidelity to the marriage vow which will be elevated to a share in the Son of God's own fidelity to his people even to death (Eph 5:25-32). The only divorce permitted by Jesus is in the case of a marriage of two persons joined by a degree of consanguinity forbidden by Jewish marriage law. Christians can remain faithful to their permanent marriage vow because that vow now participates in the unbreakable commitment of Christ to his Church. If annulments of marriages are granted today it is because there is proof that one or both of the spouses did not have the requisite freedom to make a lifelong commitment at the time of marriage.

This third "antithesis" between old and new law differs in nature from the first two in that it affects a public institution and not only interior dispositions. Yet the common thread in all of Jesus' "deepenings" of the Old Law is the creation of a new heart which his dying and rising will make possible.

Jesus now considers speech (**5:33**), a topic possibly suggested by the eighth commandment of the Decalogue (Exod 20:16). The Old Law permitted the use of oaths to establish the truth of one's statements, whether they referred to past facts or promises of future action (cf. Exod 20:7, Lev 19:12, Num 30:3, Deut 23:22). It was important not to utter frivolous oaths or swear to lies and to follow through on oaths to perform some action. Jesus declares that oaths are no longer necessary (**5:34-36**). The Christian will not need to call on God or anything related to God—heaven, earth, Jerusalem, even one's own head—to establish the truth of what he says. The words he utters will correspond with the truth in his heart. A simple "Yes" or "No" will suffice to indicate the truth (**5:37**). The Christian dwelling in Christ will not feel the need to exaggerate or embroider or manipulate or distort the truth but will simply, in the words of Saint Benedict, "utter truth from heart and mouth" (*Rule for Monks* 4:28). A desert father gave this advice: "Teach your mouth to say what you have in your heart" (*Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, Poemen 63). Jesus will give an example of this simple use of speech at his trial (26:63-64). He attributes inappropriate or unnecessary words as coming from "evil," either an evil principle in oneself or the influence of an evil spirit (JB).

Jesus will have more to say about speech in the Gospel, and his utterances will be appropriately laconic (cf. 6:7, 12:34-37).

With the fifth antithesis we move into the heart of Jesus' teaching. How should the Christian respond when unjustly treated? The Old Law was clear (**5:38**): "If a man injures his neighbor, what he has done must be done to him: broken limb for broken limb, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. As the injury inflicted, so

must be the injury suffered” (Lev 24:19 cf. also Exod 21:24, Deut 19:21). The disciple of Jesus, on the other hand, must not retaliate, must not resist the evil inflicted (**5:39a**). Nothing can make sense of this injunction except the Lord’s forgiving love shown on the Cross. By not retaliating against those who unjustly put him to death, he absorbed the full venom of human evil into himself, even letting it destroy him, only so that he might swallow up this ill treatment in the divine love. Christ is teaching that God’s love for his people, though capable of being profoundly hurt by their rejection of him, is nonetheless stronger than their sin and will annihilate it. Once again we see how the demands of the Sermon on the Mount make sense only in the framework of Christology. Their fulfillment requires that new heart which was first in Jesus and has been shared with his followers. The first hearers of the Sermon on the Mount could not yet have understood this but would have been astonished at the new standard of human behavior Jesus was proclaiming to them. God was asking something unexpected of human beings; Jesus himself would be the first to demonstrate how to carry it out.

Having briefly stated the principle in four words (*mē antistēnai tō ponērō*), Jesus moves immediately to concrete examples, as in 5:23-24. When struck on the right cheek the disciple does not retaliate but, absorbing the pain, does not shrink from presenting the other (**5:39b**). An amazing self-mastery is here indicated, or rather the mastery of love in the soul of the Christian. The Christian does not need to defend himself when he is rooted in the assurance of the Father’s love for him. Instead he loves the person who has struck him even unjustly. The law of forgiveness is in play, a law which will be openly stated in the following chapter (cf. 6:14-15; also 18:21-35). The Christian like his Master is to absorb the onslaught of evil in the greater abyss of love, a divine love. Only such a love for the offender and a not paying him back will every break the cycle of violence in the world. When wickedness has done its worst and finds that it is nonetheless accepted, it becomes capable of conversion, of letting go of evil and accepting love.

Once the principle behind Jesus’ command is understood it becomes possible to answer all the objections human nature makes to this teaching. Would it not sometimes be for the good of the offender for him to be brought to justice for his unfair actions? Does one not have the duty to protect one’s person and goods especially if he is responsible for other people such as his family? Are we to become milquetoasts, doormats for all kinds of ill treatment? Surely there are times when one mustn’t let oneself be abused? In facing these dilemmas the Christian will be guided by love, which will direct him to act responsibly and appropriately in a given situation. What will always be true is that the Christian like his Master will be called upon regularly, “seventy times seven times,” to forgive and not retaliate against the evil inflicted on him by others. The Christian Gospel is that evil has been swallowed up by good, hatred by love, sin by righteousness. By sharing in the forgiving act of Christ for the world, the Christian contributes to the redemption of that world from sin. His love helps sinners to neutralize the evil in their own hearts, and so the transformation of the world into a civilization of love can come about.

From harm done to one’s person Jesus moves to an example involving possessions (**5:40**). If someone takes you to court and demands your shirt as a pledge for a loan, let him have also your cloak. The sentence is declared “deliberately hyperbolic” by the Jerusalem Bible (in loc.) and is an example of the Lord’s Semitic way of making a point by showing extremes. The spiritual meaning of the command is that attachment to possessions should not get in the way of love for persons. Deferring to the will of another even to the point of “letting

[one]self be defrauded” (1 Cor 6:7) is an irrational behavior that only makes sense in the light of a transcending, forgiving love. Jesus’ teaching directly contradicts human wisdom and relativizes it. Once again the figure of the Crucified One shines through the Sermon, commenting on and explaining it.

Jesus’ third example (5:41) involves one’s activity: compelled by another to walk a mile, the disciple walks two. Again it is the attitude that is important: the disciple looks to the needs of the other even to his own inconvenience. Jesus’ resurrection makes possible the disciple’s availability for the needs of others even at a cost to himself. Only if we know that our lives are in the hands of a loving God can we sacrifice our own preferences for the needs of others, and willingly. What we lose will be given back a hundredfold.

A fourth example is related to the previous three although not directly dealing with unjust treatment (5:42). Christ’s disciple must “give to the one who asks” because he shares in the richness of God who always answers prayer (cf. 7:7) and assures that we have enough to give (2 Cor 9:8-9). It is becoming clear that Jesus’ teaching on the proper behavior of man is rooted in the nature of God himself, who in the course of the Sermon will be revealed as a loving Father whose will is that his human children imitate his very being. Jesus completes his fourth example by adding the command not to turn away the one who wishes to borrow.

The pinnacle of Jesus’ teaching is found in the sixth and last of the antitheses between old and new law (5:43a). While the ten commandments call for respect for the rights of others, they do not require love for the neighbor. The Book of the Covenant (cf. Exod 22:20-26, 23:6-12, also Deut 24:17-22) required compassionate treatment of the poor and the stranger, but only in the Holiness Code of the book of Leviticus was this compassion (cf. Lev 19:9, 14) formulated as a law of love for the neighbor and a concern for what a man had in his heart. “You must not bear hatred for your brother in your heart. You must openly tell him your neighbor of his offence; this way you will not take a sin upon yourself. You must not exact vengeance, nor must you bear a grudge against the children of your people. You must love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.” (Lev 19:18-19). Again, “If a stranger lives with you in your land, do not molest him. You must count him as one of your own countrymen and love him as yourself—for you were once strangers yourselves in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.” (Lev 19:33-34; cf. Deut 10:18-19). Already the Old Testament writer was seeing that man’s treatment of his fellow man must be modeled on God’s treatment of his people. It is the human person’s task to extend to others the same love and compassion he has himself received from God. In the sixth antithesis Jesus will give that insight its fullest development. God is love for the good and bad alike; the child of God must reflect his Father in this.

In quoting the Old Testament law of love for neighbor Jesus adds a phrase that brings out an implication of that law (5:43b), namely that it did not include love for enemies. One must love the poor and the stranger, but the Old Testament implies that it is right to hate an enemy who is also the enemy of God. The psalmist proclaims his conformity with God’s will in saying, “Do I not hate those who hate you, Lord, and do I not loathe those who rise against you? I hate them with a perfect hate, and they are enemies to me” (Ps 139:21-22). Another psalmist proclaims his loyalty by “looking with loathing” on the faithless who do not observe the Lord’s word (Ps 119:158). Yet even the Old Law prescribed a certain consideration for the rights of an enemy: “If you come on your enemy’s ox or donkey going astray, you must lead it back to him. If you see the donkey of a man who hates you fallen under its load, instead of keeping out of his way, go to him to help him” (Exod 23:4-5, cf. Deut 22:1-4). Jesus extends the law of brotherly love even to enemies: “But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for

those who persecute you” (5:44). The command goes farther than simply performing a kind deed that might be motivated by the desire to treat others as one would want to be treated by them. It is a call for love from the heart, proved by a prayer to God for the welfare of the one persecuting us.

Verses 43-44 contain the first mention of the word *agapē* in the New Testament. It will become the supreme virtue of the Christian. Some of its nature has already been revealed in the fifth antithesis in which the disciple is called not to retaliate against those who hurt him. The Christian will not be concerned with establishing his own rights but with doing nothing to hurt his neighbor. Here Jesus carries the attitude further into doing positive good for one’s enemy. It is this love that will show the disciples to be sons of their Father in heaven, who makes his sun rise on evil and good and lets rain fall on just and unjust (5:45). It is no longer the merit of the person which elicits love but simply the fact of his existence in God’s world. The child of God is recognized by his resemblance to his Father in this universal love. The preceding antithesis has shown what this love will sometimes cost.

Having begun this section with the word “abound” (*perisseusē*), Jesus refers to the same idea again at the conclusion of the section (5:46-47). The Christian must do something different, more “abundant” (*perisson*). Even tax collectors, notorious in those days for making money at the expense of the taxpayer, love those who love them, and the gentiles reserve their greetings for their brothers. Christians must be as perfect as their heavenly Father is perfect, that is, loving all without distinction or regard to merit (5:48). This love of the Father will be made manifest primarily in his sending his Son to die for sinners, while they were still God’s “enemies” (cf. Rom 5:8, 10). It is only in the perspective of this superabundant divine love for man that the injunctions of the Sermon on the Mount become practicable. The Christian will be called on even to give his life for the one who hates him just as Christ, the Son of God, gave his life for those who persecuted him. Jesus, who has been introduced to the reader as the Son of God, is making his followers sons of his Father. It will gradually become clear that what he asks of us is possible only because he grants us a share in his very own sonship: we are “sons in the Son” (cf. above on 5:9).

So far Jesus has taught that man is being called to a divine form of loving which must emanate from the heart. The “righteousness” he demands goes beyond that of the scribes and Pharisees and is interior. He now develops this interiority by contrasting it with the human tendency to want to be “seen” by others as righteous. A religion concerned with “keeping up appearances” is ultimately self-serving: one is concerned more with human honor than with God. It leaves man with the impression that he can achieve his own righteousness by fulfilling all the rules; therefore he does not need God. Such a man is not “poor in spirit” but self-satisfied. God can give him no “reward” because he has never let go of himself. Jesus’ religion demands an opening of the heart to our “Father in heaven” (6:1), who alone determines righteousness. It is something we must hope and ask for as a free gift, relying on his will to give it. Jesus will illustrate this in three kinds of religious practice.

He will not have his disciples “blowing a trumpet” in front of them in public when they give alms to the poor. Those who do this have their reward in the “glory” they receive from men (6:2). In a striking image Jesus does not want even the left hand to be aware of what the right is doing (6:3); it would be best if we were not conscious of our goodness since self-congratulation so easily creeps in. Should we not have a good feeling about our good deeds? Everything depends on the motive: whether we are trying to prove to ourselves our own righteousness so that we are in control of our destiny or, on the other hand (so to speak) we are simply trying to please our Father who sees in secret. When no human eye

approves us it is more difficult to take credit for one's own virtue **(6:4)**; the only "payment" one will receive will be the favor of God.

As for prayer, the hypocrites love to pray standing in the synagogues (cf. vs. 2) or on the street corners to be seen by men **(6:5)**. They can easily have a feeling of self-justification which is anything but a humble acknowledgement of total dependence on God (see the Pharisee in Saint Luke's parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, Luke 18:9-12). The problem and danger in all these religious practices is a self-centeredness that replaces the God-centeredness to which man is called by his nature. The tendency is well put by William Law: "Would you know whence it is that so many false spirits have appeared in the world...? It is this: men have turned to God without turning from themselves" (*The Spirit of Prayer*). The created spirit is open to infinite being; when he fails to see his fulfillment in the free acknowledgement of the infinite lordship of God and chooses to make himself his own god, he diminishes himself. In choosing the creature rather than the creator he withdraws himself from the source of life and eventually dies. Such was the sin of Adam which Jesus came to repair by living a human life totally oriented to the Father. As will be seen in a moment, he wants his followers like him to be totally dedicated to the Father's will. He is asking for a restoration of the right relationship between man and God, a relationship which he himself will establish.

Jesus vividly pictures the equivalent of "giving alms in secret" by citing the passage in which Elisha "goes into" the house where the dead boy lies, "shuts the door" and "prays" **(6:6; cf. 1 Kgs 4:33)**. Similarly in an oracle in the Isaian apocalypse (Isa 26:20) the Lord tells his people to "go into their rooms and close the door." The shutting out of human view ensures the heart's complete aloneness with God. Such is the aloneness man must recover today if he is to have a relationship with God in his authentic self without the masks we put on to please people or make ourselves acceptable. The Fathers of the Church identified the secret "room" as the heart: "We are admonished not to enter the recesses of our homes but the bedroom of our hearts" (Saint Hilary, ACCS Ia 128).

Before giving his third example of a religious practice done to attract attention, Jesus develops the theme of prayer more fully by warning against using many words like the pagans, who think that a lot of words will ensure the hearing of prayer **(6:7)**. The Creator knows the creature's needs—he does not need to be given a long list **(6:8)**. What is important is a simple alignment of one's will with that of the Father, a desire that the Father's name be honored, that his "kingdom"—the right relationship between men and God—come on earth, and that we have the basic things he wants us to have: daily food, forgiveness, strength to persevere, and protection from evil. These are the petitions of the Our Father **(6:9-13)**. The prayer is both the description of an attitude the praying person must have and a short formula which can be recited frequently as a way of deepening that attitude and making it habitual.

"Hallowed be thy name." In the Book of Ezekiel God is concerned about the holiness of his name being recognized among the nations; he himself will display that holiness (Ezek 36:20-23). In the Lord's Prayer the Christian pleads for the fulfillment of that prophecy. An equivalent wish is that the Lord's "kingdom" may come, his reign over human affairs. This kingdom is exalted in the middle three verses of Psalm 145 (vv. 11-13) at the end of the Psalter, as if it were a secret being saved for the coming age. The psalm in its later verses spells out what the kingdom of God will look like: the desires of those who fear the Lord will be fulfilled and they will praise him without ceasing. God's "kingship" and the honoring of his "name" are found together in the eschatological account of Zechariah 14:9.

Saint Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer attaches to the petition for the coming of the kingdom another petition (**6:10b**) which explains in what that coming consists, namely that God's will be done by his human creatures. The exact words of this petition are prayed by Jesus in his agony in the garden (cf. 26:42). It is as if the Sermon on the Mount reveals the depths of God's will for man so that Jesus can later be shown to be the one who fulfils it. The Sermon and the suffering of Jesus explain each other. Jesus embodies the teaching of the Sermon; the Sermon is only fully explained by Jesus' Passion. Jesus' Passion shows how the Sermon is to be understood; the Sermon reveals how Jesus' Passion is the fulfillment of the divine will. Insofar as Jesus accomplishes the Father's will, he *is* the Sermon on the Mount, and his disciples carry out the teaching of the Sermon only by sharing in his own Passion, death and rising. In particular the praying of the Our Father by the Church is the Church's participation in the loving prayer of Christ to his Father, a prayer, as we will see, that is always answered. God's kingdom will have come when men are as utterly focused as the angels on the fulfillment of the divine will.

Part of God's kingdom in Psalm 145:15-16 is the granting of food to God's dependents; the Lord's Prayer prays also for this fundamental need (**6:11**). The next petition for the forgiveness of debts (**6:12**), like that for the doing of God's will, has a clause attached: we can only receive divine forgiveness in the measure in which we let that forgiveness flow through us to others. The "as in heaven" of verse 10 matches the "as we forgive" of verse 12: earth imitates heaven and heaven imitates earth. Refusal to forgive is tantamount to a refusal to accept forgiveness, as will be made remarkably clear in the parable of the unforgiving debtor (18:23-35). Jesus underscores the point in his only comment on the Our Father (**6:14-15**, replacing the "debts" of the prayer with the word "offenses," "trespasses"). Once again we see how the Christian's vocation is to be like his Father, loving even those who do not love him (cf. 5:44-45, 48).

In the final two petitions of the Our Father (**6:13**) the disciples are told to ask that their faith not be put to the test in the final battle between good and evil and that they be delivered both from the evil in their own hearts and the evil one—Satan—who prowls about the world seeking their destruction (cf. 1 Pet 5:8-9). In his own prayer to the "Father" (John 17:1) before his Passion Jesus similarly asks that the disciples be kept from the "evil one" (John 17:15). With this petition all human petitions to the divine are completed.

The third spiritual practice that can be done for oneself is fasting. Disciples must not be like the "hypocrites" (cf. 6:2, 5) who look gloomy when they fast, disfiguring their faces (e.g., with ashes) to be seen by men to be fasting (**6:16**)—the Greek puns on the verbs "disfigure" (*aphanizousin*) and "be seen" (*phanōsin*). Such folk again have their reward in the esteem of men. Jesus would have the disciple disguise his fast, anointing the head and washing the face as if for a banquet so that the fast may be hidden from men, known only to his Father (**6:17-18**). No less than nine times in this chapter has God been referred to as "your (singular or plural; once "our") Father." Jesus is proclaiming an intimate relationship between the Christian and God, one in which the creature's heart is transparent to God who reserves for it the undefined "reward" of eternal life. The same intimate and loving care of the Father will be the main theme of the second half of the chapter.

The word *aphanizein* (vs. 16) may have prompted the next pair of verses in which this verb is used in a different sense: Christians should lay up treasures in heaven, where moth and rust cannot "disfigure" and where thieves cannot break in and steal (**6:19-20**). In terms of the previous section, it is better to have the heavenly Father's imperishable "reward" than to enjoy corruptible treasures on earth. Man is made for an abiding happiness, not a transitory one. Once again

Jesus appeals to the profound dignity of the human person. Entangling one's heart in temporary treasures prevents one from finding the true treasure. Again the term "treasure" may have inspired the following saying (**6:21**), in which Jesus indicates that one's heart in a certain sense resides in one's treasure: if that treasure is transient, the heart will pass away with it; if the treasure is eternal, so also will be the heart. Here in the center of the Sermon we see the ultimate importance of the heart as the place of ultimate choices.

A similar point is made with the use of a different body part. If one's eye is sound, the rest of the body can function in the light of what it sees (**6:22-23a**). The eye permits man to take in his surroundings and make judgments about appropriate behavior for interacting with them. A person's activity is curtailed if the eye does not see well. Jesus applies the whole to man's inner "eye," his ability to see the truth (**6:23b**). If it is focused on untruth the rest of one's life will be disordered. The inner eye is a parallel organ to the heart: it might be called the heart's "knowing" dimension and suggests what we call "conscience." For Jesus everything depends on a heart truly open to conformity with the Father's will. Such a conformity illumines every other aspect of a person's life. The "simplicity" of the eye is the equivalent of the "purity" of the heart (5:8).

Thus it is no surprise that Jesus' next saying concerns the single focus of the disciple, who "cannot serve two masters" (**6:24**). Here we recall Kierkegaard's definition, "Purity of heart is to will one thing." The human person is made ultimately for God who alone can satisfy his longing for communion. Other masters can be served in so far as they are subordinated to and ordered to the supreme master. When there is a conflict one must choose ("love" or "be devoted to") the principal master and reject ("hate" or "contemn") the other: Jesus uses extreme language to make the distinction. His terse summary is, "You cannot serve God and mammon," mammon being an Aramaic word designating "wealth" or "property" and sometimes personified. Here the word ultimately refers to the self as possessor of goods without reference to God. We are back at the fundamental human sin of grasping for oneself what is God's (cf. on 6:6).

All of Chapter Six has in some way been concerned with the primacy of God in the Christian's life. The long concluding section is no exception. Jesus points out that the one who makes the "kingdom" of God and its righteousness his first priority will have his basic needs satisfied and not have to "worry" (**6:25-33**). The Father who provides food for the birds and who clothes the "grass of the field" with the beauty of the lily will not allow his children, of far greater value than these, to lack food or drink or clothing. Of prime importance is the conviction that the Father loves us and will not let us be without true nourishment. For the first time in the Gospel Jesus identifies one who lacks this trust as a person "of little faith." In the fundamental matters of life one must expect everything from God. Often this will be true even for the daily necessities, but the principal import of the teaching is that the definitive life Jesus has been speaking of in the Sermon (i.e., happiness, the "kingdom of heaven," divine comfort and mercy, the vision of God, the status of sonship, the heavenly Father's "reward") will not be lacking to the one who relies on God rather than on creatures. All four of the Gospels will make clear that the primordial virtue of the disciple is faith. Jesus will exclaim simply, "All things are possible to one who has faith" (Mark 9:23). Jesus invites us to accept that his Father in heaven is also our loving Father who asks only that we acknowledge that love particularly as it comes to us through his Son. To do this is to set one's heart on the kingdom of God, to surrender to the reign of God in human affairs. Such is the attitude of the "poor in spirit" (cf. 5:3).

The passage shows Jesus' sensitivity to the beauty of nature and his penchant for apt illustration—see the reference to adding a single cubit to one's time of life or the comparison of the lily to Solomon in all his glory or the citing of

questions the pagans ask. A final statement has been added to the section because it contains the word “worry”: the disciples should not worry about the next day which will have its own worries; “sufficient for the day is the evil thereof” (6:34). God can only be encountered in the present moment.¹ No pessimist, Jesus is aware that each day will bring its troublesome burden of “evil”; indeed he will have sounded this evil to its depths, unflinchingly, and emerged victorious.

So far the Sermon on the Mount has taught the need for an inner awareness of the lordship of God, a willingness to depend on him for the needs of life, and a desire to imitate the kind of love he has for his children. He is asking for an utter reversion of man’s priorities. The fact that he is asking for this “new heart” with consummate authority and assurance suggests that he is not asking something impossible, but as yet it is not clear to the reader how this new human way of living will be introduced among men. That will become clear only when he rises from the dead and offers to believers a share in his own “righteousness” and resurrection.

If man could be forgiven only by forgiving others (6:14-15), so if he does not want to be judged he must not judge others (7:1). He will be treated as he treats others (7:2). Once again it is a question of acknowledging the rights of God. To presume to determine another’s fate is to play god, to usurp a right over another’s life that one cannot have because he does not know the depths of a person’s heart as God does. It is also to adopt a standard that, to be logical, one must apply to oneself, and which of us does not have a “beam in the eye” (7:3-5)? Behind the precept not to judge is the truth of a loving and merciful God whom it is man’s duty to imitate (cf. 5:7, 44-45). For ourselves, we are sinners and must acknowledge that fact (cf. 5:4-5). Jesus makes his point tellingly by again quoting the speech of the sinful man: “Let me remove the beam from your eye.” It is so much easier to correct others’ faults than one’s own, to which we can be strangely blind. Again Jesus attacks the “hypocrite” in us (cf. 6:2, 5, 16). Only when a man has been purified of his own sin can his mental eye (cf. 6:22-23) see clearly enough to discern the failings of his “brother” with compassion.

No other temptation was so frequently warned against by the desert fathers as that of judging one’s neighbor. When Abba Poemen wanted to know how to become a monk, Abba Joseph answered, “If you want to find rest here below and hereafter, in all circumstances say, ‘Who am I?’ and do not judge anyone” (*Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, Joseph of Panephrisus 2). When Abba Paphnutius asked a word from Abba Macarius the Great, the latter said simply, “Do no evil to anyone, and do not judge anyone. Observe this and you will be saved” (Macarius the Great 28). Abba Moses taught, “The monk must die to his neighbor and never judge him at all, in any way whatever....When someone is occupied with his own faults, he does not see those of his neighbor” (Moses, Instruction 1 & 3). Another said, “A dog is better than I am, for he has love and he

¹ Dom Aelred Graham has described the experience of living in the present moment: “If in our minds or wishes we are not at the here and now, if we are dwelling on the past or the anticipated future, or absorbed in ego-regarding thoughts, we can neither hear God’s voice nor see what is before us. To hear and to see we must ‘let go,’ that is, allow the flux of thoughts and feelings to evaporate into nothingness from our nonattention. When the mind is awakened to the point of cherishing no thought, then the challenge of vision will evoke, on the instant, the appropriate response. To be able to do this, through God’s gift, continuously and by way of habit, is to be living as one’s true self, egolessly. Then every day cannot but be a good day, every season a good season.” (*Zen Catholicism* 159f).

does not judge” (Xanthias 3). The business of the monk was to work at submitting his own heart to purification by divine love, not to correct the faults of others. The one who removes the beam from his own eye is the one who has learned to love his neighbor from a pure heart.

The next saying of Jesus is linked with the section on judging by the verb “cast” (*balēte*; cf. *ekbalein* in 7:4-5). One should cast out the fault in one’s heart but not cast the word of God indiscriminately to everybody. Here some judging is necessary: the human heart is in need of conversion. If a preacher discerns that others are not open to the Gospel message, he would be subjecting a “holy thing” to trampling by “dogs” and “pigs,” and himself to being torn asunder by them if he preached it (7:6). God’s universal love for his people is respectful: it does not treat each person the same but adapts itself to individual needs and dispositions. The preacher too will love each person in the way needed by that person: to the coarse and rebellious he will show patient endurance, being ready to speak of God and Christ (his “pearls”) only when he begins to detect some receptivity to his message. The silence of Jesus before the chief priests and elders, Pilate, and Herod (26:63, 27:12-14, Luke 23:9) is the model. A balancing element to this saying would be Saint Paul’s insistence on “preaching the word insistently in season and out of season” (2 Tim 4:2). The Christian disciple will need the gift of discernment to know when to speak and when not to speak (cf. Matt 10:19-20).

Jesus has revealed that God is a loving Father who cares for his children’s needs and wishes his children to love like him. To receive the gifts of the Father’s providence and the strength to carry out his will, the disciple need only ask for them. “Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (7:7-11). The child expresses both his need and his trust in asking the Father for what he knows the Father wants him to have. Through prayer the disciple cooperates with the divine will, so that the supplying of needs takes place as the concurrence of the divine and human will: man is not inactive in the reception of gifts but through prayer makes his own contribution to their realization. Jesus’ three pithy imperatives are then paraphrased in three equivalent clauses in the third person (7:8). With two questions Jesus invites the hearers to consider their human experience of fatherhood: does a father give something hurtful when his child asks for something good? (7:9-10). The conclusion follows: if even human beings, inclined as they are to evil, give good gifts to their children, how much more will a loving father give them to those who simply ask him. Through prayer we acknowledge that we are children dependent on a loving Father in heaven. At the same time, through prayer we receive the fullness of those gifts we could not have acquired by our own efforts. Through the expression of our poverty we become truly rich. The asking of the child makes possible the performing of the true adult.

Jesus enlarges on the father/child analogy to teach that we all have a built-in knowledge of how to treat other people: it is the knowledge of how we wish to be treated (7:12). This truth was expressed before Jesus (see the negative formulation in Tobit 4:15), who sees it as a summation of “the law and the prophets.” It is another formulation of the command, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Looked at objectively it is obviously a correct piece of advice; subjectively it takes a lifetime to learn how to put it into practice. The egotistic heart must be tamed, the center shifted from self to God, before we learn to treat others with the respect, consideration and even love with which we want to be treated. The Christian knows that he has but to ask, and ask continually, to receive the power to love like this. Ultimately I want to be loved by the one who died for me; therefore that is how I must love my brother; that is the kind of love being asked of me. Indeed, that is the privilege which my status of child of God

confers on me, to be able to love like God. It is a gift freely given if I continually ask for it.

We are not then surprised when Jesus tells us this way of spiritual childhood is a confined way, its entry is a narrow gate (**7:13-14**), and few find it. Later he will say that it is the way of the cross. The acceptance of divine love entails a death to our limited self-concern: our heart must be widened out to embrace the concerns of Jesus. Such a death is painful, but it is the way to genuine life, whereas the “broad way” of the world, the way of mankind without God, leads to disintegration. These two verses make explicit two ideas that have been in the background of the Sermon but are now stated openly as themes in themselves. The narrowness of the way of Jesus has been present in his teaching on the need to bear persecution, to refrain from divorce, to remove body parts that cause one to sin, to turn the other cheek and go the extra mile, to love one’s enemies, to renounce mammon. These sufferings constitute what Bonhoeffer called the “cost of discipleship.” But they are willingly accepted by the disciple because they lead to life, and this is the second theme that has so far been implied in the discourse. Jesus offers genuine life, the ultimate gift which summarizes all the others mentioned in the sermon (see above on 6:25-33). Disciples accept even joyfully the hardships which prepare them for the kingdom of heaven (cf. Acts 5:41). Commenting on the “narrow way,” Saint Benedict encourages his monks to remember the goal to which it leads even in this life: “Do not be daunted immediately by fear and run away from the road that leads to salvation. It is bound to be narrow at the outset. But as we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the way of God’s commandments, our hearts expanded (cf. Ps 119:32) by the inexpressible delight of love.... Through patience we shall share in the sufferings of Christ that we may deserve also to share in his kingdom” (*Rule for Monks*, Prologue 48-50).

It is in the context of these hardships that we must understand Jesus’ melancholy observation that few find this narrow way. Because it is difficult men and women avoid it, often for a great part of their lives. But in the light of God’s desire that all men be saved through the sacrifice of Christ (1 Tim 2:5-6), one may hope that human experience and supernatural grace may lead many if not all to say “Yes” to the narrow way before they die.

Because the way of Jesus is countercultural, a way less traveled than the broad way taken by “many” (cf. 7:13), Jesus must warn against misunderstandings of God’s plan propagated by “false prophets” who seem gentle enough but are inwardly ravaging wolves (**7:15**; again Jesus speaks with simple and powerful metaphors). How is the Christian to know who speaks for God and who does not? The simple principle is stated at the beginning and end of the next five-verse section (**7:16-20**) forming an inclusion: “By their fruits you will recognize them.” Again using a question (cf. 5:13, 46-47, 6:25-28, 30, 7:3, 9-10), Jesus uses plant imagery to make a clear point: Plants produce fruit according to their particular nature: it would be foolish to expect grapes from thorns or figs from thistles (the Genesis writer expressed wonder at the way each plant bears within it the seeds of its own kind, Gen 1:11-12). The implication is that a human person can only produce outward acts that conform to his inner nature. Insofar as his deeds are good they proceed from a good heart, and evil deeds are signs of an evil heart. The word “heart,” which has been the focus of Jesus’ moral teaching in the Sermon, is not used here, but it corresponds to the “inner” nature of man that defines the goodness or badness of his works. Verses 17-19 apply the principle to trees, stating it first positively, then negatively, then giving the fate of the rotten tree. The “fire” reserved for the tree not bearing good fruit is the equivalent of “gehenna” (5:22, 29-30), the “ruin” to which the broad way leads (7:13).

For the Old Testament the man who gave himself to daily contemplation of the Law was a firmly rooted tree that brought forth the fruit of good works in due time (Ps 1:2-3, cf. Jer 17:7-8), while the wicked vanished like chaff (Ps 1:4), their “way” leading to doom (Ps 1:6). In Psalm 92 the just man is compared to a flourishing palm tree or a great cedar; a subsequent verse sees the just as “planted” and “flourishing” in the house of the Lord, i.e., the temple. The plant and building metaphors will be found together also here in the final verses of the Sermon, as Jesus compares the good man to one building his house on a rock foundation. The one who adheres to the Lord may have suffering in this life but endures forever.

For Jesus there is only one criterion for entering the kingdom of heaven, and that is to carry out the will of his Father in heaven (**7:21**). What that will is is explained in the Sermon: it is love for one’s enemies springing from a purified heart. Such a heart is God’s to give, but the disciple has only to ask and it will be given. Until now Jesus has spoken of the Father as “your” (singular or plural) Father (in heaven). Now he reveals that the Father of the disciples is also his Father, as the reader knows from earlier in the Gospel (cf. 2:15, 3:17). If he has been able to speak with such authority of the Father, it is because he is the Son par excellence: he has an intimate personal knowledge of the Father which will soon be confirmed by his miraculous deeds. Jesus will have good deeds, not mere intentions: the word “do” (7:21) is picked up from vs. 19 where it refers to the tree “producing” fruit. Prophets, exorcists, miracle-workers who did great things for the Lord do not qualify for the kingdom if they have not produced works of love from a pure heart (**7:22-23**). In the most “Christological” verse of the Sermon Jesus asserts that he himself will one day be the arbiter of who will or will not enter the Father’s kingdom. Jesus discloses himself as not merely the wise teacher who declares the heavenly Father’s will but the Lord who will one day judge all men. This self-description here introduced briefly will be solemnly developed in the great discourse on the Final Things at the end of the public ministry (cf. 25:31-46). Here Jesus appropriates a psalm verse as the sentence he will utter on those who have not conformed to the Father’s will: “Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity” (Ps 6:9). The verse was originally spoken by a psalmist who from his sickbed had prayed for healing and whose prayer was heard. The final judge of the world will be a man who has been raised from suffering by God.

These ideas are crystallized in a strong pair of similes that concludes the Sermon. The one who carries out Jesus’ words is like a prudent man who built his house on rock, which therefore withstood the battering of tempests (**7:24-25**). The man who does not carry out Jesus’ words is like a foolish man who built his house on sand; the rain, the floods and the winds beat against it so that it fell mightily (**7:26-27**). The reward of obedience to the teaching of Christ is permanence in being. Disobedience leads to extinction (cf. 5:22, 29-30, 7:13).

The reaction of the crowds to Jesus’ teaching as reported by Matthew shows that they heard clearly the note of authority assumed by Jesus in the Sermon (**7:28-29**). Jesus was not proving a point, not arguing from texts or interpretations of texts like “their rabbis,” not offering opinions or suggestions; he was asserting a new law which was nonetheless the bringing to perfection of the Old Law, speaking with utter personal assurance of the Father’s will and identity. The “power” with which he spoke would now be made manifest in works of healing.

An aura of majesty surrounds Jesus as he descends the mountain of the Sermon. Many crowds follow him and now a leper approaches and falls prostrate before him (**8:1-2**). This mark of reverence is shown to Jesus eight times in the

Gospel of Matthew (see also 2:2, 8, 11), as against twice in the Gospel of Mark and once in the Gospel of Luke and underscores the supernatural dignity of Jesus as viewed by the first evangelist. The leper refers to Jesus as *kyrie*, a term signifying at the very least “sir,” but also suggesting a more than human “lord,” and echoing the use of the term as the Greek translation of the Hebrew name of God, YHWH, a term applied to Jesus already in the letters of Paul (cf. Rom 1:4, 10:9, 1 Cor 8:6, 12:3, 2 Cor 4:5, Phil 2:11). Readers of Matthew’s Gospel would have been familiar with this usage for two or three decades by the time the Gospel was written. The various meanings of the word *kyrie* no doubt overlapped in ways it would be difficult to distinguish. In any case, the leper recognizes that Jesus is endowed with supernatural power because he knows Jesus can “make [him] clean” if he wishes. In four short phrases the healing is effected (**8:3**): Jesus stretches out his hand, as if from a loftier position, touches the leper, and repeats the leper’s two verbs: “I wish it; be cleansed.” Touch and word, contact and will restore the man’s flesh. Matthew shows the utter obedience of the disease to the command of Jesus by recounting the cure with the same verb used by Jesus in his command: “And immediately he was cleansed from his leprosy” (literally, “his leprosy was purified away”). Jesus accomplishes by touch what was accomplished through the prophet Elisha when he told Naaman to bathe seven times in the Jordan (2 Kgs 5:10-14). The God of Israel, the God who created the universe by his word, is acting in Jesus.

Jesus’ first miracle is a cure of the most dreaded and ostracizing of diseases. It is a sign of his mission to heal the most helpless and to restore them to communion with God’s people. The spiritual healing of the human person disfigured by sin is the goal of his ministry; he will not have his purpose misunderstood by sensationalistic reports of physical cures (**8:4**). He tells the healed man not to publicize the miracle but instead to confirm his reintegration into the community by reporting to the priests, as required by Lev 14:2-3, and cf. Lev 13:49. Jesus is obedient to the Law of Moses as he was obedient to the “righteousness” demanded by the Father (cf. 3:15).

The second miracle of Jesus is of equal significance: Jesus heals the paralyzed and “terribly tormented” son (or servant) of a foreigner because of the man’s faith (**8:5-13**). This Jewish Gospel is at the same time a universalist Gospel. Anyone who has faith in Jesus, the faith that is convinced of his divine power and humbly (“I am not worthy,” 8:8) asks for his help, can experience that help. His petition is a putting into practice of the teaching of the Sermon, “Ask and it will be given to you” (cf. 7:7). The centurion does not require Jesus’ visit to his home: he knows that a word is enough, since he himself, as a man in authority, accomplishes actions by a single command: “‘Go,’ and he goes; ‘‘Come,’ and he comes; ‘‘Do this,’ and he does it” (8:9). The disease of his boy, whether a spirit or a simple malady, is similarly utterly subject to the power of Jesus over all forces of creation. Jesus is capable of being “surprised” by this pagan demonstration of a faith deeper than any he has so far encountered among the Jews (8:10). For the first time in the Gospel (and the New Testament) we meet the word that designates the principal spiritual act required by Jesus in the face of his message (the word “believe” is omitted from Matthew’s version of Jesus’ opening message: compare Matt 4:17 and Mark 1:15). Already in the Sermon Jesus had intimated that the chief obstacle to man’s enjoying the gifts of God was his being “of little faith,” *oligopistoi*. Now Jesus identifies that faith as the principal means of enjoying the benefits he has come to confer on mankind. Faith is the one thing he looks for and hopes to “find” (8:10).

The centurion’s faith is for Jesus the beginning of a great procession of people from all over the world (cf. “from the west...and...from the east,” Isa 59:19) who will enter his kingdom through faith and enjoy table companionship

with the patriarchs of Israel (8:11). It will be the charge of the apostles at the end of the Gospel to bring the message of Jesus to “all nations” (28:19; see also 25:32). The theme had already been hinted at in the genealogy of Jesus and the visit of the Magi (cf. 1:1, 5, 2:11-12). It comes as no surprise that Jesus contrasts this welcome given him by the pagans with his rejection by the “sons of the kingdom,” i.e., his own people for whom the kingdom was originally meant (8:12). By rejecting the Lord’s offer the chosen people in fact have preferred to remain in an “outer darkness,” a region without God and the “great light” (cf. 4:16) of his Anointed One. The Matthaean Jesus will often describe this exile as a place of “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (cf. 8:12, 13:42, 50, 22:13, 24:51, 25:30) to indicate the eternal frustration of those who know they have rejected the only one who could give them the happiness to which they are ordered.

After this visionary prophecy Jesus grants the centurion’s request, attributing it precisely to the latter’s “belie[ving]”. The request of faith was immediately (“in that moment”) granted (8:13).

Jesus’ third miracle is closer to home in that it is performed for a relative of one he has called to follow him (cf. 4:18). Simon is referred to as Peter although he will not formally receive that name until later. Jesus has entered Capernaum (cf. 8:5) on the Sea of Galilee, the town which will serve as his base of operations (cf. 4:13). Entering Peter’s house he sees that Peter’s mother-in-law is lying in bed (cf. 8:6) with a fever (**8:14**). Having cured the leper with word and touch and the centurion’s boy with just a word, he heals this woman with a simple touch of her hand (**8:15**). Power emanates both from his word and from his body. The fever leaves her and she “rises” and serves Jesus. Healing is healing to serve.

Having now healed physical maladies of leprosy, paralysis, and fever, Jesus pushes his healing power into the realm of evil spirits who possess individuals (cf. 4:24). These folk are brought to him in great numbers by others. He casts out the spirits by simple word and heals the sick (**8:16**); the scene is a miniature replica of the grander summary in 4:24. For the evangelist these actions are a reminder and fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy of the Servant (**8:17**), already alluded to in 1:18-20 and 3:16-17. This is the seventh of Matthew’s formal citations of the Old Testament (see most recently 4:14-16). In quoting the fourth song of the Servant (Isa 53:4), Matthew sees Jesus’ healing activity not merely as divine wonderworking but as a “taking away” of man’s weaknesses and a “removing” of their diseases by actually suffering them in our place. The reader does not yet know what form this vicarious suffering will take, but already he or she is seeing how Jesus did not merely cure human evil from the outside but somehow took it on himself and became identified with it. The LXX translation of the Isaiah verse is more faithful to the Hebrew with “bore” instead of “took away,” but it reads “sins” instead of “weaknesses” or “illnesses.” Both meanings would apply to Jesus. For the second half of the citation, LXX reads, “and for our sake he suffered” while Hebrew has, “and our sorrows he carried.” In this rich textual history we see the effort to understand how man would be delivered from his burdens by a man who would voluntarily take these burdens on himself. Matthew uses the Isaiah text to show that Jesus’ healings and exorcisms are part of his larger redemptive mission to reconcile all humanity to God.

Seeing the crowd around him Jesus feels the need to go away to another place; people are flocking to him for earthly well being rather than for an act of faith which will bring them redemption (**8:18**). He orders the apostles to set off for the east shore of the Sea of Galilee. An enthusiastic scribe, acknowledging Jesus as “teacher” or rabbi, approaches with a promise to follow Jesus wherever he “goes away” (**8:19**). Jesus’ answer demonstrates again his close observance of nature (foxes and dens, birds of the air (cf. 6:26) and nests) and the truth that a follower of his cannot expect to find a permanent home on earth (**8:20**). Jesus

refers to himself as “the Son of Man,” a title implying that he is a representative of all humanity, fully human (cf. Ezek 2:1), and also that he is the figure prophesied by Daniel as the one to come on the clouds of heaven to receive authority and sovereignty from God (cf. Dan 7:13-14). The term encompassed for Jesus both his human frailty and his lordship, more exactly his lordship through frailty. The disciple must be prepared to follow him on the path of homelessness. Again we see that this healer and rabbi is one who will suffer. His true home can only be in God.

“Another of his disciples” would follow Jesus after he first “goes away” (word link with the previous two verses) and buries his father (**8:21**). The reasonable request is denied. The disciple’s commitment to the Gospel must be immediate and absolute: the demands of the kingdom supersede all others (**8:22**). One senses again the absolute authority of Jesus, requiring a personal adherence to himself that is higher than even the most sacred family obligation. We will see the same demand elsewhere where Jesus speaks of discipleship (cf. 10:35, 37, 19:29). Here his reply to the follower is sharp and enigmatic. What does he mean by “the dead” who are to bury their dead? One could say that anyone not committed to following Jesus in the “narrow” way (cf. 7:14) of discipleship is not really alive, that is with the true and eternal life which is his gift to those who commit themselves utterly to him. There need be no particular moral judgment on the family of the man who wants to bury his father: Jesus simply needs to make clear that “no man can serve two masters” (cf. 6:24). The demands of the kingdom come first; everything else, even burial of one’s dead, will be undertaken only in the light of the kingdom. One begins to note at least three features of Jesus’ person and ministry: an absolute radicalism, utter assurance (what the Acts of the Apostles will call *parrhesia*), and personal integrity—he himself embodies what he demands of others and vice versa. These evident but indefinable personal qualities constitute his witness to the Father (cf. John 3:31-34, 7:46, 8:14, 18, 14:9-11) and are the compelling reason people committed and still commit themselves to him.

By this time the group has reached the boat. He boards and his disciples “follow” him (**8:23**; cf. vs. 22). The journey across the lake will give Jesus the opportunity to manifest another aspect of his power: a power over the forces of nature. A “great earthquake” happens in the sea causing waves that threaten to overwhelm the craft, but Jesus sleeps (**8:24**). The disciples’ reaction is a model for Christian prayer (**8:25**): first they “approach” Jesus, then rouse him (literally, “raise,” the verb used for raising from the dead); their three words to him express three of the principal movements of the psalms of lament: a cry, *kyrie* (cf. on 7:21), to obtain his attention; a petition, “save,” that expresses Jesus’ fundamental activity; and the actual lament or description of suffering, “we are lost!” (see, for example, the highly appropriate opening of Psalm 69: Ps 69:2). The prayer uses few words, in conformity with Jesus’ teaching (cf. 6:7). Jesus will answer the prayer, again in conformity with his teaching, “Ask and it will be given to you” (cf. 7:7 and 8:8), but not before rebuking his disciples for a fear that demonstrates their “little faith” (**8:26a**; cf. 6:30). It is not the petition that he rebukes but the anxiety, the “troubledness of spirit” (cf. John 14:1) that accompanies it. The element that is missing from the disciples’ “psalm of lament” is the essential element of trust in the love and power of the Lord. For an expression of this trust in Jesus’ own prayer, see John 11:42.

Having been “raised,” (cf. vs. 25)—the reader cannot help thinking of the resurrection, the source of all man’s “saving”—Jesus rebukes the winds and the sea (**8:26b**, much as the Creator rebuked the mighty waters of chaos so that the world might stand forth unhindered (Ps 104:7), and as he rebuked the waters of the Red Sea that they might part and allow his people to pass through unharmed

(cf. Ps 106:9; also Nah 1:4, Ps 18:16, Isa 50:2). After this threat comes a great calm, as in Job 26:11-12. It was the specialty of the Lord in the Old Testament, particularly in the Psalms, to tame the mighty waters: cf. Pss 93:3-4, 24:2, 29:3, 10, 74:13, 77:17-20). That the disciples sense the divinity behind Jesus' action is shown by their amazed question: "What kind of man is this, that even the winds and the sea"—i.e., not just the diseases and evil spirits—obey him?" **(8:27)**. The action of Jesus proclaims an immediate relationship to divinity. Their question can be considered the final element of their psalm of lament, that is, the element of praise and recognition for help received. With this miracle Matthew adds a new dimension to his "mural" depicting the various manifestations of the divine in this man Jesus.

Jesus seems to have crossed to the other side of the Sea to perform a single exorcism, his first for which any detail is given. Two demoniacs met him, coming out from among the tombs where they seem to have lived. They were so difficult to restrain that no one could travel on that road **(8:28)**. The demoniacs, or the spirits possessing them, initiate a dialogue, inquiring what the "son of God" has to do with them; has he come "before the proper time" to torment them? The demons are quicker than men to recognize the identity of Jesus, using the term used by the Father at Jesus' baptism and by Satan at the temptations in the wilderness. They are both compelled to come to Jesus and terrified that their reign in human souls has come to an end **(8:29)**. They bargain with Jesus: if he is going to cast them out, may he at least give them a dwelling, if only the herd of pigs feeding in the distance **(8:30-31)**. Such a dwelling would be fitting in the pagan territory which Jesus has now entered. With a single word Jesus grants the request. As soon as the transfer takes place the whole herd rushes down the steep bank into the sea where they die in the waves **(8:32)**. The demons are appropriately consigned to the waters of chaos and of opposition to God. The violent charge of the animals reveals the might of these demons, throwing into relief the even mightier power of the Son of God. For it is God who calms the waves or spiritual powers associated with the waves, e.g., Leviathan and the monsters of the sea (cf. Ps 74:13-14, Isa 51:9-10).

When the swineherds report the incident to the nearby town, the whole population meet Jesus, exhorting him to leave their region **(8:33-34)**. Divine power can be too disrupting to life; we prefer a comfortable mediocrity in which we are left alone. If Jesus were to heal us, we would have to reorder our priorities. On the other hand, if we exclude him we miss out on genuine life.

When he crosses back to Capernaum **(9:1)**, he is met by a group carrying a paralytic. It is time for the Lord to deepen people's understanding of his miracles and of the purpose of his ministry. Matthew reports none of the colorful details of Saint Mark's account like the lowering of the man through the roof and the great crowd; Matthew does not even say that the miracle takes place in a house. Impressed by that "faith" that he has been seeking (cf. 8:10, 13, 26), here the faith of the bearers of the paralytic, Jesus offers not a bodily cure but a spiritual one: "Be of good cheer, my child; your sins are forgiven" **(9:2)**. This unexpected statement is highly offensive to the scribes; since only God can forgive sins against God, Jesus is assuming a divine prerogative, which they see as blasphemy **(9:3)**. The healings and exorcisms and especially the calming of the turbulent sea have already presented Jesus as a wielder of divine power; but the forgiving of sin is the removal of a spiritual barrier to man's union with God, and it was primarily for the removal of this barrier that Jesus came, as we were told by the angel in 1:21 and as Jesus will himself state at the Last Supper **(26:28)**. In yet a further demonstration of his supernatural origin, Jesus knows the scribes' unspoken thoughts, the "thoughts of [their] hearts," and immediately

challenges them (9:4). Jesus' knowledge of the heart will be a recurring theme in the Gospels (e.g., John 2:25) and a source of considerable discomfiture for his hearers. Again we see Jesus' preoccupation with the heart as the organ which must be purified if man is to see and act aright (cf. 5:8, 28, 6:21).

Jesus' question to the scribes highlights the logical connection between healing and forgiving: the one who can do the former must be from God and so be authorized to do the latter (9:5). Since there is no visible proof that a man's sins are forgiven whereas a physical cure results from healing, it is easier to tell someone he is forgiven than that he is cured. Since Jesus can do the more difficult thing, it stands to reason he can do that for which there is no visible proof. Jesus is making a major effort to raise the minds of his hearers to the spiritual plane of his victory over sin, his reestablishment of a right relation between man and God. His healing of the paralytic will demonstrate that he as the Son of Man (cf. 8:20) has power "on earth" to forgive sins (9:6). The cure is again expressed in terms of "rising" from a sickbed (cf. 8:15, 26); the man rises immediately and goes "to his house" as ordered by Jesus (9:7). We are not told the reaction of the scribes, but the crowds react with the appropriate fear of being in the presence of the one who can remove their sins (9:8). This is the fear of Ps 130:4: "With you is forgiveness, so that you might be feared." It is an awareness of standing in the presence of infinite mercy needing his forgiveness (cf. the "mourning" of 5:4). Such fear is accompanied with grateful praise of the God who has made this forgiveness so close, "giving such power to men." As often in the Gospels, the healing ends with a kind of liturgy. The crowds have understood what the religious leaders have not.

If the healing of the paralytic provided the occasion for a lesson on Jesus' mission of forgiving sins, that mission now becomes the subject of a teaching in its own right. Jesus calls a tax collector to follow him, a man whose profession was synonymous with exploitation and therefore with sin (9:9; cf. 5:46). Matthew rises from his desk and follows. Later Jesus and his disciples are seen reclining at table with many tax collectors and other sinners (9:10). Sharing a meal with such lawless folk is a scandal for the Pharisees (9:11), who prided themselves on strict separation from sin and sinners (cf. Luke 7:39). The scribes in the previous story were scandalized because Jesus was claiming to be too divine; the Pharisees in this see him as too contaminated. As Jesus himself will point out, he and his followers are condemned both for doing a thing and for doing its opposite (cf. 11:16-19). Yet in Jesus the opposites are reconciled: he moves among sinners not to participate in or condone their sin but to forgive and reconcile them. He does not forgive from a lofty distance but by showing a familiar love. In a way unsuspected by the Pharisees he exercises the divine mercy in a genuinely human context: he forgives sin as a man among men (cf. the use of *anthrōpos* in 9:8 and 9:9). Jesus is at home with the sinner who needs him, not with the one who "has no sin" (John 8:7).

While the Pharisees' question about Jesus' behavior was directed to his disciples, it is Jesus himself who replies with three justifications for his behavior. He is a physician come to heal the sick not the healthy (9:12). As the hymn puts it, he is the "medicina peccatorum." Secondly, the scribes ought to know from their scriptures that what God wants from his people is loving concern for the needy (9:13a; cf. Hos 6:6). This *eleos* is the Greek translation of the Hebrew *hesed*, the most profound of God's attributes in the Old Testament and the one governing all his actions. God's *hesed* is his covenant love, his unshakeable attachment to his people guaranteed in the covenant. What God asks of the human partner of the covenant is a commitment to that same love. One must love the neighbor in need because God loved his people in their need (cf. Deut 10:15, 18-19). Such "behaving like God" is more pleasing to God than concerns

for the purity required for temple worship. Holiness is rightly defined as a separation from the profane; Jesus reminds his hearers that true holiness is a separation from any attitude that is not God's loving concern for the sinner.² Union with God must be a sharing in his universal saving love—we are back at the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount (cf. 5:43-48). The Pharisees are being invited to break open their hearts to the full dimension of this love, to recognize that Jesus incarnates this love, and to let themselves be won over by it, an event that will not happen unless they recognize their own close-mindedness or "hardness of heart" (19:8, Mark 3:5), their own sin and need for a physician.

Jesus' third justification for his behavior is a classic statement of his mission: he has "not come to call the righteous but sinners" (**9:13b**). His "coming" might refer to his coming to the shores of Galilee to preach, but is read by Christians as his coming from God into the world on a saving mission. He comes to "call," making an offer, inviting a free response, imposing nothing. Those who respond do so because something in them has resonated with this call; they feel addressed by one who knows what they are looking for and can and wishes to give it to them. These are the sheep who recognize the master's voice (John 10:3-5, 27), the voice of the one who forgives their sins. These are the ones who know they are "sinners"; public sinners could not hide behind a façade of righteousness and were thus more aware of their sin than the Pharisees, who, because they thought they "saw," remained in their sin (cf. John 9:41). Sinners who acknowledge their sin can be forgiven; those who consider themselves "righteous" are unaware of their need for a savior (Luke 18:9-10). We are back at the fundamental need for repentance as the beginning of openness to salvation (cf. 4:17, 5:4). In Saint Luke's version of this saying Jesus will make explicit this call to repentance (Luke 5:32). The Pharisees, experts in the scriptures, have not understood what should have been so clear from those scriptures: that men are not righteous, they have not responded to the obedience called for by the Law and the prophets, they need a new heart from above if they are to please the Lord (cf. Rom 2:17-24, 29, 3:19-20, and esp. 23; Ezek 36:26-27).

The teaching on eating with sinners, like the teachings on discipleship in the preceding chapter (8:19-22), has been inserted among the miracles of Jesus to guide the reader to an understanding of the person and mission of Jesus which explains the significance of the miracles. The physical healings point to a deeper healing from sin; the healer demands complete commitment. Now a new discussion brings a new teaching, this time initiated by the followers of John the Baptist, who want to know why Jesus and his disciples do not fast as do the Pharisees and the followers of John (**9:14**). We know that Jesus was not against fasting but only against fasting for display and self-glorification (cf. 6:16-18). He envisions a time when his disciples will fast (**9:15b**), but his reason for their not fasting now is once again an amazing teaching about his person. He is "the

² As Joseph Ratzinger expressed it in an early book, Christ "has drawn sin to himself, made it his lot and so revealed what true 'holiness' is: not separation but union, not judgment but redeeming love. Is the Church not simply the continuation of God's deliberate plunge into human wretchedness; is it not simply the continuation of Jesus' habit of sitting at table with sinners, of his mingling with the misery of sin to the point where he actually seems to sink under its weight? Is there not revealed in the unholy holiness of the Church, as opposed to man's expectation of purity, God's true holiness, which is love, love which does not keep its distance in a sort of aristocratic, untouchable purity but mixes with the dirt of the world in order thus to overcome it?" (*Introduction to Christianity* 264-265)

bridegroom” among his friends at a wedding feast, where anything like fasting would be completely inappropriate **(9:15a)**. A Jewish hearer could only think of God himself who was the bridegroom to Israel his bride (cf. Hos 2:8-9, 16-22, Isa 54:5-8, 62:5). Jesus’ characterization of himself as Israel’s bridegroom harmonizes well with his introduction of the theme of *hesed* a few verses earlier (cf. 9:13). God’s covenant love for Israel bound him to her as a husband to a wife. Jesus had come to take Israel his bride back to himself by forgiving her sins. This forgiveness was forecast in the prophet Hosea and will be beautifully applied to Christ in the Letter to the Ephesians: “As Christ is head of the Church and saves the whole body, so is a husband the head of his wife.... Christ loved the Church and sacrificed himself for her to make her holy. He made her clean by washing her in water with a form of words, so that when he took her to himself she would be glorious, with no speck or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and faultless” (Eph 5:23, 25-27).

The presence of the bridegroom “with them,” i.e., with those whom he has come to espouse, cannot but be a cause for feasting, as at a wedding. This is not the occasion to fast (9:15a). We are reminded of the image of Jesus reclining at table with sinners in the previous pericope. The forgiveness of sinners, their reconciliation with God, is cause for celebration. It seems natural that Jesus should bring up the topic of wine. His person and teaching is a new wine destined to “cheer the heart of man” (Ps 104:15), to inebriate him with the joy of divine union. Such a wine will be a key feature of the banquet celebrating God’s union with man (cf. Jer 31:12-14, Isa 25:6). Jesus will provide such a wine near the beginning of John’s Gospel at the wedding feast of Cana. Here he implies that the new wine which he embodies requires new receptacles: it would burst the older vessels that had not been fitted out for containing it. Jesus can only be received by those willing to be changed and fortified by him. By accepting him they become the vessels he seeks **(9:17)**. Again Jesus has turned a teaching about his identity (the bridegroom, the wine) into one about the proper response of the disciple to this identity.

Before the wine verse, Jesus makes the same point with a clothing metaphor. Experience shows that strong cloth holds firm where weak cloth tears. If a garment containing both is stretched it is the older cloth that will be ripped. Material to which a fresh patch is added must be strong enough to support the patch. The people of Israel have to be willing to be changed, to be made tough by Jesus’ teaching before they can benefit from it **(9:16)**.

One might wonder in what more ways Jesus might manifest his heavenly origin. The climax miracle is yet to come. It is presented as the second in a pair of miracles that had been joined in a kind of “sandwich” structure, one miracle occurring between the accounts of the first and second parts of the other miracle story. A leader or official of some kind (Mark will identify him as Jairus, a synagogue official) approaches and “falls prostrate” before him (cf. 8:18). He recounts a parent’s worst suffering: his daughter has just died. His petition is brief: “Come, lay your hand on her and she will live” **(9:18)**. Jesus “rises” (cf. 8:26) and accompanies the man with his disciples **(9:19)**. A woman suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve years comes up behind him and touches the hem of his cloak **(9:20)**, convinced that through this action alone she will be healed **(9:21)**. Jesus turns and seeing her, tells her to be of good cheer (cf. 9:2): her faith has saved her **(9:22)**. This last formula will become a refrain of Jesus. It is found seven times in the Gospels in connection with four different events (cf. Mark 5:34, 10:52, Luke 7:50, 8:48, 17:19, 18:42). Jesus attributes the healing to the one believing he can and wishes to heal—so much is faith an indispensable ingredient of the salvation he offers. This woman’s faith is demonstrated by reaching out and touching the healer, and not even his body but his clothing, its lowest part.

She believes that the least physical connection with Jesus is a channel of healing; her gesture is a kind of “drawing it out of him.” Such is the faith of Christians. They actively draw life from the risen Christ through his body the Church, through the sacraments which he made humble channels of his new life. The woman with the hemorrhage gives a vivid example of the faith that Jesus has been speaking about (cf. 6:30, 8:10, 13, 26, 9:2). Her faith is immediately answered.

Now the evangelist must conclude the story interrupted by the story of the woman. Jesus enters the house of the official, and seeing the musicians playing dirges and a crowd gathering, sends them out since the girl is not dead but asleep (9:23-24). The faithless crowd laugh at him. But in a mere eight words Matthew recounts the “rising” of the child through the simple touch of Jesus’ hand (9:25). The “fame” of this raising from the dead goes throughout that land, like the song of praise that ends a lament psalm (9:26). The account of these two miracles has shown all the elements of such a psalm: lament, petition, trust, and praise. There can be no more divine act than to raise a dead person to life: Jesus’ repertoire of miracles is now basically complete.

But Matthew has two more miracles to recount, intended probably to round out the picture of Jesus’ cures with healings that fulfill Old Testament promises. The first, a healing of two blind men, seems to be modeled on the later account of the blind man [men] of Jericho, reported by all three synoptics and placed just before the triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Matt 20:30-34, Mark 10:46-52, Luke 18:35-43). As in that story, the men cry out, “Have pity on us, son of David” (9:27). When they follow Jesus into the house where he returns after the raising of the official’s daughter, Jesus asks them pointedly if they believe he can do this (9:28). When they answer, Yes, Lord,” he touches their eyes, saying, “According to your faith let it be done to you” (9:29). The story underscores what Jesus has already taught about faith (cf. on 9:22). It would also recall God’s promise to give sight to the blind (Isa 35:5, 61:1 LXX, Ps 146:8). As in his first miracle (8:4) Jesus admonishes the men to let no one know of the cure, but they go out and publish it “in all that land” (9:30-31; cf. 9:26).

Matching the cure of the blind is an even briefer story of the cure of a mute and possessed man whom others bring to Jesus (9:32). When the demon is cast out the man speaks (see a similar pairing of blind and deaf in Isa 35:5). The ten representative miracles Jesus has worked elicit a chorus of wonder from the crowd: “Never has anything like this been seen in Israel.” It is the response of the heart open to the simple facts (9:33). But it is matched by a negative response from the Pharisees, by now identified as Jesus’ principal enemies: “By the ruler of devils he casts out devils” (9:34). While they cannot deny the fact of the exorcisms, they can attribute their source to demonic rather than divine power. Jesus will soon address this conclusion of theirs.

Having given detailed accounts of ten miracles Matthew gives a summary of Jesus’ activities to this point (cf. the parallel summary at the beginning of the ministry, 4:23-25). Jesus goes about to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and curing every disease and every weakness—notice Matthew’s repetition of the word “all/every” to underline the universality of Jesus’ mission (9:35). The three activities of Jesus are interrelated. The *teaching* is an activity like that of the rabbis; with Jesus it becomes a *proclamation* that God is entering human affairs in Jesus’ own person, and the proof of this divine action is the *healing* of every human ailment, including that of sin and possession by the spirit of evil. But seeing the crowds of afflicted people, he is moved to compassion for them, “for they were harassed and cast down like sheep without a shepherd” (9:36). The compassion is a manifestation of the *hesed* mentioned in 9:13. It is evoked by the panorama of

afflictions which the Son of God sees people have to bear and which are not wanted by the Father. Jesus enters into the very concern of Israel's God for his sheep "without a shepherd" (cf. Ezek 34:5, Num 27:17, 1 Kgs 22:17). In the prophecy of Ezekiel, it is God himself who will undertake this role of shepherd: "I myself will pasture my sheep, I myself will show them where to rest—it is the Lord God who speaks. I shall look for the lost one, bring back the stray, bandage the wounded and make the weak strong. I shall watch over the fat and healthy. I shall be a true shepherd to them" (Ezek 34:15-16). In addition he will raise up a human shepherd, a descendant of David who will "pasture them and be their shepherd" (Ezek 34:23): God will exercise his shepherding function through his messianic Son. The context in which the shepherd metaphor is introduced, that of Jesus' compassion for the suffering, may even suggest to the reader Jesus' willingness to identify with his sheep in bearing their sufferings and faults; Matthew has already made this connection with the prophecy of the Suffering Servant (8:17=Isa 53:4), a prophecy which identifies the Servant as a "lamb that is led to the slaughter... for our faults struck down in death" (Isa 53:7-8). This is a shepherd that must be "struck" (cf. Matt 26:31=Zech 13:7). We have seen that Jesus intends to take away sin by in some way associating himself with it (cf. 9:10-13). Jesus will be a true shepherd by laying down his life for his sheep, as the Gospel of John will make perfectly clear (John 10:11, 15).

However, at this point Jesus is more concerned with drawing others into his activity of shepherding than with identifying himself as the shepherd. One can say that he wishes to create a group of collaborators through whom he himself will be able to shepherd every man, woman, and child on the planet down through time. In other words, even before the mystery of his redemptive death is disclosed he is forming a group of heralds who can make known that mystery once they have experienced it. In a similar way in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught how his disciples would live without their yet understanding the mystery that would explain the source of that new life.

For Jesus the throngs of afflicted are a harvest waiting to be harvested (**9:37**). They need workers to bring them into God's barn (cf. 13:30). It is for the disciples themselves to pray God to send workers into the harvest (**9:38**). One of the most urgent prayers of the Church needs to be that God send out ministers who will bring the healing touch of Christ to wounded persons everywhere. If we ask we will receive (cf. 7:7). For now Jesus provides his chosen men with the powers they will need to serve his mission. He calls to him "all his twelve disciples," giving them their tasks without our yet knowing their names or why the number twelve was chosen. The powers they are given reflect those of Jesus himself: power to cast out impure spirits and to heal every disease and every weakness (**10:1**; cf. 9:33-35). Then comes the list of names of these "twelve apostles" (phrase only here in Matthew). The first four (**10:2**) are the two pairs of brothers called at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry (cf. 4:18-22). Of the other eight (**10:3-4**) we have met only "Matthew the tax collector" (cf. 9:9). As in 4:18 Simon is identified as "the one called Peter," although that name will not be given until 16:18. Similarly the last person on the list, Judas the Iscariot, is identified as the "one who betrays" Jesus although that story has not yet been told. The evangelist seems to assume that the reader knows the broad outlines of Jesus' story. Jesus "sends" these twelve (**10:5**), hence their name "apostles" or "ones sent on a mission," explaining their task in what is considered the second of his five great discourses in Matthew's Gospel.

Although Jesus in his second miracle (cf. 8:10-12) had envisioned the conversion of the pagan nations, he forbids his apostles to go to them or even to a Samaritan town. His Gospel is for the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (**10:6**),

that is, the afflicted ones of Galilee whom he commiserated in 9:36. The chosen people must know that God has kept his covenant with them. The mention of “Israel” in close connection with the “twelve” apostles helps to explain Jesus’ choice of the number twelve: his apostles in some way embody the people of Israel, made up of its twelve tribes. Their first task will be to “proclaim” (cf. 9:35), in continuity with the preaching of John (cf. 3:2) and Jesus himself (4:17), that “the kingdom of heaven is near” (10:7): God is definitively entering history to establish right relations between men and himself. The presence of the divine reign will be manifest in the apostles’ curing of the weak, raising of the dead, cleansing of lepers, casting out of demons (10:8a)—all the saving activities of Jesus himself. From the very beginning the reign of Jesus is shared with representatives appointed by him. The benefits they offer are not for sale, just as they themselves did not have to buy them but received them for nothing (10:8b). Indeed they must travel with nothing but bare necessities: no gold, silver, or copper (money) in their belts (10:9), no bag for the journey nor two tunics or sandals or a staff (10:10). We have already been told that the ministers of the Gospel are “workers” in the harvest of those being saved (cf. 9:37-38); as such they can expect “food” from those for whom they provide this service. The radical stripping of the apostle of all that is not immediately necessary for his mission of proclaiming the kingdom of God is of a piece with the radical claims made on those who would follow Jesus (cf. 8:19-22) and on the rejection of body parts that would lead one away from God (cf. 5:29-30). The demands of the kingdom are absolute (cf. 6:24): the apostle must not be encumbered. Only the empty can be filled with the infinite.

Having spoken of the journey Jesus now speaks of arrival in the towns. Entering a town the apostles should inquire who would be “worthy” and stay there until they leave the town (10:11). To move from one place to another would distract the apostle with the details of his accommodation. Commitment to one place leaves him free to give himself to the mission. On entering a house and greeting it (10:12), the apostles will discover whether it is worthy, that is, open to the good news: if so, their “peace” will be received by the house. Jesus implies, as he will state clearly in the Gospel of John, that the proclamation of the word of God brings to the fore what a person has inside him. If one is open to the demands of God as one understands him, he will be open to the message of Jesus; if he is not open to God, he will reject Jesus (cf. John 3:19-21). Those who welcome the preaching of the apostles will, as it were, “catch” the peace of the latter, the peace of abiding union with God which is the fruit of their message. The “unworthy” house will be like a wall reflecting the offer of peace back to the apostles (10:13). Only a free acceptance of the gift will benefit the hearer. If a house or town does not receive the apostles or listen to their words, the apostles by the symbolic gesture of shaking off the dust of that place from their feet indicate that that house or town has no share in the good things of the Gospel: it was their choice to refuse it (10:14). The price of this refusal is an annihilation worse than that of the inhospitable towns Sodom and Gomorrah (10:15, cf. Gen 19:4-5, 24-25, 28) on the “day of judgment,” that is, when people receive the full consequences of their choices during life. We are free to reject our “peace” (cf. Luke 19:42) but need to realize that this is an act of self-destruction. As for the apostles, to stay where they were rejected would be to “cast pearls before swine” and submit the Good News to trampling (cf. 7:6).

In spending more words on the negative reception of the apostles’ message than on the positive, Jesus has already indicated that they can expect to meet hostility. By way of a transition statement he now moves on to tell the apostles how they must deal with the opposition they will meet. The apostles can expect to be like sheep (recalling his designation for the people in 9:36 and 10:6)

who will be attacked by wolves bent on destruction (**10:16**). The psalmist had often compared his enemies to ravenous beasts (Ps 59:7-8, 15-16, 58:7, 57:5, 22:13-14, 17). For Ezekiel it was the leaders and princes themselves who preyed on the people like wolves (Ezek 22:24-27; cf. Zeph 3:3). Jesus knows that what will happen to him will happen also to his envoys (see below and John 15:20, 17:14). They will need to be astute, like serpents, in dealing with opposition while not losing their innocence, like doves. In a single verse Jesus makes a point with four similes drawn shrewdly from the animal world (cf. 6:20, 26, 7:6, and 10:29-31 below).

We now hear how severe and how official the rejection of the apostles' message will be. They will need to manifest their prudence (cf. 10:16) by wariness of men (**10:17**), for the latter will hand them over to local councils and flog (cf. John 19:1) them in synagogues. Before leaders and kings they will be led for the sake of Jesus as a witness to them and to the pagans (**10:18**). Religious and secular leaders will find the message of Jesus a threat. But the apostles need not be anxious how or what to speak in their defense: a mysterious gift will be given them at that moment so that they know what to say (**10:19**). This gift will be none other than "the spirit of your Father" who will speak in them (**10:20**). Again we are reminded that Jesus' followers have God as their Father (cf. 5:16, 48, 6:1, 8-9, 26, 32, 7:11); now we learn that the same Spirit of the Father who came upon Jesus at his Baptism will be at work in these other sons of God. The apostle is not to prepare a defense but to rely on the personal presence of this third Person of God. The Christian lives in the Trinity: he is inspired by the Spirit of his Father to give witness to Christ the Son. Such a witness may be rejected but will ultimately win the world. The disciple will share in the fate of Jesus, that is, in his redemptive death for the world.

Before leaving the theme of witness Jesus must add that in addition to leaders and kings the apostles' own family members will hand them over to death: brother his brother, father his child, children rising against their parents and putting them to death (**10:21**). In sum, they will be hated (cf. again John 15:18-19, 17:14) by all for the sake of Jesus' name (**10:22**). These two melancholy verses match vv. 17-18, and between the two pairs of verses describing increasing degrees of hostility comes the "island" of courage and serenity depicting the animation of the witnesses by the Spirit of God (vv. 19-20). Each of the three sections of this "sandwich" structure has the word "hand over" at the beginning. But the last word of the treatise on opposition is a promise: "He who endures to the end, this one will be saved." This short and consoling word of the Master must have fortified countless numbers of Christians experiencing the night of physical pain, rejection, imminent death, voices saying in the ear "That this was all folly" (T. S. Eliot, "Journey of the Magi"). Clinging to the Christ who himself suffered death and rose is for the Christian the way to sharing in his glory, to his "salvation."

Again we have a transitional verse reminding us of the injunction to leave a town that is inhospitable (10:14). Persecuted (cf. 5:10-12, 44) in one town, they should flee to another (**10:23**). Before they have finished the towns of Israel, Jesus will come. This mysterious saying implies that Jesus, "the Son of Man" (cf. 9:6), will be absent for a time from his apostles. They cannot yet know what this absence is (cf. 9:15), but Christian readers know that their crucified Lord risen from the dead will at some point "come" back to the world in order to judge men and women on how they have led their lives (cf. 7:2, 10:15). This "coming" will involve his bringing into his kingdom all those who have obeyed his Father's will (cf. 24:30-31, 37-44, 25:31-34). Christians who persevere to the end and are slain for the word will then receive the reward of their labors. The root "end" joins

this verse with the end of the previous section (“finish” = “come to an end of,” 10:23).

Jesus now explicitly states the Christological reason for the suffering of the apostles, till now only implied: disciples must be like their teachers, servants like their masters (**10:24-25**); the servant image for the apostle is new. If the master of the house has been labeled Beezebul, how much more will the members of his household be called this. In 9:34 the Pharisees had attributed Jesus’ power of exorcism to the “prince of demons,” a phrase found in apposition to Beezebul in 12:24. The apostles will face the same ineluctable mystery of man’s rejection of the divine as Jesus himself is already encountering. It will be a kind of badge of authenticity for the heralds of the Gospel. They should not court it but should not be surprised when they encounter or elicit it. We have already seen that the testifying apostles have the Spirit to guide them. Now Jesus identifies them with himself, and in the coming section will assure them of the loving concern of their Father: the persecuted witness can prevail because he is supported by the three persons of the Trinity. The key word of consolation in this section is “do not fear” (10:26, 28, 30). It will be to no avail to try to keep the message of Christ hidden for fear of persecution since “nothing is veiled which will not be revealed and hidden which will not be made known” (**10:26**). What Jesus speaks to them in the dark they must speak in the light; what they hear in the ear they must proclaim on the roofs (**10:27**). The word of God has a built-in thrust to manifest itself (cf. 5:14-15). The heralds publish aloud what Jesus has insinuated in their hearts. The preacher can be destroyed but the word will be heard.

The apostles should not fear those who can kill only the body; the soul lives on (**10:28**). The one truly to be feared would be the one who can kill the soul as well, namely God the eternal judge, who ensures that those who rejected him in life will be granted their wish to be separate from him forever (this is “gehenna,” see on 5:22, 29-30). But this heavenly Father will not let the souls of those who trust in him come to any harm. Jesus asks his hearers to consider how cheap a pair of sparrows can be bought (**10:29**); even one such creature’s fall to the ground does not happen without the Father, who knows even the number of hairs on a person’s head (**10:30**). The section concludes with a final admonition not to fear, for “You are worth more than many sparrows” (**10:31**). Matthew has used the same verb in a similar section of the Sermon on the Mount (6:26). None can escape the providence of God, their loving Father. The disciples’ lack of fear is grounded in faith in the knowledge, love and power of the Creator of the world and Father of Jesus. The Father who raised him from the dead after his rejection by his people will see that the faithful apostle shares a like resurrection.

Indeed Jesus now speaks to them no longer of “your father” but of “my father,” and the final section of the speech is the most explicitly Christological. All the hardships the apostles will face find their meaning in their link with Christ. Whoever confesses Christ before men will be confessed by Christ before his heavenly Father (**10:32**), for it is to the Father that he will go when he is “taken away” (9:15) and in his Father’s presence that he will come again as judge (cf. 25:31-34). Similarly whoever denies Christ before men will be denied by him before his heavenly Father (**10:33**, cf. 10:15 for the same judgment). It is by their attitude to Christ that men will be judged, whether for salvation or for condemnation. A sword of separation divides these two groups: they cannot coexist. There must be no misunderstanding: if the mission of the apostles is to announce “peace” (cf. 10:13), it is peace with God not with evil. Jesus repeats the warning against misunderstanding which he had used in the Sermon on the Mount: “Do not think that I have come to...” (**10:34**, cf. 5:17). He has not come to bring “peace on the earth” in the sense of a compromise with worldly values that

do not take account of God. A desire to maintain comfortable relations with one's family and social milieu could lead to such a compromise with one's allegiance to Christ, but there is no escape from the sword of division (**10:35-36**). Jesus uses a quote from the prophet Micah in a different sense than the original: Micah described the breakdown of trust within families as a sign of the corruption of his time; for Jesus the division between family members is an inevitable product of his own mission. The ideal would be for all family members to be united in their commitment to Christ, but to choose against Christ is inevitably to separate oneself from those who adhere to him.

The final sayings of the discourse all follow the same pattern, beginning with a participle or relative clause identifying a certain kind of person and then giving the consequences of that person's actions. The sayings are connected by theme and by link words. The first of these explicates the quotation from Micah: to love a family member more than one's God in Christ is not to be "worthy" (**10:37**; cf. 10:10, 11, 13) of Christ. To accept the suffering involved in this breach with others is to take up one's "cross" and follow after Christ, a reference Jesus' hearers would not understand until after his death. Only such a following of Christ on the way of the cross renders one "worthy" of him and the life he offers (**10:38**). To find one's "soul" on earth, i.e., a purely temporal happiness, is to lose it, while to lose one's soul for Christ is to find it (**10:39**). Who receives the apostles receives Christ, and who receives him receives the one who sent him, namely his Father in heaven (**10:40**). This is one of the few references in the Synoptic Gospels to the "sending" of Jesus by the Father, a common theme in the Gospel of John (see veiled references in 15:24, 21:37). Already here one glimpses the connection between the sending of the "apostles" ("ones sent") by Jesus and his own sending by the Father. Another saying beginning "He who receives..." introduces the only saying in this group that does not refer directly to Christ (**10:41**): one who acknowledges the divine presence in one who speaks the truth ("prophet") or acts uprightly ("righteous man") will receive an appropriate reward because he displays the proper openness and obedience to God. This is the person "worthy" of the peace Christ offers (cf. 10:13). Finally whoever offers one of Jesus' "little ones" a cup of cold water simply because he is Jesus' disciple, will not lose his reward (**10:42**). The disciples are "little ones" because they come without physical power and resources but only with their reliance on the power of the Father. The integrity of their message will win some to show them kindness, a kindness that might be said to be directed to Christ himself (cf. 10:40), a theme that will come fully into its own in Jesus' last great discourse in the Gospel (25:40).

These last six sayings, several of them in two parts, have been linked by the words "worthy," "receive," "reward," "in the name of," and "lose." Together the sayings show how profound is the link between the disciple/apostle and Christ. It is this link, together with the loving protection of the Father and the fortifying activity of the Spirit which will animate and prosper the apostolic mission down the ages. The acceptance of the cross of mission is the surest way of identification with Christ for eternity. Jesus and his disciples will destroy sin by suffering its onslaughts and thereby triumphing over them.

Having completed his instructions to "his twelve disciples," Jesus resumed his "teaching and preaching" in the cities of Galilee (**11:1**). In this new section of the Gospel the focus will be less on the miracles of Jesus and more on how he is perceived and received by men. The first to seek clarification on his identity is John the Baptist who sends messengers to him from prison (**11:2**), where he was apparently taken when he was "handed over" (cf. 4:12; same term used by Jesus of the apostles in 10:17, 19); his crime will be recounted in Chapter 14. Matthew

says that John has heard of the “works of Christ,” a title not applied to Jesus since the infancy narrative (cf. 1:16-18, 2:4). The words and works of Jesus so far reported are sufficient grounds for granting him this title. John wants to know whether there can be applied to Jesus another title, namely “the one to come” (11:3). He refers to any of several figures whose saving coming was expected by the Jews: a prophet like Moses whom the Lord was to send (cf. Deut 18:15, 18-19), a messianic son of David who would bring to fulfillment the prophecy of an everlasting dynasty to David (2 Sam 7:16, Jer 33:15-17, 21, Ps 89:30, 37), the prophet Elijah taken to heaven by God and destined to return before the day of the Lord (cf. Mal 3:23). Jesus answers by telling the messengers how to summarize for John what they have heard and seen, from which it will be clear that Jesus is fulfilling Old Testament prophecies of salvation in works that clearly demonstrate a divine origin (11:4). The blind see (11:5; cf. 9:29-30; Isa 29:18b, 35:5) and the lame walk (cf. 9:6-7), lepers are cleansed (cf. 8:3) and the deaf hear (cf. Isa 29:18a), and the dead are raised (cf. 9:24-25) and the poor are evangelized (cf. 5:3; Isa 28:19, 61:1). The catalogue is meant to be as much a help to the reader as to John in deciding who Jesus is. Jesus rounds off his summary by calling “happy” the man who is not offended by this human display of divine power (11:6). For a human being to arrogate to himself such divine authority would indeed be blasphemy, as the Pharisees rightly saw, were it not justified by the authenticity of Jesus’ deeds and the integrity and authority of his personality.

Having replied to John’s question about the identity of Jesus, Jesus now questions the crowd about the identity and role of the Baptist. What did they go out to the desert to see? A mere reed shaken by the wind (11:7)? Clearly nothing so unsubstantial. A man clothed in soft garments? Such persons would be found only in houses of kings (11:8), and John’s clothing was anything but soft (cf. 3:4). Perhaps you went out to see a prophet (cf. 10:41)? Indeed, says Jesus, and much more than a prophet (11:9). John was the messenger God had promised to send (cf. Mal 3:1) to prepare the way before him or before his representative (11:10). In the Hebrew text of this prophecy of Malachi, the messenger was to clear a way before God himself, who would come suddenly to his temple. In the Greek version quoted by Matthew the messenger is to “prepare” a way before an unnamed “you” addressed by the Lord. Both meanings fit well in Jesus’ case: the Father sends the Baptist in front of the man Jesus, who is at the same time exhibiting divine characteristics. Jesus has turned the reflection on John the Baptist into a further lesson on his own identity and on his fulfillment of another Scripture.

Such an application of the prophecy of Malachi gives John, in fact, his particular importance. Until the inauguration of the kingdom of God, none greater than he has been born (11:11); yet even the least member of that kingdom is greater than he, for members of the kingdom have God as their Father as Jesus does. Jesus sees John as having roused the people to a kind of violence by which they will seize membership of the kingdom (11:12). Since Jesus is establishing the kingdom on earth (4:17, 9:35), these “violent” ones now have the opportunity to seize it by subordinating their whole lives to him in the way that he has been calling for (e.g., 5:10-11, 29-30, 44-45, 7:13-14, 8:20-22, 10:34-39). Those who have already made a commitment to Jesus are the first-fruits of his kingdom on earth. John as the final figure in a line of prophets and of the Law is at once the greatest of them all and the catalyst for the establishment of the kingdom (11:13). He sums up the Old Testament and its function of pointing to Jesus, who now reveals that John is none other than the Elijah whose coming again was prophesied by Malachi (11:14), that is, the one who would prepare men and women for the great and terrible day of the Lord (see on 11:3).

Jesus has made his identity clear; if he is encountering difficulties it is because men wish him to conform to their particular expectations rather than submit to his lordship. They are like children sitting in the market place calling to others **(11:16)**, expressing disappointment that people don't "follow their tune." They are offended when they play flute music and people don't dance or when they play a dirge and people don't mourn **(11:17)**. Similarly the people of "this generation" accuse John the Baptist of having a demon because he doesn't eat or drink **(11:18)**, but condemn Jesus, the "Son of Man" (cf. 10:23) as a glutton and drunkard, friend of tax collectors and sinners, because he eats and drinks **(11:19a)**. In each case they make themselves the arbiters of how religious people are supposed to behave. The challenge for Jesus' hearers and for us is to accept him on his own terms because of his own authority, even when he does not conform to our expectations. Man must surrender his pretensions to be God, surrender rather than impose. Only if Jesus is allowed to be Lord can he help us. In fact, as Jesus has already taught (cf. 9:14-15) there can be spiritual reasons both for fasting and for not fasting—both can constitute works of "wisdom" in the appropriate seasons **(11:19b)**. True wisdom involves discernment of the will of God in the present situation.

Jesus must now describe the melancholy end of those who reject him, the folk who had the benefit of most of his miracles yet did not "repent" **(11:20)**; cf. 4:17), that is, did not let their priorities change, did not accept Jesus as Lord, did not let themselves be made into new wineskins to contain the new wine of his teaching (cf. 9:17). The towns of Chorazin and Bethsaida, for remaining impervious to his "wonders," will suffer more on the "day of judgment" (cf. 10:15) than the pagan towns of Tyre and Sidon, which would have long ago repented in sackcloth and ashes if they had seen these wonders **(11:21-22)**. But the sternest judgment is reserved for Capernaum, the base of Jesus' Galilean mission (cf. 4:13, 8:5). Its defiance of Jesus can only be expressed in the harsh language with which Isaiah depicted the fall of the Babylonian tyrant. This man thought he could climb to the sky and rival the Most High; for this reason he would be cast down into the deepest hell **(11:23)**; cf. Isa 14:13-15). To substitute the self for God is to sever one's roots in the source of life and hence to die. Even Sodom (cf. 10:15), so inhospitable to the family of Abraham's nephew, had it seen the wonders performed by Jesus, would still be standing because it would have accepted him **(11:24)**. The punishment of Sodom will therefore be less than that of Capernaum. The theme of the hurling down of the proud will recur in the *Magnificat* (Luke 1:51-52). We are perhaps surprised to hear the severity of Jesus' judgment on the towns whose crowds welcomed him so enthusiastically (cf. 4:24-25, 9:8, 33), but Jesus knows that officialdom is set against him (cf. 9:3, 34) and even the crowds have not seen the need for repentance.

Some features of Jesus' rhetorical style may be noted here. His sayings are usually succinct and make use of striking metaphors drawn from nature or everyday life. He has a fondness for sharp contrast. Illustrations of a point are often in twos (9:16-17, two examples of new in relation to old; 10:32-33, confessing and disowning Christ; 11:21-24, two examples of rebellious towns). He likes asking questions that make the hearer think (5:46-47, 6:26-28, 7:3, 10, 16, 11:7-9, 23). He has a habit of introducing solemn pronouncements with the phrase, "I say to you" (11:9), or "Truly (*amen*) I say to you" (10:15, 23, 11:11), or "Nevertheless I say to you" (cf. 11:22, 24). He has a slogan which calls attention to his authority: "He who has ears to hear let him hear" (cf. 11:15). He weaves Old Testament passages easily into his own teaching (cf. 5:34-35, 7:23, 10:21, 35-36, 11:23).

If Jesus knows that he has been rejected by the "wise and understanding" **(11:25)**, he knows also that "the childlike" have accepted him, since his Father,

Lord of heaven and earth, has hidden the truth about him from the former and revealed it to the latter. Jesus gives thanks to the Father for acting thus. A bond of connection is being made with those who don't claim to understand God: these folk will become inhabitants of the kingdom. The danger with human wisdom is that it can "puff up" (1 Cor 8:1), leading a person to think he has mastered the truth. This "false wisdom" is to be contrasted with the true wisdom found in discernment of the will of God in the present situation (cf. 11:19). Knowledge of Jesus is not a human acquisition but a gift of God, given to the childlike, who still know they have something to learn. The incarnation of God in the man Jesus, his redemptive death, his preference for sinners, the command to give up all to follow him—these features of the religion of Jesus could not have been deduced by human reason. They can only be grasped by those who let themselves be won over by Jesus. The childlike and unlearned to whom the Gospel is revealed are of the same family as the "poor in spirit" (5:3), the "sick" (9:12), those with faith (8:10, 9:22, 28), the "little ones" (10:42), all of whom recognize their need for God. Jesus praises the mysterious counsel of the Father that is wiser than human wisdom (**11:26**), that can be known only by a revelation from God (cf. Eph 3:3-5). He breaks into praise at the beauty of the Father's plan, much like Saint Paul in Rom 11:33-36.

Jesus' prayer to the Father has made him aware of the unique understanding the two of them share, and he must speak of it to those around him, most likely the "childlike" just referred to. The Father has handed over everything to the Son: everything the Father is, everything he plans, everything he has done is shared by Jesus the Son (cf. John 5:20, 26-27). No one can possibly know the Son as the Father does since no purely human mind can grasp the fullness he has received from the Father (which is "the fullness of divinity," Col 2:9). Not even the childlike, to whom the Father has revealed something of the mystery of Christ, much less the "wise and understanding" can know Christ as he is. At the same time no one can know the Father except the Son who shares his divinity with him. But graciously the Son "chooses to reveal" the Father to certain human beings (**11:27**). Thus the Father reveals the Son to the childlike, and the Son reveals the Father to those whom he chooses. Men and women are to be called into the mutual knowledge of the Father and Son. In this single verse the Son lays bare his inner mystery, stating more overtly than anywhere else in this Gospel the truth that is implied in all his deeds and words. The Gospel of John will develop in much greater detail all that is implied in the intimate knowledge that unites Father and Son, but the kernel of it is already contained in this saying.

Out of the mystery of his intimate relationship with the Father, Jesus now invites all who are wearied and burdened to come to him for refreshment (**11:28**). These are the "sheep without a shepherd" (9:36), "lost sheep" (10:6), the "sick" (9:12), "sinners" (9:14), and perhaps those who felt burdened by the demands of the Law as interpreted by the Pharisees (cf. 23:4). Jesus has come to minister to the needs of sinful men; only those aware of their burdened condition are likely to come to him for relief. How does one "come" to him? By taking on oneself his "yoke" and learning from him (**11:29**). The two are equivalent: the yoke is that of discipleship, that of learning from a master how to conduct one's life. Jesus, who twice in this chapter has spoken of wisdom (cf. 11:19 & 25), speaks here as wisdom itself personified, echoing invitations by Lady Wisdom to young men in Proverbs (cf. Prov 8:34, 9:1-6) and Sirach (Sir 24:19-22, 51:23). At the end of the latter book the "uninstructed" are invited to place themselves in wisdom's school: "Put your necks under her yoke, and let your souls receive instruction" (Sir 51:26). Jesus gives as a reason for coming to him that he is "gentle and humble of heart." His treatment of others will not be harsh or overbearing, but he will be

easily approachable. More importantly, these two qualities can be said to embody the very lesson he wishes to teach: a way of living and relating to others that is not domineering and proud but deferential, forcing no one, aware of the burdens people carry, showing empathy, even being willing to bear burdens with them, forgiving, obedient to the Father. In the words of John Meier, “In Jesus the Wisdom of God, the teacher and the subject taught are one and the same. Adherence to his person is the sum total of the law, a yoke that proves most light to the true disciple” (128). His person embodies the accomplishment of the Father’s will that he looks for in others. To submit to his teaching and example is to find the “rest for your souls” which Jeremiah saw as the fruit of following the “good way” marked out by Israel’s law (Jer 6:16, 19). Finally, Jesus’ yoke is “easy” and his burden “light” because he bears them with us; all that is asked of us is the faith to accept his healing forgiveness (**11:30**). Those who trust in the love of Jesus find themselves capable of handing on that love to others, thus fulfilling the most radical of Jesus’ commandments, that of loving one’s enemy.

Chapter 11 ends with an image of Jesus surrounded by disciples to whom he administers refreshment. This bond is slowly being created between Jesus and his “church” even as another set of people are rejecting him and hardening against him. The Passion of Jesus is already underway even as the nucleus of disciples represents a saved community that will endure after the resurrection as the beginning on earth of the kingdom of God which Jesus is founding. Matthew’s portrayal is constantly of Jesus as “God with us” (1:23, 28:20), God in the midst of the community of his people. Later passages will only make more vivid a picture of “God with man” that is already developing (cf. 12:46-50, 18:20, 26:29, 36). The nucleus may be surrounded by an outer darkness where there is the weeping and gnashing of teeth of those who reject the Lord (cf. 8:12 etc.), but this darkness cannot extinguish the light kindled by the Lord (cf. 4:16, 5:14-16).

The rejection Jesus has spoken of in Chapter 11 comes to sharp focus in Chapter 12 over the issue of sabbath observance (**12:1a**). Since the return from exile in the late sixth century BCE, the sabbath had taken on a major significance for the Jews. Observing the seventh day rest was a primary way of recognizing the sovereignty of God over creation. It was a way of participating in the rest of Yahweh after his work of creation (cf. Gen 2:2-3). No one in Israel was to do any work that day: “For six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath for the Lord your God. You shall do no work that day, neither you nor your son nor your daughter nor your servants, men or women, nor your animals nor the stranger who lives with you. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that these hold, but on the seventh day he rested; that is why the Lord has blessed the sabbath day and made it sacred” (Exod 20:8-11). The Sabbath rest was to be strictly observed as a “lasting covenant” (cf. Exod 31:12-17); gathering wood, for example, was punishable by death (cf. Num 15:32-36). In Deuteronomy the Sabbath is given the additional significance of a commemoration of the Lord’s deliverance of his people from slavery in Egypt (cf. Deut 5:12-15).

For the post-exilic prophets observance of the Sabbath was a touchstone of willingness to live by the covenant and a guarantee of the Lord’s favor (cf. Isa 56:2-7): “If you refrain from trampling the sabbath, and doing business on the holy day, if you call the Sabbath ‘Delightful,’ and the day sacred to the Lord ‘Honorable,’ if you honor it by abstaining from travel, from doing business and from gossip, then shall you find your happiness in Yahweh and I will lead you triumphant over the heights of the land. I will feed you on the heritage of Jacob your father” (Isa 58:13-14). The high commissioner Nehemiah in the mid-fifth century took strict measures to prevent merchants and traders from entering

Jerusalem on the Sabbath to sell their wares (Neh 13:15-22). In a post-exilic passage added to the book of Jeremiah, the Lord tells the kings and people of Judah, “As you value your lives, on no account carry a burden on the Sabbath day or bring it in through the gates of Jerusalem. Bring no burden out of your houses on the sabbath day, and do not work. Keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your ancestors” (cf. Jer 17:19-27).

By Jesus’ time the custodians of the Law had minutely codified the activities not permitted on the Sabbath. The restrictions were devised by men to safeguard the holiness of the Sabbath, but they could easily become ends in themselves, blinding people to the inner meaning of the Sabbath observance. It was inevitable that Jesus’ passion for the will of his Father come into conflict with the human regulations by which men sought to vindicate their own holiness. The Pharisees will pay great attention to their minute regulations while leaving aside the “weightier matters of the Law—justice, mercy, good faith” (cf. Matt 23:23). The conflict begins quite innocently as Jesus is walking through grain fields with his disciples on the Sabbath. Hungry, they pick heads of wheat to eat as they walk along (**12:1b**), a practice permitted in Deut 23:26. Jewish tradition had forbidden the activity on the Sabbath as a form of harvest-work (**12:2**). Jesus will justify the apostles’ action with three arguments. He first appeals to the example of David, who once when he and his followers were hungry ate the holy bread placed before the Lord which was to be eaten by the priests (**12:3-4**; cf. Lev 24:5-9). The implication is that the hunger of the one anointed by the Lord and of his followers was sufficient grounds for their overriding the detail of the Law on this occasion. The Messiah’s need would be sufficient reason for transcending the Law in an emergency. When the law was not even a divine but a human law the grounds for failing to observe it would be even stronger. Jesus is suggesting that as the “son of David” (1:1, 20, 9:27) he has the authority to waive the human regulation for himself and his followers (the nascent Church; cf. on the end of Chapter 11 above) in this case.

Secondly, the Pharisees could read in the Law itself (cf. Num 28:9) how the priests must offer special holocausts and oblations in the temple on the Sabbath and incur no guilt for doing this “work” (**12:5-6**). Presumably the temple venue absolves them from the strictures on work. Work carried out in worship of the Lord is acceptable. Jesus insinuates that he himself is even holier than the temple because God dwells in his very person. Such an implication would be an even greater cause for outrage than Jesus’ assumption of the role of messianic Son of David. What Jesus condones for the nourishment of his followers even on the Sabbath is by definition permitted, whatever human regulations have to be set aside. It is difficult to see how the Pharisees could not interpret Jesus’ identification of himself with the temple as utmost arrogance, if they were not willing to look at the grounds of his claim.

Finally Jesus has recourse to mercy, *hesed*, the law behind all laws. “Mercy, covenant love, is what I want, not sacrifice,” he says, again quoting Hosea (**12:7**; Hos 6:6, cf. 9:13). God’s very nature is love. Whatever he does is done out of love, and what is demanded of his image, man, is to reflect and imitate that divine love. It is compassionate to allow one’s followers to feed themselves when they are hungry on the Sabbath, just as it is compassionate for him and his followers to eat with sinners. In this great pericope, Jesus has identified himself with King David, with the dwelling of God in Jerusalem, and finally with the divine essence itself to explain his activity in the face of human regulations. He has shown what the essence of Sabbath observance is, union with God and the divine goodness. This point will become even more clear in the following conflict story. It is because this Son of Man (cf. 11:19) understands the divine will from inside that he deserves to be called “Lord of the Sabbath” (**12:8**).

This final sentence of the story adds to the three Old Testament themes of David, Temple, and divine *hesed* that of the Sabbath. It is in Christ that true Sabbath rest (cf. 11:29!) is to be found.

When Jesus enters the synagogue at Capernaum on the Sabbath, the religious officials set the stage for a formal confrontation with him over the Sabbath observance (**12:9**). Prompted by the presence of a man with a withered hand and knowing Jesus' healing powers, they ask him whether it is permissible to heal such a person on the Sabbath (**12:10**). We are told elsewhere that such an action would be considered working on the Sabbath (cf. Luke 13:14); if Jesus were to permit it much less do it himself, he would be violating the commandment as interpreted by the legal experts. Jesus answers with a question, asking the hearers to look at their own experience. Would they not on the Sabbath "raise up" one of their sheep if it fell into a pit (**12:11**)? God has just such an instinctive urge to save his suffering human creatures whether the day be a sabbath or not. The Sabbath is an opportunity to refrain from labor so as to rest with God. But if God's very being is *hesed*, then what is more consonant with union with God than acting with love to save his ailing child? The authorities have failed to see the wood for the trees, have focused on an external regulation without respect to its inner meaning, the truth it was meant to protect. The Sabbath for Jesus is an opportunity to share in the healing action of divine *hesed*, a participation in God's liberating act. In restoring to wholeness the man's withered hand (**12:13**), Jesus shows himself to be in union with the God who is infinite love, and it is precisely in that union that Sabbath rest ultimately consists. It is therefore permissible to do good on the Sabbath (**12:12**). The Pharisees now feel they have sure grounds for determining to annihilate Jesus (**12:14**). The Galilean ministry is effectively finished, ending in failure.

The crowds, however, continue to follow him as he leaves the area, and he continues to "heal them all," now admonishing them not to make him known (**12:15-16**; cf. 8:4, 9:30 for similar warnings). He knows that the Pharisees are already plotting against him and sees no need to aggravate their hostility before the fruition of their plans. For the evangelist Jesus is fulfilling the prophecy of the suffering servant of the Lord (**12:17**), of whom Isaiah had said that he would not raise his voice or cause a commotion in the streets (**12:19**=Isa 42:2), yet he would be chosen and beloved by God, pleasing to God (**12:18**=Isa 42:1; cf. 3:17), filled with God's spirit (cf. 3:16), and destined to announce just judgment to the nations (cf. 28:19). His way would be gentle (cf. 11:29): he would not crush the broken reed or quench the smoldering wick until he brought justice to victory; the nations would hope in his name (**12:20-21**=Isa 42:3-4). Jesus the servant is a mixture of gentleness and strength: hidden he will be made manifest (cf. 10:26-27); rejected he triumphs. This is the eighth of the twelve Old Testament passages which Matthew formally and solemnly applies to Jesus. The picture of the humble servant who ministers to all nations is being filled in.

It is now time for Jesus to respond to the Pharisees' attribution of his miracles to the devil (cf. 9:34, 10:25). The discussion is set up by the briefly noted healing of a man blind, dumb, and possessed by a demon (**12:22**; cf. 9:29-30, 33). While the amazed crowds confess that this must be the "son of David" (**12:23**; cf. 9:27), the Pharisees reiterate their charge that he casts out devils only through Bezebul, prince of demons (**12:24**). Without necessarily hearing their words Jesus knows their thoughts and begins to refute them. If a devil is casting devils out of a man, he is clearly destroying his own reign over man: Satan "divided" against himself cannot expect his kingdom to "stand" (**12:25-26**). Jesus spells out the obvious fact that a man freed from the devil no longer belongs in the devil's power. Why would a devil cast out his own (**12:25-26**)? The freeing of a soul from the hold of evil must be the work of a beneficent power. Further, even

members of the Pharisee party have cast out devils: does this mean they too do this by the devil's power (**12:27**)? Jesus' questioning mode leaves no doubt about the answer, yet he goes on to give the answer in unmistakable terms: if an evil supernatural power has been cast out it can only be by the power of a greater supernatural good, the power of the God of goodness, a power which Jesus designates as the "spirit of God." This is the spirit which he received at his baptism (cf. 3:16) and in whose power he overcame the devil in his own temptation in the desert (cf. 4:1ff). Through this spirit Jesus now extends the "reign of God" over human beings, reclaiming them for union with his Father (**12:28**). Never so far has Jesus so clearly claimed that his exorcisms are proof that the "kingdom of God" (instead of "kingdom of heaven" as normally in Matthew; cf. also 19:24, 21:31, 43) has arrived. Jesus gives us a clear image of the three divine persons working for man's salvation: by the Spirit dwelling in him the Son casts out demons to bring about the reign of his Father over the world.

Another question of Jesus invites us to look more closely at what happens in an exorcism. Imagine the possessed man as a house where a strong demon has taken possession (**12:29**). How can anyone burgle the house without first tying up the strong one in possession? If a man no longer exhibits the signs of possession by an evil spirit, that spirit must have been bound by someone stronger. The saying goes to the heart of Jesus' message; for Rudolph Bultmann, "Here if anywhere must the characteristic element in the preaching of Jesus be found" (in Vincent Taylor: *The Gospel of Mark*, 241). Exorcisms prove that Jesus has overthrown the power of evil. In his ministry Satan's power to destroy souls is nullified.

So much for the argument. Having defended his actions and explained their meaning, Jesus now returns to the real problem: the attitude and fate of those who reject his divine origin. Those who are not "with" him are not simply neutral but are "against" him (**12:30**). We have seen that those who are "with him" constitute the Church (cf. on the end of Chapter 11). Those who reject him put themselves outside the Church wherein is found salvation. Those who do not share with him in the "gathering" of the harvest of men actually contribute to the scattering of the flock (see the associating of the harvest and sheep images in 9:36-38). It seems that almost never in Matthew is Jesus unaccompanied by others in his ministry: he cannot think of himself without his Church, the house of God, the light on the stand, the city on the hill, the fellowship of brothers. The whole apostolic discourse of Chapter 10 presented the apostles as the continuation of the personal ministry of Jesus himself.

To be "against" Jesus is a "blasphemy of the spirit" (objective genitive) which cannot be forgiven, since it is a decision of the human spirit to go against the Spirit of God speaking in one's heart. When the Spirit of God assures a man in his heart that Jesus is truly from God and yet the man refuses to submit to Jesus, he cannot be forgiven because he does not want to accept forgiveness from Jesus. Jesus has made it clear that he came to forgive sinners, sinners of all kinds (**12:31**, cf. 9:2, 6, 13). The only sin that could prevent his granting forgiveness would be to deny that one has sin and that he is the forgiver (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1864). To "forgive" such a sin would entail a violation of human freedom on the part of God, a failure to respect the inherent free nature of the person he created, a forcing of himself on his free creature. There is no need to seek any other sin that could be called "speaking against the Holy Spirit" (**12:32b**). Even speaking a word "against the Son of Man" (**12:32a**) might simply be the result of a misunderstanding of Jesus, a failure to see the divine in him, the kind of speaking against Jesus we might find in someone raised in a religion which does not accept Jesus as God, i.e., Islam or Judaism. Insofar as persons in this category are not going against an inner awareness, prompted

by the Spirit of God, of Jesus' divine nature and mission, they may be speaking against Jesus in a way that does not violate their own inner voice and hence is not a blasphemy against the Spirit. Only when a person is aware in his heart that God is offering him salvation in Jesus is he obliged to listen to this voice of his conscience. See the excellent note on 12:32 in the Jerusalem Bible.

Words spoken against the Spirit can be understood as the fruit of a tree gone bad: it is the inner source of the words that is at fault. As in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus draws attention to the heart as the place where moral goodness or badness is determined (**12:33b** repeats 7:16a & 20, substituting "tree" for "them"; verse **12:33a** is a variant of 7:17). With the strong indignation of John the Baptist Jesus lashes out at the "brood of vipers" (cf. 3:7) who pretend to utter good things when they themselves are bad within, for it is "from the fullness of the heart [that] the mouth speaks" (**12:34**), just as adultery was said to be primarily a matter of the heart (cf. 5:28). All sin can thus be defined as the heart's refusal to confess what it knows to be true, a refusal to submit to God in Jesus, a lack of faith. In the terminology of the Gospel of John, men have preferred darkness to the light (cf. John 3:19), lying to truth (cf. John 8:55). This rejection of the truth permits men to remain in their sinful actions (cf. John 3:19-20), in their hatred (cf. 1 John 2:9). In verse 35 Jesus recasts the imagery of the tree bearing fruit from 12:33 into the language of a man bringing forth "good" or "evil" (cf. 12:34) from his "treasury" (**12:35**; cf. the connection of "heart" and "treasure" in 6:21). The purification of the heart (cf. 5:8) Jesus seeks is accomplished by the bringing of one's sins to Jesus to be forgiven: "If we acknowledge our sins, then God who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and purify us from everything that is wrong" (1 John 1:9), for "the blood of Jesus his Son purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

The "locus" of sin is the heart but sin is manifested in words and deeds. Jesus returns to the sinful word and speech (cf. 12:34) in the last two verses of this denunciation of his opponents. For every "idle" word men speak they will have to give an account in the day of judgment (**12:36**). Such a word would be one not emerging from a "healthy tree" (cf. 12:33) or "good treasure" (cf. 12:35), in particular a word of blasphemy (cf. 12:31-32). Once again Jesus reminds us of a "day of judgment" when men will receive the fruits of their choices in life (cf. 11:22, 24). Since words proceed from the heart, one will be either "justified" by his words or "condemned" by his words (**12:37**). Were one able to keep in mind the presence of the risen Christ, one would find oneself using words to build up the community and not tear down (cf. Eph 4:29).

Jesus looks for a surrender of the heart to the divine power manifest in his works. When some scribes and Pharisees come and ask for a sign (**12:38**), he repudiates them for not submitting to the evidence he has already given. They are an "evil and adulterous generation" (**12:39**), professing but not living loyalty to the one God. He will not be made subject to human demands. He illustrates the attitude he is looking for with two stories (see similar pairings to illustrate a point in 5:13-14, 6:26-29, 7:9-10, 8:19-22, 9:15-17, 10:29-30, 11:21-24) from the Old Testament. The Ninevites repented when the prophet Jonah preached to them: they recognized the divine call through the prophet (**12:41**). For this reason on the day of judgment (cf. 12:36) they will rise up and condemn "this generation" (cf. Ps 95:10, 12:8) because they acknowledged the truth at cost to themselves. Jesus is a "greater than Jonah" who has all the more reason to be obeyed. Similarly the Queen of Sheba will rise up and condemn this generation since she journeyed from the "ends of the earth" to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and here is one "greater than Solomon" (**12:42**). "Hear" and "repent" are two moments of the response Jesus is looking for. In the first story an Israelite man preached in a foreign city; in the second a foreign woman came to the Israelite king to listen to

him. In both cases foreigners received gladly the revelation of the God of Israel—the prophet’s call to repentance and the king’s demonstration of “wisdom” (see the wisdom theme in 11:19, 25, and 28-29). Again foreigners are only too glad to see what the chosen people will not see (cf. 8:11-12).

Nevertheless, after explaining why “this generation” does not deserve a sign, Jesus does offer a sign. It is not the kind the Pharisees want to see but a sign that Jesus fulfills the Old Testament. He identifies himself, as Son of Man, with Jonah, not merely as the prophet who converted the pagans, as also in Luke 11:29-32, but as one swallowed up by the sea monster for three days and three nights. As Jonah was in the belly of the whale for three days and three nights, so will Jesus be in the belly of the earth before being “vomited” into eternal life from the region of death and evil (**12:40**). This “sign” will only become intelligible after Jesus’ resurrection, when men will see how accurately yet unexpectedly Jesus repeated the experience of the prophet. Jesus is not only the prophet who brought the word of God to the pagans but the man punished for the sin of disobedience yet saved by the mercy of the Lord to be the bringer of life (cf. Jonah 2:11: “The Lord spoke to the fish, which then vomited out Jonah on to the dry land”). In this short pericope we see how thoroughly Jesus enters into the Hebrew scriptures and appropriates them to his person and mission. The Book of Jonah might well have been one of the texts expounded by Jesus during the forty days he taught the apostles after his Resurrection (cf. Luke 24:27, 44-47).

In this chapter of Matthew’s Gospel Jesus has identified himself as one “greater than” three Old Testament “types,” which stand for his threefold role as priest (temple), prophet (Jonah), and king (Solomon). He is the place where sacrifice is offered to the Father and the Father’s blessings are mediated to men; he is the mouthpiece of the word of God; and he is the wise leader who brings peace and prosperity to his people.

The exorcizing of the demon in 12:22 led Jesus to reflect on the Pharisees’ attribution of his power to the prince of devils. Now he returns to the subject of exorcism to consider its aftermath. It is not enough for a demon to be cast out of a man (**12:43**); a new spirit must take the demon’s place (note that in Psalm 51 the suppliant asks not only that his sin be washed away but that he be given a new and fervent spirit). One might remove the filth from one’s spiritual house so that it stands “unoccupied,” “swept clean,” and even “decorated” (**12:44**). The demon needs a home to live in, and not finding it in “waterless” places, returns to his former home and finds it available and commodious enough for “seven spirits worse than himself,” and then the man’s condition is worse than it was before the exorcism (**12:45a**). Christ himself and a committed relationship with him alone can fortify a person against renewed incursions of evil spirits. In a final sentence (**12:45b**) Jesus identifies this “last condition” of the possessed man with the condition of the “evil generation” that refuse belief in him and seek a sign (cf. 12:39). It is as if the demon cast out from the blind and dumb man has taken up residence in the hearts of the Pharisees. The sentence is thus a fitting conclusion to the section 12:22-45.

Yet some of Jesus’ hearers did believe. Saint Matthew counters the bleak rejection of Jesus by the religious authorities with a dramatic portrayal of the incipient Church. While he was yet finishing his words about possession by demons, Jesus was told that his mother and brothers were “outside” the building in which he was speaking, and that they wished to speak to him (**12:46-47**). Jesus seizes the opportunity to teach a lesson about the Church. As so often he initiates thought by asking a question about who constitutes his family (**12:48**). With a gesture he gives the answer: “Stretching his hand out” to his disciples gathered round him, he identifies them as his real “mother and brothers” (**12:49**). Following Jesus, willingness to learn from him, establishes a bond closer even

than the bonds of blood. Jesus' disciples are bound to him by ties of mutual love. Jesus is saying, "There is a greater than family here." He has already taught that ties of human family must be subordinate to the demands of the kingdom (cf. 8:21-22, 10:35-38). The disciples are bound to Jesus because in listening to Jesus they are "doing the will of [his] Father in heaven" (**12:50**). Accomplishing this will is the one criterion for lasting union with the Father. Since Jesus himself will be utterly obedient to the Father, the obedient following of him will earn for men and women the title "brother and sister" of Jesus; the designation "mother," which preceded "brother" in verses 46-47 now comes at the end. The Christian might reflect that the human being who after Christ most perfectly obeyed the Father's will was in fact his mother. In this way the apparent repudiation by Jesus of his own family is in fact a drawing them into the eternal family of God. The creation of this family in the lifetime of Jesus himself offsets the darkness of the hardening resistance of the Jewish officials. The disciples' faith is yet weak and will seem to be extinguished, but the bonds already forged will survive betrayal itself.

In the "narrative chapters" 11 and 12 there has in fact been a considerable amount of teaching. Nearly three-quarters of the verses in these two chapters are words of Jesus in which he discusses the diverse reactions to his ministry. It is now time for a full discourse on this topic, the Discourse of Parables. In this collection of seven parables (cf. 13:3a) Jesus will reveal the mystery of the kingdom of God which is growing in secret behind the outward appearances of weakness and failure.

Leaving the house where the previous scene took place, Jesus takes his seat (cf. 5:1) by the sea of Galilee (**13:1**). To address the throngs that follow him he must "sit" in a boat to teach them, while the crowd stand on the shore (**13:2**). With no introduction he begins the first parable. From the beginning of his ministry Jesus has realized that the benefits he comes to offer to men need to be freely accepted by them if they are to have effect. This acceptance is what he means by faith. The centurion's servant was cured because the centurion believed (8:10, 13); the paralytic was forgiven because of the faith of those who brought him to Jesus (9:2); the woman with the hemorrhage and the two blind men were healed because of their faith (9:22, 29). In commissioning his apostles he made it clear that some would welcome them (cf. 10:13, 40) and many would neither "welcome" them nor "listen" to their message (10:14). Jesus' miracles did not elicit the necessary "repentance" from the towns where they had been worked (11:20, 12:41); his wisdom was not "listened to" (12:42). The Pharisees attributed his good works to evil powers (12:24). The spiritual response Jesus required was thus a combination of repentance, listening, and believing. If his mission was to bear fruit in men's lives, they would need only to accept him as the giver of divine gifts with a willingness to leave behind any former attitude of self-sufficiency or self-enthronement. Since it was the word or message of Jesus that would give life if accepted, one can see how naturally he would compare that word to a seed, the small beginning of a flourishing life, an entity that needed only a soil disposed to permit its growth. The parable of the Sower is a brilliant metaphor for the career of Jesus's word so far (**13:3b**).

The metaphor is presented as a simple and graphic story which will not be explicated until the disciples question Jesus later. In less than five verses Jesus presents with vivid detail four successive kinds of soil on which the Sower's seed falls. That which was sown by the path was eaten up by birds (**13:4**). That which fell on rocky soil had no depth of earth, so that when it sprouted quickly it had no strength to resist the heat of the sun and withered (**13:5-6**; this category is described at greater length than the others). Some seed produced plants that

(13:14a) is the ninth of the Old Testament passages with which Matthew underlines the fulfillment by Jesus of key elements of Old Testament prophecy.

It might be noted that Matthew cites the Septuagint reading of Isaiah, which softens the Hebrew, in which God commands Isaiah to make fat (thick) the people's heart by his preaching "in order that" they may not grasp the message. The word of God preached by the prophet is not intended to cause the ruin of the people but given their obstinacy this is the result it will have. In the Gospel version the notion of intentionality on God's part is dropped while the factual description of the people's condition is retained. Jesus has now fitted the public's callousness to his message into the great mystery of human sin recorded throughout the Hebrew scriptures. His rejection by the people is part of the divine plan, although the working out of the plan is yet obscure.

It is necessary for Jesus to remind the disciples that they are an exception to the prophecy. Since their eyes truly see and their ears truly hear (i.e., listen), they can be called happy **(13:16)**. They alone overthrow the condemnation of Isaiah. Jesus continues to play on the words of the prophecy by saying that many prophets and righteous persons desired to "see what [the disciples] see" without ever seeing it, to "hear what [they] hear" without hearing it **(13:17)**. Those who truly sought the divine will did not yet receive the revelation of God in human flesh which was reserved until Jesus (cf. Eph 3:5); they could only "look forward" to the day of this revelation (cf. 1 Pet 1:10-12, Heb 11:10, 13-16). The small nucleus of Jesus's followers will turn out to be the "good ground" which will enable the seed of his word to flourish throughout the world.

For these disciples who have the necessary faith, Jesus now reveals further aspects of the first parable **(13:18)**. In allegorical fashion he explains the reference of the four kinds of soil. Verse 11 has already intimated that the parable is about "the kingdom" of heaven. Now Jesus says that the seed is the "word of the kingdom," i.e., the word that announces the arrival of the kingdom in Jesus; a later evangelist will identify the word with Jesus himself (John 1:14). If a person hears without understanding, the "evil one" or devil swoops down like birds to snatch what should have been sown in the "heart" **(13:19; cf. 13:15)**. Others have an immediate but shallow and temporary reception of the word; its "roots" in the heart are not strong enough to withstand the trials and persecutions (cf. 5:10-11, 44, 10:23) that inevitably assail the adherent of the word **(13:20-21)**. Jesus was aware that his word must sink deeply enough in the heart that it governs all the rest of one's life, subordinating all legitimate activities and interests to its sway—hence the radicalism of so many of his teachings—cf. 5:29-30, 6:24, 8:21-22, 10:37, 12:30. The reception of the word is not "for a time," while it is fashionable or comfortable: it is addressed to the "heart," the place of ultimate decisions. Rocky ground is cluttered ground that has insufficient room for the word of God.

The third group of hearers seems to have assimilated the word at a deeper level than the second: no rocks in the soil to prevent its taking root. Yet there are rival plants which are ultimately stronger than the word and will suffocate it. Jesus labels these plants "the worry of this age" and "the pleasure of wealth" **(13:22)**. One has learned to endure trials in the service of the word but has not yet cast his whole care on the Lord (cf. 6:25, 27-28, 31-34) and is preoccupied with enjoyments of this life. Attachment to riches blocks and eventually stifles the life of childlike trust in God (cf. 16:26, 19:23-24, 29). Such "thorny plants" must be rooted out before they grow if faith is to "bear fruit."

But "good soil" allows full scope to the word so that it can flourish and bring forth its proper and abundant fruit **(13:23)**. Word sown in this soil "makes" or "produces" a hundredfold or sixtyfold or thirtyfold: the verb is that used in the Sermon on the Mount for "doing the will" of the Father (cf. 12:50, 7:21, 24, 26 and

also 7:17-19). The true righteousness of God is meant to “abound” (cf. 5:20). Our part is to clear the soil for a fruitful reception of the word, or rather to allow the Lord to eradicate whatever sinful passions in our hearts are blocking the establishment of his life in us. For the word that he sows in us is ultimately himself, his own life. We must “accept and submit to the word planted” in us (Jas 1:21). Jesus’s interpretation of the parable of the Sower is an invitation to conversion.

The second parable is again spoken to “the crowds” (cf. 13:34) and like the first will be followed by a private interpretation for the disciples. The parable seems to grow out of the third part of the parable of the Sower in that it tells of good and bad plants growing from the same soil. Because of the work of an enemy, the blades of wheat have to compete with a goodly crop of weeds (**13:24-26**). While the practical-minded servants would uproot the weeds right away (**13:27-28**), the wiser master knows how inextricably the root systems of the two kinds of plant are entwined: one could not remove the one without damaging the other (**13:29**). Only when the plants have borne mature fruit will the good plants be so firmly rooted that they can survive the removal of the others, which are to be bound for burning (**13:30b**). Meantime the two must be allowed to “grow together” until the harvest (**13:30a**). When the weeds have been removed, the wheat can be gathered into the master’s barn (**13:30c**).

While this parable has in common with the first parable the metaphor of the seed, its purpose is completely different. Jesus addresses a problem that will be experienced by all who accept his word: they will have to live among those who reject this word and therefore live an embattled existence. Their lives will be different from those of “the world.” The full rewards of the Gospel will not be theirs until, at a time determined by the Lord, the wicked are definitively eliminated from the kingdom, at which point the disciples of Jesus will be “gathered in” to the Father’s company. The parable is about the “time of the Church,” as Jesus’ explanation will make clear. It reminds us that believers will be “persecuted” by anti-God elements in this world (see on 13:20-21). The kingdom will be under siege from the powers of evil, without, however, being destroyed by them.

Yet a third parable exploits a theme implicit in the first: a seed with very inauspicious beginnings produces a plant larger than most others. All three parables of seeds show the eventual triumph of the seed of life whatever the unfavorable circumstances of its sowing. The grain of mustard (**13:31**) is the smallest of seeds, but when grown is the greatest of shrubs, becoming a tree where birds of the sky can nest (**13:32**, the latter detail drawn from a vision of Daniel, Dan 4:9, 18; cf. also Ezek 17:23). Jesus shows an almost childlike wonder at the phenomenon of abundant life contained in a tiny grain, a wonder sensed in the first account of creation (cf. Gen 1:11-12). He calls attention to the flourishing of the life which he and his Father brought out of nothing. Because the Church is of God, despite its insignificant outward appearance it will emerge as an organism which can provide shelter for all human beings in the world. God’s ways are not our ways (Isa 55:8-9; note the juxtaposition of this verse with the simile about the word of God and the seed, Isa 55:10-11) his way of working does not conform to our expectations. We need to remember this when we long for a more apparently “successful” or “triumphant” Church.

With the fourth parable Jesus makes a similar point to that of the third but abandons the simile of the seed and compares the kingdom of heaven to leaven which a woman (to contrast with the man sowing seed in the first three parables—cf. the same device in Luke 15:4-10) took and hid in three measures of wheat flour until the whole was leavened (**13:33**). Here again the insignificant becomes supremely significant. In this case it is an active power that penetrates its

environment making of it something truly new. The small force has a mysterious transforming power. “Seed” and “bread” are again found together in the passage from Isaiah cited above (cf. Isa 55:10-11). The gift of God combined with the work of man/woman nourishes God’s children.

Saint Matthew reminds us that all this teaching is being presented by Jesus in parables and only in parables (**13:34**). He finds a new reason for this method in the Old Testament, where the psalmist announces: “I will open in parables my mouth; I will utter things hidden since the foundation of the world” (**13:35**; Ps 78:2). The solemn introduction to this citation makes of it the tenth in the series of twelve Old Testament citations spread throughout the Gospel (see most recently 13:14-15). Jesus is in the line of the didactic psalmists who revealed in metaphorical language the mysteries of the kingdom, the divine activity by which God draws the world to himself. The speaker of Psalm 78 disclosed the relations between God and men by recounting numerous episodes of Israel’s spiritual journey. Only through such representational language can the ineffable become in some way accessible to human beings.

At this point Jesus leaves the crowds (presumably he had been in the boat till now, cf. 13:2) and enters “the house” (probably at Capernaum; **13:36a**). The disciples now have an opportunity to ask for an explanation of the second parable of the discourse, that of the wheat among the weeds (**13:36b**). Whereas Jesus’ explanation of the first parable brought a new interpretation to the obvious meaning of the parable, his exposition of the present parable is more a matter of specifying an identity for the characters in the story. The explanation is given in two parts: first comes a list of correspondences between signifier and signified (**13:37-39**), then a retelling of the parable now in literal terms using the code of correspondences (13:40-43). The first section is a series of seven equations:

Sower	=	Son of Man
Field	=	world
Good seed	=	children (members) of the kingdom
Weeds	=	children of the evil one
Enemy sower	=	the devil
Harvest (action)	=	the end of the (present) age
Reapers	=	angels

Jesus identifies the sower of good seed as himself under the title of Son of Man, a title which signifies his role in the carrying out of the plan of God (cf. 12:40, three days in the earth; 12:32, bearer of the word of God; 12:8, master of the Sabbath; 10:23, future coming; 9:6, forgiver of sins; 8:20, unhoused). His word is sown worldwide, and those who hear it constitute his kingdom. But the enemy of God, the devil (cf. 4:1), has a rival kingdom interspersed among the kingdom of God. When both plants have reached full term, it is time for the harvest, at which point the weeds will be definitively disposed of (**13:40**). The Son of Man has angels at his disposal who can eradicate and exterminate those who have followed the devil’s suasions rather than his own word. These are those who have provided a “stumbling block” for the children of the kingdom by “doing lawless deeds” (**13:41**; the words in quotation marks are found in some manuscripts of Zeph 1:3). Those who have rejected God have in fact rejected the life which he wished to give in his kingdom. The severity of their being “thrown into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (**13:42**, cf. 8:12) is Jesus’ compassionate way of making plain to men the serious consequences of their choices. He takes human freedom seriously. He wants no one to be cast into everlasting fire but will force no one into heaven (the master’s “barn”) against that person’s will. The final sentence of Jesus’ explanation goes beyond the parable itself to describe the glory of those who live in God’s eternal kingdom: these “just” will “shine like the sun in their Father’s kingdom” (**13:43a**).

Their radiance will be like that of Jesus himself (cf. 17:2), no longer dimmed by entanglement with the wicked (cf. the combination of “justice” and “light” in Ps 37:6). The agricultural metaphor has been left behind.

The theme of harvesting of good and evil at the end of time appeared in the Book of Joel (cf. Joel 4:12-13) and will be taken up again in the Book of Revelation (cf. Rev 14:14-20). As in the great judgment scene of 25:31-46, it is Jesus himself as Son of Man who judges between righteous and unrighteous: all judgment has been given to him by the Father (John 5:22, 27, 30). The parable of the weeds thus has a far more Christological force than that of the Sower. It is to this dimension of the parable that Jesus calls attention with the formula used at the end of the parable of the Sower: “Let him who has ears hear” (**13:43b**; cf. 13:9).

The discourse comes to an end with three briefer parables, each beginning “[Again] the kingdom of heaven is like....” (cf. vv. 31, 33). The fifth parable has in common with the previous passage the words “field” and “hidden,” but its purport is different. The kingdom of heaven, that is the life of God with men, is so great a treasure for a man that he will sell all he owns to buy the field in which he has found and hidden it (**Matt 13:44**). Such a man, like one of the characters in the parable of the Sower (cf. 13:20) is filled with “joy” at the discovery of the kingdom, but in his case the joy leads to resolute action. He makes the kingdom the love of his life, his “treasure” (cf. 6:20-21). The parable highlights that the kingdom offered by Christ is the fulfillment of man’s deepest desires and that the appropriate response to its offer is the placing of it as the highest value in one’s life. He who has God has all. The treasure is “hidden” in this life; its radiance will be revealed only after the “harvest” of final judgment. The readiness of the man to sell his possessions recalls the immediacy with which the first disciples “left their nets (cf. 4:20)..., their boat and their father” (cf. 4:22) to follow Jesus.

The words “find,” “all he has,” and “buy” link the sixth parable with the fifth. In this case the man is actively “seeking” a treasure, namely beautiful pearls (**13:45**). Already Jesus has compared the Gospel of the kingdom to pearls (cf. 7:6). Jesus offers men the precious pearl of eternal life. In the context of this section of the Gospel, the parable describes the attitude Jesus might have expected to meet when he offered them the union with God which they sought. While his hearers did not react with the alacrity and commitment he sought, there would be countless men and women down the ages who would find in him the pearl of great price and sacrifice all to have it (**13:46**), both consecrated persons and persons living in the world. The selling all to have the one great treasure is ultimately an act required of all Christians: it is the single-minded preference of God to the creature (cf. 4:10, 5:8, 6:24, 10:32, 37-39). One must love God with the whole heart and soul (cf. 22:37-38).

The final parable revisits the theme of the parable of the Weeds, this time expressed in terms of a dragnet of fish. Both parables are found only in the Gospel of Matthew. They explore the mystery of the Church on earth, united with God yet mixed with impurity. The net thrown into the sea gathers up all kinds of fish (**13:47**). On shore (**13:48**) the fishermen (cf. 4:18-20) collect (cf. vv. 30, 41) the good ones into a container and throw away the unusable (*sapra*, cf. 7:17-18, 12:33). This is a parable of the “end of the age” (**13:49**, cf. 13:40) when the angels (cf. 13:39) will separate (cf. 25:32) the wicked from the midst of the just (cf. 13:43) and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be the weeping and gnashing of teeth (**13:50**, an exact repetition of 13:42). The Christian lives in hope, not by sight: the visible fulfillment of God’s promises is still to come; encompassed by suffering, we must wait for it in patience (Rom 8:24-25). Our inheritance is laid up for us in heaven, a salvation to be revealed at the

end of time (1 Pet 1:4-5). The Christian does not lose heart because he finds himself immersed in a world of sin.

At a critical point in the Gospel Jesus has demonstrated how his word establishes on earth a community of those who hear and accept it, a community that will endure in the midst of a world that rejects the message, a kingdom that will flourish unencumbered in eternity. The disciples will need this assurance in the trials that lie ahead. In answer to his question, they respond that they have understood “all these things” (**13:51**). In a brief closing parable Jesus likens the scribe “instructed in the kingdom of heaven,” as they now are, to the master of a house (cf. 13:27) who draws from his storeroom (“treasure,” cf. 13:44) new and old things (**13:52**). Teachers of the kingdom will be able to apply the original teaching of Jesus to new situations; similarly they will show how the “new wine” (cf. 9:17) of Jesus’ teaching fulfills themes of the (“old”) Hebrew scriptures (e.g., the bridegroom, cf. 9:15). The kingdom of heaven takes “old” materials and transforms them into the fabric of God’s new creation in Christ.

The lines are now drawn: a number of the people accept Jesus; the officials and most others reject him. Matthew has only to recount a final occurrence in Galilee that seals Jesus’ Galilean ministry: his rejection by his “own town” and “house.” Jesus leaves the Sea of Galilee (**13:53**) for Nazareth (cf. 2:23, 4:13). When he teaches in their synagogue, his countrymen are dumbfounded by such “wisdom” (cf. 11:19, 12:42) and “powers” (**13:54**; cf. 11:20, 21, 23), asking whence they come, for is he not the carpenter’s son (the first we hear of Joseph’s occupation), and are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Jude (**13:55**), and are not his sisters all among them? The initial question is repeated: “Whence come all these things to him?” (**13:56**). The option of a direct gift from God does not occur to them, in spite of the superhuman teaching and wonders. The ultimate scandal for us is that God is in the ordinary and we must bow down to him there. Jesus upsets men’s comfortable world, their self-sufficiency. His countrymen find him a “stumbling block” (**13:57**). Jesus acknowledges with sadness that people find it threatening for a prophet (cf. 5:12) to emerge from their midst: their certainty that God would not speak in such a familiar person is a kind of self-hate: their own world couldn’t be good enough for God. At the same time it is a kind of self-exaltation that refuses to accept God in the other. This attitude prevents Jesus’ being able to perform many miracles there (**13:58**). The root cause is the word that ends this long chapter on the variety of responses to Jesus: unfaith (the theme of faith has not been mentioned since 9:29). Most of those who have heard the teaching of Jesus and seen his works to this point have not been able to acknowledge his lordship. In this environment there is nothing more he can do for them.

There now occurs an incident that will precipitate Jesus’ retirement from Galilee. We learn that John the Baptist has been put to death by Herod, the tetrarch (“petty independent prince”—Bauer) of Galilee, who had earlier arrested him (cf. 4:12). Saint Matthew introduces the account of his death by reporting that Herod thought that Jesus must be John the Baptist risen from the dead (**14:1-2**). John’s death must then have occurred in the interim between his sending of an embassy from prison (cf. 11:2) and Jesus’ discourse of parables. Herod assumed that this new wonder-worker of whom he was hearing must be a re-appearance of the man he had wrongfully beheaded. Herod’s reaction incidentally shows that the idea of a resurrection from the dead was “in the air” at this time. Saint Matthew now needs to give the details of John’s murder, an event which will have a profound impact on Jesus’ awareness of his own destiny.

Herod had imprisoned John for denouncing his relations with Herodias, the wife of Herod’s brother (**14:3-4**). He would have had John killed if he had not

been afraid of the crowd, who recognized John as a prophet (**14:5**; cf. 13:57, 11:9, 13-14) or spokesman of God. Similar fears will animate the opponents of Jesus (cf. 21:46, also 21:26). What forced Herod to kill John was a foolish oath he swore on the occasion of his birthday celebrations. The daughter of Herodias had danced for him and pleased him so much that he swore to give her whatever she asked for. Prompted by her mother, whose liaison with Herod John had denounced, the girl asked for the head of John on a platter (**14:6-8**). Because of the oaths taken before his guests, the “king” (as he is now called) had no choice but to comply, though he was “distressed” to do so (**14:9-10**). In Matthew’s account the distress seems to be caused by Herod’s fear of the crowd, while Saint Mark gives a more complex and sympathetic account of Herod’s motives, cf. Mark 6:20. The head of John is brought on a plate and given to the girl, who brings it to her mother (**14:11**). John’s disciples bury his body and report his death to Jesus (**14:12**).

Jesus’ reaction is to leave the area by boat and seek a deserted place where he can be alone (**14:13**). The unjust killing of the one who had gone before him and baptized him together with the hostility to his own mission in Galilee meant that he would now have to concentrate on strengthening the faith of the remnant who continued to follow him. Yet crowds still follow him and will not permit him to be alone. At the very moment when he is keenly aware of the people’s lack of real faith, his heart goes out to them in compassion and he performs a miracle of feeding.

Upon leaving the boat and seeing the vast crowd, Jesus is moved with compassion toward them (as in 9:36) and heals all their sick (**14:14**). His compassion seems even deeper than before (cf. 9:36) when he asked his disciples to pray for workers for the harvest. As evening approaches, the practical disciples advise their master to dismiss the crowds so that they may buy food for themselves in the neighboring villages (**14:15**). The giver of life responds that that will not be necessary, ordering the disciples, “Give them something to eat yourselves” (**14:16**). Not only is he prepared to feed the crowd in this deserted place, but he wishes his disciples to be the instruments of the feeding. In this way the disciples are intimately associated with Jesus’ ministry even before his saving death. They are to issue to “the crowds” bread in abundance. It will be easy for the post-Easter generation to see in this miracle the adumbration of the Eucharist. As will happen so often in the coming chapters, the disciples will not understand the Lord: they have only five loaves and two fish (**14:17**). Jesus orders them, “Bring them to me here” (**14:18**). The archetypal miracle is told in a single sentence consisting of four participial phrases, two main verbs, and a final elliptical clause (**14:19**). Jesus gives orders for the crowd to lie on the grass, takes the five loaves and the two fish, looks up to heaven and blesses (gives thanks), and breaking the loaves gives them to the disciples, who in turn distribute them to the crowds. The verbs describing the four principal actions, “took,” “gave thanks,” “broke,” and “gave,” will reappear at the Last Supper in the institution of the Eucharist (cf. 26:26). The miracle is accomplished by the Son of Man’s taking earthly food and offering it in thanks to the Father so that it can be multiplied for the benefit of many, indeed all. Man’s blessing of God for all his gifts becomes God’s multiplying of those gifts. Bread raised in thanks becomes the bearer of abundant gifts. The fact that the miracle takes place in a “deserted” area recalls the gift of manna in the desert (cf. Exod 16:32, Deut 8:2-3—a passage already cited by Jesus in the desert; Deut 8:16, Ps 78:19, 24-25); the fact that Jesus has the people “recline” makes of it a festive banquet and a refreshing meal; the fact that the miracle is worked no longer for selected individuals but for the whole people is a sign of the universality of Jesus’ saving

work. The miracle of the loaves is a miracle for the Church. The superabundance of the miraculous gift is indicated by the size of the crowd that was “filled”—five thousand men not including women and children (**14:21**)—and by the surplus of fragments that filled twelve baskets (**14:20**). The miracle, astounding in its own right, will acquire special significance as an image of God feeding his Church with the sacrificed Body of his Son.

Jesus now has his disciples return to the boat and precede him to the other side of the lake, while he dismisses (cf. 14:15) the crowd (**14:22**). At last he has time to be alone and goes up a mountain to pray; as evening comes on (cf. already 14:15), he is there alone. This communing with the Father has been the source of his ministry all along. It is the channel through which he knows the mind of the Father as he has frequently expounded it (cf. 5:45, 48, 6:4, 8, 14, 32, 7:11, 11:25-27). From his Father he draws the power of his ministry to heal and to forgive, even to raise from the dead. But even in this personal communion with the Father the Church is not absent. As expressed powerfully by Joseph Ratzinger, “Jesus saw the Church in the Father....[T]he Church was, so to speak, the object of the conversation between the Father and the Son, and thus the Church was firmly fixed in the life of the Trinity” (*The God of Jesus Christ* 73). The Cardinal is referring to the very next verse of our passage, which describes the plight of the disciples which Jesus must have “seen” in his prayer: the boat was already a mile from land, buffeted with waves because of a contrary wind (**14:24**). In the latest part of the night (3 to 6 a.m.) Jesus comes to them walking on the water (**14:25**). The statement flows so naturally from the evangelist’s pen that the reader is scarcely surprised. Jesus has been shown in intimate converse with the Father, has performed a miraculous and superabundant multiplication of bread, and has disclosed the inner workings and secrets of the kingdom of heaven, pronouncing a coming judgment on those who do not accept him. For him to walk on the water is an action utterly in keeping with the power of the person he has shown himself to be. It is a share in the power of God himself, who continually in the Hebrew scriptures manifested his divinity by triumphing over or taming the turbulent waters of chaos (cf. Gen 1:2, 6-10, 9:11, 15, Exod 14:21-22, Ps 74:13, 77:17-20, 78:13, 136:13, Job 9:8, Isa 43:16, 51:10). The miracle reminds us of the calming of the storm (cf. 8:26), but in this case the power of Jesus over the waters is even more immediate. Jesus has just demonstrated to his disciples his power to give food to many; now he shows his power to be present in mysterious ways, ways that confound nature. In the Eucharist the two intentions will come together: Jesus will be present in the bread given to many.

The sight of the Lord is a cause of consternation and fear to the men; they cry out (**14:26**). But at once Jesus speaks consoling words: “Be of good cheer (cf. 9:2, 22, John 16:33); it is I; do not be afraid” (**14:27**). He has come with his own divine power—the clause *egō eimi* recalls the divine name given to Moses (Exod 3:14 reads in Greek, *egō eimi ho ōn*)—to use this power not to intimidate but to help the disciples. Before even the waves are stilled, Peter, the first disciple to be called (4:18-19), asks to share in the power of Jesus over the waters, if the “apparition” is indeed Jesus (**14:28**). Jesus willingly accedes, Peter climbs out of the boat and walks on the waters, coming toward Jesus (**14:29**). Again we see how immediately Jesus wishes to share his ministry with men (cf. 10:1, 8, 14:16, 19). But Peter sees the wind’s power and becomes afraid, losing that original confidence in the Savior, and he begins to sink, crying out, “Lord, save me” (**14:30**). “Immediately” Jesus stretches out his hand to grasp him, chiding him for his “little faith” (cf. 8:26) and his doubting (**14:31**). Jesus is teaching clearly that by relying without fear on his power and favor, men, in particular the leaders of his Church, can share in his divine over the forces of evil and chaos in the world, that is to say, share in his victory over sin and death.

Matthew is the only evangelist to record this episode about Peter, as he will be the only one to report the Lord's choice of Peter as the rock on which the Church is to be built (cf. 16:18).

Only when Jesus and Peter climb into the boat does the wind subside (**14:32**). The disciples prostrate (cf. 8:2, 9:18) before Jesus, confessing him to be truly the Son of God (**14:33**; cf. 2:15, 3:17, 11:25-27). We will soon hear this confession again on the lips of Peter alone (cf. 16:16), and at the foot of the cross from the Roman centurion (cf. 27:54). The disciples' faith in Jesus is genuine, even though it will be severely tested before taking firm root.

Jesus' compassion for the crowds in their suffering has not waned. On landing at Gennesaret a couple of miles southwest of Capernaum (**14:34**), he is met by many sick persons of the region who have heard of his presence from the men of the area (14:35). By now it is enough for them to want to touch the hem of his garment (like the woman with the hemorrhage, 9:20-21), and all who touch it are cured (14:36). Even this means of healing can be given a sacramental interpretation (see above on 14:25): healing is transmitted not just through Jesus' person but through something that has touched his person. The sacraments can be seen as visible signs making present the Christ veiled behind them. The hem or lowest part of the garment of Jesus, which trails along the ground, is instinct with his power and life. His lowly ordained ministers have the power to transmit that life through humble physical objects.

By now word of Jesus and his activities has reached the Pharisees and scribes of Jerusalem (**15:1**; people had come to Jesus from Jerusalem as early as 4:25). They come to him to ask why his disciples transgress the tradition of the elders, not washing their hands when they eat bread (**15:2**). This ritual law was one of many outward observances by which the Pharisee party intended to signify its intention to keep the law of God. It was an easy-to-perform external action that could leave the one performing it with a sense of having accomplished the law of God. Jesus will have to point out that these human traditions by which men tried to guarantee their righteousness before God were missing the true point of the law, which was the love of God and neighbor expressed in good actions and rooted in the heart. As he taught in the Sermon on the Mount, he was looking for a purification of the heart that expressed itself in love even for enemies (cf. 5:8, 24, 28, 44, 48; also 9:13, 12:33-35); outward observances, even sacrifice itself, were of value only insofar as they signified and were accompanied by a true conversion of heart to the love of God (cf. 13:15). The strong feeling and language which Jesus evidences at this casuistic objection to his nascent "Church" is a sign of how pernicious he regards the Pharisaic attitude, which masks self-justification with the guise of religion. Jesus must use his strongest language to cut through this hypocrisy. The conflict that all along has been brewing with the Pharisees (cf. 9:3, 11, 34, 12:2, 14) is taking on a sharper and more official edge: each side of the conflict is irreducible.

Jesus makes his point by contrasting the human law of washing hands before eating (which may have been inspired by the law to wash clothing after contact with an unclean animal, cf. Lev 11:40) with the fourth commandment. It is not the disciples but the Pharisees who "transgress" this command of God (**15:3**). God commanded that one honor his father and mother (cf. Exod 20:12, 5:16); whoever cursed father or mother should be put to death (**15:4**, cf. Exod 21:17). The Pharisees, however, dispensed a person from giving material help to his parents if he dedicated a portion of his funds to God instead (**15:5-6**), thus making void the word of God by their "tradition." The Pharisees have missed the point that the purpose of the Law is to care for persons. Calling them "hypocrites," Jesus sees in them the people chastised in the prophet Isaiah (**15:7**): "These people with their lips honor me, but their heart (cf. 13:15) is far

from me; they give me vain worship, teaching as divine teaching the commandments of men" (**15:8-9**, cf. Isa 29:13). Jesus must excoriate human sin in order to lay it open: the most law-abiding people can be the least compassionate. Only an acknowledgement that the whole-hearted and pure love that God seeks must be the work of the Lord's redeeming power can make obedience to the Law possible. The Pharisees like everyone else must "repent" in order to be saved (cf. 4:17, 11:20-21, 12:41). The corruption of the best is worst. When men appropriate the word of God to justify themselves, they have missed the point.

Jesus needs to explain to the crowd the mistake of the Pharisees (**15:10**). Not what goes into a man's mouth (e.g., "unclean" food) defiles him but what comes out of the mouth defiles him (**15:11**). As in the Discourse of Parables, a private explanation of this saying will be given by Jesus to the disciples (cf. 15:15-20). In the meantime the disciples report that the Pharisees have taken offense at his remarks about the traditions of men (**15:12**). Jesus points out that any movement not initiated by his Father in heaven is bound to fail, like an uprooted hedge (**15:13**; cf. the withering of those not rooted in the word of God, Ps 1:2-4, Wis 4:3-5): he speaks as one on intimate terms with the Father, who knows the Father's will from inside (cf. 11:25-27). The Pharisees, on the other hand, are "blind guides of blind men," leading themselves and others into the pit of destruction (**15:14**); they need to be left to meet their destined end.

Peter again steps out from the disciples (cf. 14:28) to ask for an interpretation of the parable (**15:15**; cf. 15:11). Jesus is discouraged at the disciples' (plural) lack of understanding (**15:16**). Food that goes into the mouth passes through the stomach and is eliminated in the latrine (**15:17**). But what comes out of the mouth (words and plans) emerges from a man's heart and determines whether the man is clean or unclean (**15:18**). Jesus gives seven examples of sins that emerge from the heart (**15:19**): evil thoughts, murders (cf. Exod 20:13), adulteries (Exod 20:14), fornications, thefts (Exod 20:15), false witnesses (Exod 20:16), and blasphemies (cf. 12:31). Sin is defined not so much by foods eaten with unwashed hands as by a man's inner choices (**15:20**). Once again Jesus is calling for a purified heart (cf. Ps 51:12). In the first half of this chapter he has touched on nearly all of the ten commandments as expressions of the will of God for men and as needing to be obeyed from man's heart (cf. 12:34).

Following the multiplication of bread and the teaching about food comes another story that mentions bread. Having departed from Galilee, Jesus is in pagan territory, the coastal area of Tyre and Sidon (**15:21**). This miracle of exorcism seems to be placed here to indicate that the faith Jesus did not find among his own people (cf. 13:58 and even 14:31) will be found among the pagans (cf. already 8:10, 13). A Canaanite woman of the region, having heard the report of Jesus' marvels, comes forward crying out, "Have pity on me, Master, son of David (this whole expression also in 20:30-31; 9:27 omits "Master"); my daughter is cruelly tormented by a demon" (**15:22**). Though not an Israelite, she recognizes Jesus' messianic lineage (cf. 1:1, 20, 12:23). Nonetheless Jesus ignores her, and his disciples ask him to dismiss her because she continues to cry out behind them (**15:23**). Jesus answers (the woman), "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (**15:24**). In keeping with his earlier injunctions to the apostles (cf. 10:5-6), Jesus is still primarily concerned with offering the gift of salvation to his own people who lack a shepherd (cf. on 9:36). The passive "I was sent" implies a mission from God (cf. the mission of Isaiah, Isa 6:10, for example, or Moses, Exod 3:10, 12, 14-15), the Father of Jesus, but without the clear sense of "sent into the world," i.e., from outside, a sense which the verb acquires in the Gospel of John. Undaunted by either Jesus' silence or his polite but curt demur, the woman prostrates before him asking, "Master, help

me" (15:25). Jesus must give a firmer refusal, using an insulting term for non-Israelites: "It is not right to take the bread of the children and throw it to dogs" (15:26). After recent uses of the term "bread" a Christian might think of the healing power of Christ that is mediated through the Eucharist; Jesus seems to rebuff the woman's request by calling her unworthy of his gift. The climax of the beautiful and concise story comes in her reply, in which she quickly uses Jesus' image against him: the dogs eat of the scraps that fall from their master's table (15:27). She does not mind being called inferior to the chosen people, knowing that the saving God can reach all people. Jesus' resistance is completely broken down by her demonstration of her "great" and relentless faith, for which he commends her as he grants her request (15:28). She asked and received, sought and found, knocked and had the door opened to her (cf. 7:7-8). The daughter is "healed" from that hour (cf. 8:13).

It is only after the Lord has been put to death by his own people that the mission to the gentiles, adumbrated in this incident and in the healing of the centurion's son, will be authorized and mandated (cf. 28:19). As Saint Paul will teach so forcefully, the only human requirement for entering the Lord's kingdom will be faith (cf. Rom 1:16-17, 3:22, 26, 28-30, 4:13, 23-25, 5:1-2, Gal 3:8-9, 14, 22, 5:5-6), the faith that Jesus has not found among his own (cf. 13:58). The Canaanite woman gives a living example, more effective than any dogmatic statement, of how this faith demonstrates itself.

After this foray into Canaanite territory Jesus returns to the Sea of Galilee, and going up a mountain he sits there (15:29, cf. 5:1-2) to perform many healings. The scene recalls the summary of healings at Genessaret, which occurred after the feeding of the five thousand (14:35-36). On both occasions people from the area bring their sick to Jesus. While in the former scene these are healed by touching his garment, here they are laid at his feet. Here four specific groups of sick are mentioned: the lame, the crippled, the blind, the mute, along with "many others," and he heals them all (15:30). Seeing with wonder how the mute are speaking, the crippled are whole and the lame are walking and the blind seeing (15:31), the crowd "glorify" the God of Israel acknowledging Jesus as his instrument.

As Matthew has given us two parallel summary accounts of miracles, he now gives us a parallel to the feeding of the five thousand in a second account of multiplication of loaves. This time it is Jesus, not the disciples, who takes the initiative for the miracle. We learn that the crowds who came for healing have been with him for three days without food (15:32). Jesus tells the disciples that he has pity on the crowd (cf. 14:14, 9:36), fearing to dismiss them without food lest they give out on the way. With their short memories, the disciples inquire where in that deserted place they will find enough bread to satisfy such a crowd (15:33). This time Jesus asks how many loaves they have; the answer comes: seven and a few small fish (15:34). In nearly the same language as 14:19, Jesus "instructs" the crowd to "take their places" on the ground, takes the loaves and fish, and "giving thanks" (*eucharistēsas* instead of *eulogēsen*), breaks and gives them to the disciples who distribute them to the crowds (15:35-36). This time seven containers (different word in 14:20) full of fragments are collected (15:37), while four thousand men were fed (15:38, cf. 14:21). As in the earlier story a reference is made to the boat; here having dismissed the crowd, Jesus enters the boat and goes to the region of Magadan. The similarity of language in 15:35-38 and 14:19-21 suggests that at this point in his ministry Jesus wishes to emphasize that he has come to give food to his people, a food that will be symbolized but not exhausted by the bread multiplied in abundance. The next context in which bread is mentioned will point the reader in the direction of a more spiritual kind of food.

After the earlier multiplication of loaves and summary account of healings, the Pharisees criticized Jesus (cf. 15:1-2). Again, now joined by the Sadducees, they approach Jesus in a hostile spirit to “test” him **(16:1)**. Their question this time is a request for a “sign from heaven,” in effect the same request made in 12:38. Before repeating the answer he gave in 12:39, Jesus gives an image for the failure of these men to read the signs that have already been provided. When the evening sky is red, they know that fair weather is coming; when in the morning the sky is red and gloomy they know that bad weather is coming **(16:2-3a)**. They can read the face of the sky but cannot recognize the “signs of the times” **(16:3b)**. The miracles of Jesus and his authoritative preaching and person have not led these men to infer that the power of God is breaking into human affairs—they remain impervious to his appeal. He can only repeat his earlier denunciation of such an “evil and adulterous generation,” to whom no sign except that of Jonah will be given **(16:4, cf. 12:39)**. The attitude of the Pharisees has not changed; it can only be said to have hardened. Jesus leaves them.

The disciples take Jesus to the other side of the lake, forgetting to take bread with them **(16:5)**. Still reflecting on the demand for a sign, Jesus warns them to take note of and beware of the “leaven” of the Pharisees and Sadducees **(16:6)**. Their clinging to a righteousness of their own and their refusal to repent in the presence of the savior is a pervasive influence through society, a bad “leaven” to be contrasted with the good leaven of the kingdom (cf. 13:33). Preoccupied with their own failure to bring bread, the disciples hear only the reference to leaven and assume Jesus is rebuking their forgetfulness **(16:7)**. Knowing this, Jesus asks why they are concerned about lack of bread, thus showing their “little faith” **(16:8; cf. 6:30, 8:26, 14:31)**. Do they not understand; do they not remember the “five loaves of the five thousand” and how many baskets they took up **(16:9)**, or the seven loaves of the four thousand and how many baskets they took up **(16:10)**? Providing bread is obviously not a problem for Jesus but is a key part of his plan. How could the disciples not know that he was not speaking of bread when he told them to watch out for the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees **(16:11)**? Only then do they realize that Jesus spoke not of bread but of the teaching of these two groups **(16:12)**. The idea is thus planted in the reader that “teaching” is one element of the bread with which he wishes to feed his people, another being “healing” (cf. 15:26 and the two summaries of healings in this section of breads, 14:34-36, 15:29-31). Since the ultimate teaching of Jesus is that he gives himself for the salvation of men, these chapters focusing on “bread” are a remote preparation for the revelation of the Eucharist. The word of God is a living sacrifice that gives life to men. The revelation of this sacred mystery will now become the focus of Jesus’ teaching.

Jesus has made clear that the appropriate or expected response to his work and teaching is faith in his person. Those who have witnessed and heard him can receive his gift of “salvation” by acknowledging that it is his to give, that he comes from the divine sphere and is the bearer of God’s own life-giving, healing power. This acknowledgement of his lordship comprises, as we have seen, a confession that this man is to be revered and obeyed and that any rival claim to “lordship,” such as preferring the self to God, is to be renounced (“repentance”). Each individual person confronted with the person and saving activity of Jesus is invited to submit to him and his law of love. To accept him is to accept membership in his family, the Church, the communion of those who are saved by him. While Jesus has attracted followers who are loyal to him, they have not yet formally declared their full and knowing commitment to him. Jesus has arrived at the stage of his ministry where this declaration becomes necessary.

He chooses a somewhat remote place in Galilee for eliciting the disciples' confession. Going to the area around Caesarea Philippi near the sources of the Jordan in the north of Galilee, he asks them who men say that the Son of Man is **(16:13)**. This is the title Jesus has often used of himself (cf. 8:20, 9:6, 10:23, 11:19, 12:8, 32, 40, 13:37). What men have to decide is the identity of Jesus himself, not just the meaning of his ministry or the qualifications for entering his kingdom or some other judgment falling short of the recognition of his identity. The disciples report various opinions they have heard: the man who has done these astounding deeds and given this authoritative teaching must be a divinely accredited prophet, perhaps a return of the martyred John the Baptist, perhaps a return of long deceased prophets like Elijah or Jeremiah or another **(16:14)**. Now Jesus would know who the disciples themselves think that he is, referring to himself in the first person and no longer as "the Son of Man" **(16:15)**. Without hesitation Simon Peter gives the direct answer: "You are the Christ the Son of the living God" **(16:16)**. For the first time in the Gospel Jesus' messiahship is recognized by another human being, although the Evangelist has referred to Jesus as Christ in the genealogy, the infancy account, and in the passage where John sends to ask if Jesus is "the one who is to come" and Jesus answers by pointing to his miracles (cf. 11:2-5). Peter moves beyond the general identification of Jesus with "one of the prophets" to his utterly unique role as "the anointed son of God," the messianic king whose saving coming was expected. Peter has understood what the heavenly voice pronounced at Jesus' baptism: "This is my Son" (cf. 3:17). Jesus is the privileged son of David who has come to inaugurate the rule of God on earth.

Jesus recognizes the divine origin of Peter's response. Addressing Peter by his given name, "Simon son of Jona," Jesus calls him "blessed," for he has not arrived at this conclusion by human power ("flesh and blood") but through a revelation from Jesus' Father in heaven **(16:17)**. Saint Paul, too, will receive a similar revelation from the Father without the intermediary of "flesh and blood" (cf. Gal 1:16). The Father has spoken to Peter's heart through Peter's experience of Jesus. The two persons of God working together have sown a sturdy faith in this first of Jesus' disciples. But Peter is not called blessed only for himself. Throughout the Gospel Jesus has been concerned to create leaders for his group of followers at the same time as he is creating the group itself (cf. on 4:17-20, 10:1, 7-8, 14:16, 19, 28-29). Now he makes Peter a rock foundation for the group he is assembling, which he calls his "church" **(16:18a)**. Simon is formally given the name "Peter," designating this new role. Jesus is thinking of his messianic kingdom as a building, a temple of which the stones are persons who believe in him and constitute his family (cf. 12:49-50). In calling this group of persons his "Church," Jesus is remembering that God's chosen people were "called out" of slavery in Egypt to become his special inheritance (cf. 2:15, Hos 11:1). The Greek word *ekklēsia* was used in the Septuagint to translate Hebrew *qahal*, the assembly of God's people called to hear and obey his word (cf. Deut 4:10, 9:10, 18:16, Acts 7:38). Jesus has come to "build" his people into an "assembly" modeled on that of Israel in the desert, a people called out of slavery to death and sin into fellowship with him through the hearing and doing of his word (cf. 7:24-27). This church will withstand the assaults of the "gates of hell," that is, the dominion of those demonic and human spirits who by rebelling against God brought death into the world **(16:18b)**. The "gates" of a city would be the site where its military strength would be concentrated. The assembly of believers which Jesus is building on the rock foundation of his disciple Peter is destined to endure beyond all opposition.

To say that Jesus' church is to be "built on" Peter is to say that all members of the church will in some way be supported on him, must have some

relationship with him. But Jesus has a more definite authority in mind. Peter is given the “keys of the kingdom of heaven” (**16:19a**). Jesus has spoken often of this kingdom as the community of persons living under the reign of God. Jesus’ “church” is the visible realization of this kingdom on earth. The “kingdom” embraces all who accept the kingship of God however they understand that kingship; those who do the will of this God by following their conscience, whether or not they have heard of Christ or understood him properly, can be members of this kingdom without being visible members of the Church. Such persons are gathered into the kingdom through the mediation of the Church and have a hidden relationship with the Church. The angels too are members of the kingdom of heaven. When Jesus gives Peter the “keys” of this kingdom he is giving him the power of granting or denying entrance to the kingdom of heaven insofar as this kingdom is realized on earth. Peter is to be the arbiter of which persons have an authentic faith in Jesus and which do not. This authority is made especially clear in Jesus’ next promise: “Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (**16:19b**). Peter can declare that a person who has not recanted his sins is not a member of the kingdom as embodied in the church; he also has the power to pronounce a repentant sinner free of his sins, free of any obstacle to participation in the communion of God’s family. In other words, Jesus is giving Peter the power to speak for Jesus. Clearly this is not an authority to be used arbitrarily; it is a power answerable to Jesus, the founder of the Church, and must be used in conformity with his mind, through the direction of the Father and the inspiration of their Holy Spirit. Jesus has just made the ultimate kenosis, entrusting the governance of his Church to a sinful man whose faith has nonetheless made him capable of being a mediator of the presence of the Savior on earth. In committing this authority to Peter the Son of God seals the great condescension he made when he entered the world as a man: he binds himself to the flesh in an ongoing way through a human being who can admit others to union with him. The promise that the Church will endure implies, in the Catholic understanding, that this office of Peter too will endure. Jesus intends that the authority given to Peter should be an integral element of his church on earth as long as that church shall endure.

The solemnity of what Jesus has just done is underscored by Saint Matthew in the form in which he has presented Jesus’ utterance to Peter. Verses 17 through 19 contain three sayings each of which has three parts, as illustrated in the following diagram:

- 17 Simon, son of Jona, you are a happy man!
Because it was not flesh and blood that revealed this to you
but my Father in heaven.
- 18 So now I say to you: You are Peter
and on this rock I will build my Church.
And the gates of the underworld can never hold out against it.
- 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven:
Whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven;
whatever you loose on earth shall be considered loosed in heaven.

In each verse the second and third lines develop the theme of the first line in antithetic (contrasting) propositions. The promise of Jesus to Peter and the Church has been handed on by the evangelist in the most solemn and memorable format.

Having praised Peter for recognizing him as the Christ, Jesus orders the disciples not to reveal his identity to anyone (**16:20**; cf. 9:30). The injunction is part of a distancing of himself from the crowds that we have already seen in 12:15-16, 14:13; while he has occasionally met with faith in the crowds, the majority have withheld faith (cf. 8:34, 11:20, 12:14, 34, 39, 13:58). He would not

have the disciples “throw pearls before swine” (7:6). The crowds have had ample opportunity to believe but have failed to repent. Jesus must now focus on nurturing and educating the faith of Peter and the other disciples who believe. The next episode will show how much they still have to learn.

What Jesus has to say about his messiahship is that the rejection he and John the Baptist have experienced in Galilee must also be brought about in the heart of Judaism, the Holy City of Jerusalem, and by its authoritative leadership. He “must” go there to suffer many things from the elders and high priests and scribes and ultimately be put to death (**16:21**). He gives no explanation of this new teaching, which seems to arise out of a deep interior understanding of the plan of his Father (cf. 11:27). Already in the discourse to the apostles he was aware of his rejection by the Pharisees (cf. 10:25; also 12:14-15) and of a “cross” that awaited him (cf. 10:38). One of the meanings of the “sign of Jonah” was that he would be “in the heart of the earth” for three days and three nights (cf. 12:39-40). But the death Jesus foresees is to be followed on the third day by a being “raised up.” The latter concept was so foreign to the disciples that they seem not to have heard it. It is the prophecy of rejection that they pick up on and react severely to.

While Peter had been given the grace to penetrate to the messianic identity of Jesus, he is not yet ready to accept the Lord’s scandalous words. He “takes Jesus aside” to “rebuke” him for declaring that the Messiah will not triumph. “God forbid” that his messiah should suffer: “This will never happen to you” (**16:22**). The man who a moment ago had shown profound spiritual insight now reveals how ignorant he still is. All of us like Peter remain perpetual disciples, always having to learn new and unexpected depths of the divine mystery. Jesus must “turn” to Peter, confronting him directly with his arrogant obtuseness (**16:23**). Jesus experiences Peter’s blandishments as the temptation of Satan himself (cf. 4:10) and dismisses him with the same words he used in the desert: “Be off, Satan,” adding the words “behind me,” which recall the original summons to Peter “Come behind [after] me” (cf. 4:19). Jesus at once rebukes the one who rebuked him and invites him to renew his discipleship by entering into the mystery of the messiah’s suffering (cf. also 10:38). The narrowness of our preconceptions of how God should work must be shattered if we are to comprehend and enter into the divine mystery. Peter’s resistance to accepting the mystery of suffering is an “obstacle” or “stumbling block” to Jesus since it attempts to dissuade him from following the path the Father has marked out for him. Peter is thinking in man’s way, not God’s (cf. Isa 55:8-9). Jesus again shows his passion for carrying out the divine will (cf. 15:4-6).

Peter’s misunderstanding of messiahship has made it clear to Jesus that “his disciples” need explicit teaching about the role of suffering in the plan of God. If they want to come “behind” him (cf. vs. 23), that is, be his followers, each one must “renounce himself” (**16:24**). A person who chooses Jesus as his Master must be willing to listen to him and accept and follow his teaching even when it conflicts with his own desires or preferences. The following of Jesus will entail the suffering of self-denial. Jesus does not hesitate to call this suffering a “taking up one’s cross”; the original audience would have seen or heard about the phenomenon of criminals carrying to the place of execution the cross on which they were to be crucified. The punishment was widespread in the Roman Empire. After Jesus’ crucifixion the saying about “taking up one’s cross” would be seen as not merely a metaphor for the suffering which disciples must endure but as a call to take as a model the one who did in fact take up a cross and was crucified. Jesus’ summons to “follow” him (cf. 4:20, 25, 8:22) now takes on the sense of “accept a share in my suffering,” a sense dimly adumbrated already in the story of the scribe who wished to follow Jesus (cf. 8:19-20).

Instead of explaining why he must suffer, Jesus has simply extended the necessity for suffering to his disciples. As so often in this Gospel, no sooner does Jesus teach or demonstrate something about himself than he immediately identifies the disciples with himself in that particular aspect. If he walks on the water, he immediately shares that power with Peter. If he heals and casts out demons, he early on gives the apostles/disciples power to do the same (cf. 10:1). In nothing is he without his disciples. He is presented as the author of a new humanity, the one who established a new way of being human and gave his followers a share in that new humanity. It is only later in the Gospel that Jesus will give some understanding of the purpose of his and the disciples' suffering.

The theme of verse 24 is developed by a similar saying in verse 25 that was placed here partly because of the link word "wish." The previous verse was directed to someone who "wished" to come after Jesus; the present verse is about one who "wishes" to "save his soul." Such a person will "lose" it (**16:25**), because by "saving one's soul" Jesus in this context means the human effort to create one's own permanent happiness without the "self-renunciation" he asked for in the previous saying (see the similar form of this saying in 10:39). What is necessary is that a person "lose his soul" for the sake of Christ: i.e., surrender his own preferences and ideas to the will of the Lord who alone can "save" (cf. 1:21). A person willing to let his own plans for his life be capsized by the will of his Lord will end up "finding" his real soul, his perfect happiness in the Lord. We are back at the theme of not serving two masters (cf. 24). Life eludes the one who grabs for it but is given to the one open to receiving it as a gift from the Lord. Accepting life from the risen Lord is a "yoke" because the life of the Lord in us does not always permit us to do what we "want" on the superficial level; these wants may have to be "amputated" (cf. 5:29-30).

There follows a similar saying connected to the previous one by the link word "soul." "In what way is a man helped if he gains the whole world but forfeits his soul?" (**16:26a**). Here the word "soul" refers not to a limited human desire for happiness (as in v. 25) but to the core of a person's being which is made for God and can only be satisfied by God. Why would a person try to fill an infinite desire with finite experiences, which could never satisfy it? Jesus is urging his hearers to be prudent about their main choices in life and to choose a happiness that will satisfy the spirit because it abides and not one that will inevitably be taken away, no matter how fulfilling it may seem for a time. The point will be well illustrated in another Gospel by the parable of the rich man building barns but losing his life before he can gather in his produce (cf. Luke 12:16-21). Jesus matches the question of verse 26a with another question which also uses the word "soul": "Or what will a man give as an exchange for his soul?" (**16:26b**). A man must be true to his desire for authentic life if he wants to fulfill his nature.

Jesus must now explain how following him through renunciation and the cross issues in genuine human fulfillment. Designating himself, as in 16:13, as "Son of Man," he announces that he is to "come in the glory of his Father with his angels" (**16:27**). His death, which he foretold after Peter's confession (cf. 16:21), will not be the last word but will be followed by a manifestation of himself as sharing in the radiance of divine life. This glorious appearance, which the reader can associate with Jesus' "being raised," which he also foretold, will be the occasion for his granting to each person the full consequences of the choices he made in life. He will "repay each man according to his deeds." This action was the divine prerogative in the Old Testament (cf. Ps 62:13, Prov 24:12, Jer 17:10). Here it is Jesus himself who will grant the "reward" which in the Sermon on the Mount was to be the gift of the Father (cf. 6:4, 6, 18). The pithy saying of 16:27 will be amply illustrated by the great Judgment scene of 25:31-46. Saint Matthew is at pains to show that indeed "All power in heaven and earth has been given" to

Jesus (cf. 28:18, 11:27) the crucified One. In a final verse Jesus equates his “coming” to give each person the fruit of his deeds with the coming of the “Son of Man in his kingdom” (16:28); if the kingdom is the right relationship between God and men, then its establishment will consist in the permanent vision of the risen Lord for those who have chosen to accept his gracious gift of his own life. What Jesus meant by saying that some of those listening to him would not taste death before this glorious coming of the Son of Man is debated. Perhaps the easiest explanation is that within the lifetime of these hearers the effects of Jesus’ resurrection would be evident in the wonders and transformed lives of communities of believers within and beyond Palestine. The power of the risen Lord would be manifest particularly in the willingness of so many to shed their blood for their faith in him.

As the apostles have penetrated to Jesus’ identity as messiah, he is now able to reveal to them something of the true glory of his person. In the first half of the Gospel the focus has been on Jesus’ teaching and his mighty deeds. It has only gradually become apparent that his mission of inaugurating the kingdom of God has something to do not just with words or actions but with his very self. He is to be involved in some drama that will involve rejection by men and ultimate triumph. The kingdom of God is the kingdom where the Son of Man is king. This Son of Man will dispense divine judgment and reward those who have “followed” him in his suffering, death and resurrection. The mighty power of his person will overcome all assaults on him. His sharing in the divine glory itself is what Jesus now reveals to three of his chosen ones. Six days after Peter’s confession and the prediction of his own suffering (we are reminded of the six days intervening between the sealing of the covenant and the summoning of Moses into the cloud on Mount Sinai where the glory of the Lord rested, cf. Exod 24:16-18), Jesus takes Peter and James and John up a high mountain by themselves (17:1). “And he was transformed before them,” says the evangelist. The first element of this “transfiguration” is that his face “shone as the sun.” Matthew has already told us that in the Galilean ministry of Jesus, people had seen “a great light” (4:16). Jesus has taught that “the just will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (13:43). Now Jesus, who has come to “fulfill all justice” (3:15) shows himself to be the very light that illumines the world (cf. 5:14). The three apostles see “the light shining on the face of Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). Secondly, Jesus’ very garments become white, seemingly flooded with light (17:2). Thus his whole body radiates a glory that in the Old Testament is associated with God (cf. Ps 27:1, Isa 60:1-2, 19-20; also Rev 21:23).

The next element in the transfiguration is the appearance of Moses and Elijah in conversation with Jesus (17:3). Moses was the divinely designated liberator of God’s people from Egypt and the one through whom God spoke his law to Israel. Through this man God made both his will and his power known to his chosen nation. Elijah was the prophet who summoned the Israel back from Baal worship to fidelity to Yahweh, who was granted a profound personal experience of God on Mount Sinai, and who at the end of his life was mysteriously transported into heaven. Both men belonged in a certain way to the “divine world.” Both experienced the presence of God on a mountain. Both men disappeared from this world at the mouth of the River Jordan near the place where Jesus was baptized. What did these men speak with Jesus about? One can only assume it was about Jesus’ role in the drama between God and his people in which they had played so important a part. Jesus would in some way continue their work of bringing the people of God into union with him. The final verses of the Old Testament (in the Greek, not the Hebrew, arrangement of the Books) reminded Israel to remember Moses and promised that Elijah would come again (Mal 3:22-23).

Peter seems to interrupt the discourse of the three holy ones, noting how good it is for him and his fellow apostles to be there. Perhaps if he constructed shelters for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah he could ensure that they would remain on the mountain **(17:4)**. Again it seems that Peter would like to control the mystery of the Lord, somehow to be in charge of it. He has not yet sensed the awe of the presence of divine majesty. This will happen only when the two final elements of the scene emerge: the shining cloud that overshadows the apostles and the voice speaking from the cloud **(17:5)**. In the Old Testament the cloud symbolized the presence of the Lord. From Egypt the Lord went before the people in a pillar of cloud (Exod 13:21). He spoke to Moses from a cloud on Mount Sinai (Exod 24:16). When the ark of God was constructed and installed in its tent, the presence of the Lord was signified by a cloud over the entrance: "The cloud covered the Tent of Meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because of the cloud that rested on it and because of the glory of the Lord that filled the tabernacle" (Exod 40:34-35). Here, as in the transfiguration, the cloud is accompanied with the radiant glory of God. The cloud "overshadows" the three apostles, seeming almost to envelop them. This experience together with the voice emanating from the cloud will throw the apostles to the ground on their faces.

Both the introduction to the divine speech and the speech itself **(17:5b)** exactly reproduce the introduction and speech uttered "from the heavens" (rather than "from the cloud") at Jesus' baptism. Once again Jesus is identified by God as his son, the beloved, in whom God is well pleased. This time the meaning of the words is strengthened by Jesus' words on the intimacy of knowledge between Father and Son (11:27). The Son is the "beloved" of the Father, as Isaac was the beloved and only Son of Abraham, who was willing to give his son in sacrifice. The Father is particularly "well pleased" with the Son at this point, for he has indicated his readiness to do what "must" be done, that is, go up to Jerusalem to suffer and die at the hands of the authorities. However, what is truly new in the divine speech at the transfiguration is the addition of two final words: "Hear him." The Father's admonition seems to refer in particular to Jesus' prediction of his Passion and his teaching on the necessity of suffering. If it was necessary for those to whom the parables were addressed to "listen" to Jesus' words (cf. 13:9, 43), it is all the more necessary now that people hear the complete message, including the call to follow the Lord on the way of his cross. No other path can lead to "finding one's life [soul]." The call to discipleship is more urgent and penetrating than ever.

Hearing the voice, the apostles fall on their faces, fearing greatly **(17:6)**. They know themselves to be in the presence of the divine (cf. Peter's falling at the knees of Jesus after the miraculous catch of fish, Luke 5:8), where one is more guest than host. This is the fear shown by the disciples in the boat at the sight of Jesus walking on the water (14:26), and like that fear it is expressly dispelled by the Lord, who comes up to the apostles and touches them, saying, "Rise and do not fear" **(17:7)**. The touch of Jesus corresponds to the "It is I" of the earlier episode (cf. 14:27). When they look up, they see no one but Jesus alone in his normal appearance **(17:8)**. The three have had a profound experience of the presence of God in Jesus, one which the early church would remember (cf. 2 Peter 1:16-18). Yet several more lessons will be needed before Peter and James and John will develop a firm faith. As the four descend the mountain Jesus enjoins them not to tell anyone of the vision until the Son of Man rise from the dead **(17:9)**, thus reminding them of the end of the prophecy of his coming Passion and death (cf. 16:21). After the resurrection the apostles would understand the connection between the glory of Jesus and his acceptance of the Father's will that he suffer and give his life.

The presence of Elijah at the transfiguration prompts “the disciples” to ask why the scribes teach that “Elijah must come first” (17:10). Elijah had already been mentioned as a possible identification of “the Son of Man” (cf. 16:13-14). Since this prophet had been taken up into heaven in the fiery chariot, it was assumed that he was still alive. At the end of the Book of Malachi God had announced, “Know that I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before my day comes, that great and terrible day. He shall turn the hearts of fathers towards their children and the hearts of children towards their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a curse” (Mal 3:23-24). Since Jesus has been speaking about the coming of his “kingdom” (cf. 16:28), the disciples assume that God’s “great and terrible day” must be imminent, and they wonder when Elijah will come as its predicted forerunner. Jesus confirms that Elijah is coming to “restore” all things (17:11), using the verb with which the Septuagint had translated the word “turn” in Mal 3:24. The forerunner’s task is to restore the right relationships between persons; in Malachi the same idea was expressed as restoring right relationships between fathers and children. While this task is more particularly that of the Messiah, it could be said to belong to the precursor who awakens men to the Messiah’s coming. By proclaiming the need for repentance, this figure establishes the beginning of the right relationship between men and God. Jesus claims that this figure has already appeared (17:12) and was unrecognized: people “did to him whatever they wished.” Only when he adds that the Son of Man is similarly destined to “suffer” under the same men do the disciples realize that Jesus is speaking of John the Baptist, whom Herod had imprisoned and beheaded (17:13). From the beginning of the Gospel John was presented as an Elijah-like prophet (cf. 3:4), and Jesus has already identified him as “the Elijah who was to return” (11:14). John is Jesus’ forerunner not only in his preaching and witnessing to Jesus but also in his martyrdom for the sake of righteousness.

In Chapter 10 the apostles had received from Jesus “authority over unclean spirits with power to cast them out and to cure all kinds of diseases and sickness” (10:1). While Jesus and his three companions were on the mountain, the rest of the apostles were approached by a man seeking healing for his son, but the apostles had been unable to cure the boy (17:14-16). The boy was “a lunatic and in a wretched state,” often falling into fire and into water. The father approaches Jesus kneeling and reports the apostles’ failure. Jesus attributes the failure to the apostles’ lack of faith (17:17). In calling the apostles a “faithless and perverse generation,” he assimilates them to the Pharisees and Sadducees who put him to the test by asking for a sign (cf. 12:39, 16:4). In the first of two exasperated questions he whose mission is to be “God with us” (cf. 1:23) asks how long he will be “with” the disciples, implying that they ought to have learned faith in him by now. How long will he “put up with” them? They are clearly still neophytes; he will have to perform the cure himself and has the boy brought to him. Jesus rebukes the boy, as he once rebuked the winds and the sea (cf. 8:26). It now appears that the sickness is caused by a demon, who comes out of the boy at the rebuke of Jesus. The child is cured from that moment (17:18). As the disciples had earlier asked Jesus in private for an explanation of the parables (cf. 13:10, 36) so now they ask him privately why they were unable to expel the demon (17:19). Jesus reiterates the theme of lack of faith, using this time the hapax “littleness of faith” (cf. the adjective in 6:30, 8:26, 14:31). He takes the opportunity to teach a solemn lesson about the power of faith. Were their faith the size of a tiny mustard seed, they would be able to command a mountain to move from its place; nothing would be impossible for them (17:20). The disciple who is sure of God’s love in Jesus has power to banish any threat to his eternal salvation, since he is relying not on his own strength but on the promise of the one who has saved him. This is the strongest statement about faith in Matthew’s

Gospel and is in harmony with Saint Paul's teaching that one can do all things in the strength of Christ (Phil 4:13) and that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ (Rom 8:35, 38-39).

The cluster of events following on the first prediction of the Passion is over, and Jesus must take up again the teaching about what is in store for him. While he and the disciples are gathered in Galilee, he reminds them in shortened form of what he had said before: the Son of Man is to be "handed over" (= "betrayed") into the hands of men (**17:22**), and they will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised (**17:23**). This time no objection is raised by the disciples, but they are deeply grieved by the prophecy. Their suffering is perhaps the beginning of an enlightenment.

Jesus now uses another incident to teach a lesson. When he returns to Capernaum the collectors of the temple tax approach Peter to ask if his master pays this tax (**17:24**). Answering that he does, Peter enters the house and his question is anticipated by Jesus, who asks from whom the rulers of the earth collect customs duties or taxes, from their children or from strangers (**17:25**). When Peter answers from strangers, Jesus confirms that the children are exempt (**17:26**). Since the proprietor of the temple is God, then God's children are exempt from the tax, which is only paid by outsiders. Jesus' followers are the family of God (cf. 12:49-50); they follow one who is greater than the temple (cf. 12:6) and so are not obliged to pay for the upkeep of the temple building. Having established this Christian exemption from the temple tax, Jesus declares that if his use of the privilege would scandalize his fellow Jews, then it would be better to pay the tax. Saint Paul will similarly teach that Christians should not exercise their privilege of eating meat (Rom 14:15, 20-21), including meat dedicated to idols (1 Cor 8:7-13), if others of weaker conscience would be offended. Jesus directs the fisherman to a fish that will have in its mouth the amount for the tax for Peter and himself (**17:27**).

Just as Jesus' first prediction of his Passion, death and resurrection was followed by a misunderstanding on the part of Peter, so the second prediction is followed by a misunderstanding on the part of the disciples, who wish to know who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (**18:1**). Jesus' response to the question will constitute the fourth great discourse in the Gospel. He begins with a prophetic gesture, calling a child to him and standing him in their midst (**18:2**). The first thing the disciples must do is "turn" and become like children (**18:3**). The disciples are thinking of being over others when what is required for entry into the kingdom is to be under God. The sin of Adam was secession from God and a striving for complete autonomy. Virtue will consist in man's rediscovery of his dependence on God, an awareness that his being is from God. The child in their midst is the model for the disciples: a man must "humble himself," becoming like the child, if he wishes to be great in the kingdom of heaven (**18:4**). Perhaps Jesus is echoing the previous story in which he implied that the disciples were "sons" of the Lord of the temple. Emancipation from a loving Father is not the way to receive that Father's gifts (cf. the parable of the Prodigal Son, Luke 15:11-24). The "turning" back to God is what is meant by conversion. One must be willing to be his child, to trust him for everything (cf. 6:32-33). One must say, "I have tried to be my own god."

Jesus retains the image of the child to teach another lesson. One must not only become like a child, one must welcome "one such child" as the one standing in their midst (**18:5**). To welcome the child is to make room in oneself for the needs of another person whom one can help. This is the way God himself behaves and is the behavior he expects from his children made in his image.

Receiving one such person who depends solely on God is a way of accepting Christ himself, who in a way not yet specified by the Gospel lives in those who trust not in their own strength. The man who relies on God is in fact strengthened by the power of God which he has allowed into him by faith. When that faith is in Christ then it is the power of Christ himself that flows into the one who trusts him. The humble man (“child”) thus becomes a vehicle of Christ himself to the one who welcomes or ministers to him (cf. already 10:40). We receive Christ by being open to those who have received him. The saying prepares us for the Last Judgment scene in 25:31-46 where the virtuous find Christ in the needy person whom God loves and cares for: one can only be united with Christ by loving and serving those needy ones to whom he wishes to give himself.

While the “child” in verse 5 may have referred to the disciple of Jesus, the next saying is definitely about “these little ones who believe in me.” Jesus is referring to the disciples who are present or to all disciples who can be represented by the child he has placed in their midst. Anyone who abuses their childlike trust in the Lord, causing them in any way to lose their faith in him (= “scandalizing” them), earns the Lord’s most uncompromising condemnation. Such a person ought to be dropped into the sea with a millstone around his neck (**18:6**); in other words, his evil must be eliminated from the earth, like the demons in the pigs swallowed up by the sea in Gadara (cf. 8:32). So intense is the love of God for the “poor” one, the “sick,” the “child” who entrusts himself to him, the sinner, that nothing must separate that “little one” from God. Human beings must witness to each other, principally by their behavior, that God is love. The extreme language of Jesus conveys how urgent it is for men to accept their vocation of manifesting this love of the Father for his children (cf. 5:44-45, 48).

In a saying on the same topic, Jesus pronounces woe on the world because of scandals (**18:7**). In this world of sin it is “necessary” (= inevitable) that they occur, but woe to the man responsible for them. It is up to each individual to prevent scandal from entering the world through him. Each person has to cut off in himself the impulse to give scandal. The two sayings about cutting off parts of one’s own body, used earlier in the context of renouncing lustful desires (cf. 5:29-30), reappear in this context of giving scandal. Adherence to the will of the Father, who is love, entails the pain of renouncing disordered desire. The order of the sayings is reversed: first the saying about the hand, to which the foot is added (**18:8**), then the saying about the eye (**18:9**). In both cases Jesus adds adjectives describing the condition of the body which “enters into life” through mortification: “crippled,” “lame,” “one-eyed.” Eternal life can be enjoyed by an imperfect body, but a perfect body without life is thrown into “eternal fire” or “the gehenna of fire” (cf. 5:22). For only the second time in the Gospel Jesus uses the term “life” (*zōē*) for what he offers to men (cf. 7:14, the path that leads to life). It is what all men seek and is worth every sacrifice.

Having completed the sayings about “scandal” (vv. 6-9), Jesus returns to the theme of “these little ones” from verse 6, warning his hearers not to “despise” one of them (**18:10**). He knew that this would be a temptation since man’s rejection of God would manifest itself in a rejection of the creature in God’s image. The person who depends on God is a sacrament of Christ; union with Christ passes through union with such a person. Each “little one” is provided with an angel in heaven who looks upon Jesus’ Father in heaven. The angel is placed to take his “client’s” part before God himself. The Christian can never forget the direct link between his fellow-Christian and God: what he does to one he does to the other. With Psalm 91:11-13, verse 10b gives a foundation for the doctrine of the guardian angel.

Why are these “little ones” of such importance? In a parable Jesus reveals how precious they are in their heavenly Father’s sight (**18:12-14**; note that **18:11** found in some manuscripts of the Gospel is probably not original but comes from Luke 19:10). Appealing to his hearers’ judgment, he asks whether a man with a hundred sheep, one of which goes astray, will not leave the ninety-nine on the hill and go seek out the stray (cf. Ezek 34:16). If he happens to find it, Jesus declares solemnly that the owner rejoices more over the recovered sheep than over the ninety-nine who did not stray. The fact that a person has “gone astray” by sin calls forth his Master’s most energetic love; when the sinner is reconciled the Master’s joy is greater than his joy in those who did not need rescue. We knew that the Father loved good and bad alike (cf. 5:44-45); now Jesus reveals a new depth of that love, which leaves everything to find one sinner in danger of eternal death. This is the “Sacred Heart” of the Father. It is not his will that one of his children should die. The Christian is both a sinner who has been the recipient of that divine love and the dispenser of that love to others.

Having begun with a call to the humility of the child, Chapter 18 has become a discourse on relationships among the children of God, whom Jesus now calls “brothers” and members of the “church” (only other mention in the Gospels in 16:18). It now appears that the profoundest element of one’s status as a “little child” is sin. Brothers need to acknowledge their sin if they are to benefit from the divine forgiveness so liberally offered (see preceding parable). The church of Jesus is precisely the forum where that forgiveness is dispensed. Jesus gives three steps for winning from a sinner the repentance that makes forgiveness possible. First a Christian is to show a brother’s fault to him while they are alone with each other; if the brother “listens,” confessing his fault, the Christian has “won” his brother (**18:15**). If he does not listen, the Christian can take along one or two others who can help the brother admit his fault. Jesus finds support for this measure in the Law, which determined that the witness of two or three is needed to substantiate an accusation (**18:16**, see Deut 19:15). Should the sinner refuse to listen to these, the church should be told. If the sinner rejects the judgment of the church, he has effectively excluded himself from the community, becoming “like the pagan and the tax-collector” (**18:17**). Jesus thus gives to the Church, the community of believers, the power not only to grant forgiveness of sin but to insist on the need for repentance in order for sin to be forgiven. The forgiven sinners who form the church share in the divine power to identify sin and to forgive it. This Jesus makes explicit in the following solemn saying: whatever the representatives of the church “bind on earth” (= declare unforgiven) is bound in heaven, and whatever they “loose on earth” (=declare forgiven) is loosed in heaven (**18:18**). The power given to Peter alone in 16:19 is now extended to the inner circle of disciples whom Jesus is addressing in this discourse.

There follow two sayings of Jesus connected to each other and to verse 16 by the number “two.” While they do not speak of sin or forgiveness, they do speak of the relations between brothers which is the theme of the discourse. Jesus solemnly declares that if two of his followers “on earth” (cf. previous verse) agree on anything they ask for, it will be done for them by his Father in heaven (**18:19**). The prayer of an individual is not as strong as the common prayer of two persons; the union or agreement of the two in asking for the accomplishment of the will of God is pleasing to him and powerful, perhaps because it is a sign that the division between men introduced by sin (cf. Gen 4:1-8) is overcome. In the context of the present chapter, the saying may apply especially to prayer for the forgiveness of sin. In any case, Jesus here proclaims the value and importance of common prayer. His next saying, about “two or three gathered together in [his] name” (**18:20**), is connected to the previous saying by the conjunction “for” and

thus is to be read as referring to common prayer. Such prayer is effective because Jesus himself is in the midst of those praying together in his name. The ultimate reason for the effectiveness of the church's prayer is that it is the prayer of Jesus himself in the Church's midst. At this high point in the Lord's Discourse on the church, we encounter again the theme dear to Matthew, namely that Jesus is "God with us" (cf. 1:23).

There remains only the need for Jesus to illustrate the themes of divine and human forgiveness with a striking parable, presented as an answer to Peter's query about how often one ought to forgive a "brother" (cf. v. 15) for his offenses (**18:21**). Jesus answers: not Peter's "up to seven times" but "up to seventy-seven times" (**18:22**). The Father's "will" (cf. v. 14) is that no limit be put to forgiveness. The magnificent parable that follows explains how relationships within the "kingdom of God" work (**18:23**). A debtor owes an enormous amount to a king. Since he is unable to pay, the order is given that he be sold together with his wife and children and all his possessions so the debt may be paid (**18:24-25**). When the servant throws himself prostrate on the ground and asks the master to be patient with him and promises to pay, the master has pity on him, releases him and cancels the debt (**18:26-27**). Though Jesus has said little about God's forgiveness of sins (cf. 6:14-15, 9:2-6), the first part of the parable is clearly about God's forgiving of man's sin when man asks for it.

But when this servant encounters a fellow servant who owes him a small amount, he tries to strangle the fellow servant and demands to be paid (**18:28**). In vain does the debtor fall down and plea for patience in the same words used by the first servant (**18:29**). The forgiven servant has not admitted that his own life depends on an unmerited gift of the master rather than on his meeting the demands of the debt. His insistence on receiving the small amount he is owed shows that he still wishes to live by the standard of merit rather than that of gracious gift (**18:30**). "Deeply grieved," the other servants report the matter to the master (**18:31**). In choosing to live by the standard of merit the unforgiving debtor justly finds that standard applied to himself and is tortured till he pays all he owes to his master (**18:32, 34**). As Jesus has taught, "the measure you give will be the measure you get" (7:2). The master in the parable gives the moral: "Ought you not to have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you?" (**18:33**). As in Jesus' comment on the Our Father, a man is forgiven by God only if he lets the forgiveness he has received flow out of him to others.³

Perhaps the fault of the servant in the parable was lack of repentance, lack of awareness of how much he had been forgiven. Had he truly internalized how much he owed to mercy, he would have clung to mercy as the guiding principle of his own life. In the end, everything in this chapter on the church comes down to the forgiveness of sin: it is the gracious gift of a loving Father to be earnestly prayed for and mediated to one another by his forgiven children. It is by love of enemies (cf. 5:44-45, 48) and the forgiveness of offenses that men and women show they are children of God. On the other hand they will incur their heavenly Father's anger (**18:35**) if they do not forgive their brothers from their hearts. Jesus, who has asked for a pure heart (cf. 5:8, 12:34, 15:8, 18-19) whose treasure is in heaven (cf. 6:21), an understanding heart (cf. 13:15), now shows that the heart of man must beat with the same mercy as that of the Father in

³ A Dutch theologian has succinctly summarized this foundational dynamic of Christian life: "The characteristic task of Christianity is that of passing on, of making tangible for others, the love of God, which comes upon us in a visible and humanly comforting way in Christ, God-with-us, and in all who live in imitation of Jesus. (F. J. Heggen, *Confession and the Service of Penance*, 83)

heaven. Jesus' own role in winning the forgiveness of sins is as yet unveiled (cf. only 1:21).

The end of the discourse on the Church is also the end of the Galilean ministry. Jesus moves abruptly into the region of Judah east of the Jordan (**19:1**). Yet he is still followed by "many crowds" and performs cures (**19:2**). Jesus continues to give instruction to the intimate circle of disciples, although the subject he now addresses is raised by Pharisees, who here give a foretaste of the "testing" which they and the priests will subject Jesus to in Jerusalem (**19:3**). They hope to trap Jesus into taking a position on a controversial question which they can then refute from texts of Scripture. Here the disputed question is whether divorce is allowable for any cause. In the previous discourse Jesus has made it clear that people in his church must live in mutual forgiveness. Jesus uses the Pharisees' question to give his own disciples further instruction about life in his church, particularly about different states of life in that church.

Jesus argues from Scripture. Have not his interlocutors read in the first chapter of Genesis that God's intention was to create man male and female (**19:4**, cf. Gen 1:27)? And Jesus gives the meaning of this duality in a verse from the second chapter of Genesis: "for this reason a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two will be one flesh" (**19:5** = Gen 2:24). Man and woman are created to give themselves to each other in an exclusive way that is sealed with the gift of children. They will be in the image of God by loving with a life-giving love. Jesus heightens the Scripture by emphasizing that if the two become "one flesh," then "no longer are they two" (**19:6**); therefore, what God has joined man must not separate. Jesus' hearers are quick to ask why then did Moses command that a bill of divorce be given when a wife is dismissed (cf. Deut 24:1). Jesus sees the granting of divorce as a concession to the "hardness of heart" of man living under the regime of sin, "but from the beginning it was not so" (**19:8**). Jesus claims to be restoring the original plan of the Creator for marriage. It will appear only later that he can do this because he is striking at man's "hardness of heart" at the very root in dying to take away sin. It will be through the power of the risen Lord that man and woman will find strength to be faithful to each other for life. To divorce a woman and marry another is to commit adultery (**19:9**; in 5:32 divorce makes the wife an adulteress, and to marry a divorced woman is to commit adultery). The exception "for fornication" seems to apply to the case where a gentile couple have married within one of the degrees of consanguinity prohibited by Jewish law, a law which on this point seems to have been adopted by the early Christians. Others argue that the exception refers to a case of infidelity for which a special solution might be needed, e.g., separation of the spouses without divorce.

When the prohibition of divorce was taught in the Sermon on the Mount it was in the context of personal morality and the higher standard of the law of Jesus with respect to the Law of Moses. In the context of the present passage it forms part of Jesus' teaching about ways of life in his church. The teaching itself remains consistent.

For the disciples the command that a man and woman not divorce is so onerous that it would be better not to marry at all (**19:10**). Jesus agrees with that statement, but not in the sense in which the disciples meant it. Without relenting on the prohibition against divorce, he implies that some people might be given the vocation not to marry (**19:11**). Some men are celibate because they are born impotent, some because they are made so by others (e.g., in war), and some because they have made themselves celibate for the sake of the kingdom of heaven (**19:12**). This kingdom of heaven has been the subject of Jesus' preaching from the beginning (cf. 4:17, 23, 5:3, 19, 13:11, 18:23). Here he

implies that God's rule over human affairs, which he is inaugurating, is becoming so immediate that some persons might choose an exclusive relationship with God in place of marriage. It will shortly be clear that this celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of heaven is in particular a personal relationship with Jesus, for whom one might be invited to relinquish all other ties. While all Christians are called to serve Christ alone (cf. 10:37), some are called to translate this belonging to Christ alone into a concrete manner of living without a human partner. Jesus invites the "one who is able to accept this" to accept it. The dedicated celibate life is therefore both the gift of God (cf. "to whom it is given," v. 11) and the free choice of man.

In his discourse on the Church Jesus has spoken about the necessity of becoming "like little children" in order to enter the kingdom. Here in the context of teaching about husband and wife it is appropriate that he return to the theme of children. Again he uses an incident that occurs to teach a needed lesson to the disciples. When people bring children to Jesus that he might lay hands on them and pray, the disciples rebuke them (**19:13**), feeling that the Master is too important to be bothered with children. Jesus will not have them turned away because "of such is the kingdom of heaven" (**19:14**; cf. 18:4). Not only must men "become" like children (cf. 18:3), the leaders of Christ's church must see in children and in all who share in the helplessness which they signify the members of the kingdom of God. To care for the vulnerable is to care for Christ (cf. 18:5). This teaching is the principle behind the tireless work of the Church in education, care of the sick, and ministry to the poor and abandoned. Jesus fulfills the request made to him and places his hands on the children's heads before departing from the place (**19:15**). His call for the welcoming of children just after a discussion of the indissolubility of marriage also suggests that children are to be welcomed in marriage rather than rejected.

Just as the teaching on divorce (19:1-9) was followed by two briefer passages on related issues (19:10-12; 19:13-15), so now a longer passage on renunciation of possessions (19:16-22) is followed by two shorter sections on the danger of riches (19:23-226) and the reward for those who renounce possessions for Christ (19:27-30). As in other passages in this section of the gospel (cf. 17:10, 19, 24, 18:1, 21, 19:3), the teaching of Jesus is evoked by a question. One whom we later learn is a "young man" (cf. 19:20, 22) approaches the "master" to ask the question of questions: "What good thing shall I do to obtain eternal life?" (**19:16**). The question is significant first because it identifies the goal of human longing as "eternal life," which has so far been mentioned, almost parenthetically, only in 7:14 and 18:8-9. Secondly it expresses man's awareness that his ultimate fulfillment depends somehow on a choice he must make, an act he must perform. Up to this point Jesus has been seeking the lost sheep; now it is the sheep that seeks him, asking the Master what is required of him. Jesus asks why the man questions him about the good, since only one is good. The good God (cf. Ps 73:1, 86:5, 100:5, 119:68) has explained to man what is good (cf. Mic 6:8) by giving him the commandments. Jesus reiterates the Old Testament teaching that they are the way to life (**19:17**; cf. Deut 5:32-33, 8:1, 30:16, 19-20).

Like another inquirer later in the Gospel (cf. 22:36), the man needs to know which are the most important of the commandments to keep (**19:18a**). Jesus singles out five of the Ten Commandments and a sixth commandment from the Holiness Code in Leviticus. Since it is the will of God that man have life (cf. vv. 16-17), it is appropriate that Jesus mentions first the fifth commandment, "You shall not kill," moving on to cite the sixth through eighth commandments and the fourth commandment (**19:18b-19a**), all of which have to do with respecting the lives of other human beings, whether in negative (fifth through eighth

commandments) or positive (fourth commandment) form. For Jesus the principle behind all these commandments is found tucked away among the precepts of Leviticus: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (**19:19b**; cf. Lev 19:18 and also 19:34). The very nature of man is that he love his own existence and seek to further it. This instinct has been planted in him by God and is the reflection of God’s own love for existence. It has already provided the basis of Jesus’ commandment on how to treat others: “Whatever you wish others to do to you, so you also do to them” (7:12). Here in Chapter 19 Jesus shows that the good actions we are called to do for others are rooted in a love for them which in turn is an extension of our love for ourselves. The Christian sees himself as a brother in the family of God. He loves himself as part of that family whose Father is God himself. He loves his own being as a gift from the God who is life itself. What he loves in himself is the being of which he is a participant, a reflection. His love for this divine person who is life itself leads him to want to give himself to this person. In his very being man is made for this personal relationship. He is called to love the true and the good, which is a transcendent person. On earth we do not see God, but we know that our neighbor, like ourselves, is the object of his love. It is therefore by loving our neighbor that we express our love for the author of our own life. As our love for the infinite Being transcends even our love for our limited self, there may come a time when to be true to our nature we must surrender our earthly lives for the good of others. It is the nature of man to transcend himself in love. This teaching Jesus will explicitly give before his death.

Claiming to have observed these commandments, the young man has a third question: “In what am I still lacking?” (**19:20**). He rightly senses that observance of the Law, however punctilious and sincere and obligatory, will not bring him to his goal. If he would be “complete” in his preparation for eternal life, he must renounce all attachment to creatures and make Jesus himself the central focus of his life. Observance of the commandments can only bring us to the point where we sense our own inability to earn eternal life, which must be the gift of the infinite God. After a lifetime of effort we discover our poverty and look for the merciful hand of the Savior. It is this ultimate requirement that Jesus now puts forward to the young man: “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and then come, follow me” (**19:21**). Jesus appeals to the human desire for treasure, as in 6:20 and 13:44, and promises the authentic treasure which is the lasting one of eternal life. His call to renounce earthly possessions is a call to cease relying on creatures for one’s well-being in order to rely on Jesus himself as the bringer of life. It is a call for every man and woman, although not all must fulfill the call literally. This is the same radicalism we have already heard from the Lord: cf. 5:29-30, 6:24, 8:21-22, 10:37-38, 13:44-46. In the words of John Meier, “In the last analysis it is the person of Jesus that is the norm of morality for Matthew” (*The Gospel of Matthew*, 220). All must sever any attachment to earthly goods that threatens their attachment to Christ; some renounce possession of earthly goods altogether as a striking and most effective means of carrying out the Lord’s invitation. These would be those “to whom it is given” by God (cf. the gift of celibacy in 19:11).

On hearing Jesus’ invitation, the young man departs in sadness, since he had many goods and was not ready to sacrifice them (**19:22**). We are not sure whether he is refusing to subordinate his attachment to goods to his attachment to the Savior or refusing to follow Christ in the radical way which would entail the literal selling of his possessions. His unhappy departure prompts Jesus to reflect with the disciples on the danger of wealth. He declares solemnly that the rich man will only with difficulty enter the kingdom of heaven (**19:23**). Riches provide an earthly comfort which can blunt one’s desire for the only true treasure which lasts. Reinforcing his teaching with a famous simile, Jesus declares it easier for a

camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven **(19:24)**. For those who saw riches as a sign of God's favor (cf., e.g., Ps 112:3, 128:2), this was a difficult teaching. The disciples are quite astounded and ask, in a question typical of this section, "Who then can be saved?" **(19:25)**. "Being saved" is the equivalent of "entering the kingdom of heaven," entering into [eternal] life, and "being perfect." Looking directly at the disciples, Jesus acknowledges the impossibility for men to save themselves. He is implying that humanity all too easily prefers creatures to the Creator. Without using the word "sin," he implies that all men need "saving" by God from their own sinful tendencies. What is impossible for men is possible to God **(19:26; cf. Gen 18:14 with Job 42:2)**. God is in fact making salvation possible through the very ministry of Jesus which will culminate in the forgiveness of sins won by him on the cross. In the new covenant in his blood, the law of God will be written on men's hearts, empowering them once again to prefer the Creator to the creature and so win life.

Still another question is asked of Jesus, this time by Peter. He and the other disciples have literally "left all things," livelihood, home, family, and "followed" Jesus (cf. 4:20, 22); what are they to have? **(19:27)**. The question gives Jesus an opportunity to detail the generosity of God to those who follow him by the way of total dispossession. His answer is twofold: a solemn statement directed to the chosen disciples and a general statement applicable to all others who will similarly leave all things for the sake of his name. In the "regeneration" of mankind, "when the Son of Man sits on the throne of his glory" (cf. 25:31), they too will sit on twelve thrones judging (ruling) the twelve tribes of Israel **(19:28)**; that is, they will participate in the risen Lord's rule over his people. Clearly the disciples here addressed are the twelve apostles, and they represent the new Israel. Just as the people of Israel descended from twelve brothers, so the church of Jesus owes its existence to the Gospel preached by these twelve followers of the Lord. All others who similarly leave all earthly attachments—Jesus mentions five family relations along with homes and fields—for the name of the Lord will be repaid a hundredfold and inherit eternal life **(19:29)**. Jesus has now given a thorough answer to the young man's question about eternal life (cf. v. 16).

A final verse of Chapter 19 is a version of 20:16, and the two verses seem to form a frame for the parable of Jesus in 20:1-15. But the saying has its own distinct application in the context of Chapter 19: "Many who are first will be last and the last first" **(19:30)**. Those who are rich and comfortable in this world can be said to have "had their reward" (cf. 6:2, 5, 16) and will have little reward in heaven, while those who have despoiled themselves in this life to make room for Christ will enjoy the fullness of eternal life.

Because the disciples have been thinking in terms of reward, Jesus now tells a parable to correct the impression that the gifts of God can be "earned" in the human sense. In the parable the "last" are "first" in the mundane sense that the last persons hired are the first to receive their wages. A vineyard owner went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard, agreeing to pay them a denarius for a day's work **(20:1-2)**. At mid-morning he went out and saw others standing idle in the market place and hired them, promising to pay what was just **(20:3-4)**. At noon and at mid-afternoon he did the same **(20:5)**. Late in the day he went out and found others and asked them why they stood there idle the whole day. Since they had not been hired he sent them too into the vineyard **(20:6-7)**. At evening the vineyard master instructs his steward to pay the workers their wages, beginning with the last to arrive **(20:8)**. These receive the same denarius that was the agreed wage for those who worked the whole day **(20:9)**. Understandably those who came earlier and worked longer, "bearing the burden

and heat of the day,” expected to receive more than those who worked only an hour **(20:10-12)**, and they complain. Addressing one of them as “friend,” the master replies that he has not been unjust but paid the wage that had been agreed upon **(20:13)**. If he gives the same amount to those who worked less, he is not defrauding anyone but showing his generosity. The workers who complained are looking with an “evil” or jealous “eye” on those who received the same wage for less work **(20:14-15)**. The Lord is free to give his gifts where he will; some have the vocation of working hard for the kingdom, others witness to God’s mercy for those who have not earned it. It is the disciple’s task to receive the goodness of God in whatever way God “wishes” (vv. 14-15) to dispense it. Human calculation is no way to understand God’s actions; all we know is that the “good” God (v. 15, cf. 19:19) provides all with a way to come to him. When the “frame” saying is repeated at the end of the parable **(20:16)**, the order of terms is reversed so that it begins with the parable’s theme of the “last” being paid “first” and actually being first in the sense of receiving the most generous payment. Perhaps the “first” who come “last” refer to those who rely primarily on their works to win them salvation, whereas salvation comes only to those who rely totally on Jesus. In this way the parable becomes another illustration of the two stages of Jesus’ reply to the rich young man (cf. 19:17-19, 21). Jesus’ Gospel is about mercy not merit.

Relentlessly Jesus continues his march to Jerusalem. Along the way he announces for a third time the fate that awaits him there **(20:17)**. Speaking to the twelve alone he tells that the Son of Man will be “handed over” (cf. 17:22) to the chief priests and scribes, who will condemn him to death and “hand him over” to the pagans (not mentioned in the first two prophecies of the passion) to be mocked and scourged and crucified, and on the third day he will be raised up **(20:18-19)**. This most detailed of the predictions specifies the “suffer many things” of 16:21 and “into the hands of men” of 17:22 as mockery and scourging. It specifies the mode of “killing” as crucifixion which could be inflicted only by “the pagans.” From the second prediction the passage retains the appellation “Son of Man” and the word “handed over.” The third prediction adds that the Jewish leaders, “chief priests and scribes” (cf. 16:21) will condemn Jesus to death before handing him over to the Romans. The disciples cannot know that this suffering and death of the Messiah will be the “ransom” (cf. 20:28) freely paid to win the salvation of mankind. It will be the ultimate manifestation of the gratuitous mercy of God which was the subject of the preceding parable. It is the way the divine shepherd seeks the stray sheep (cf. 18:12-14) and forgives the debt mankind could not pay (cf. 18:24-27).

As was the case after the first two predictions, the third prediction is followed by a demonstration of the apostles’ lack of understanding. The mother of James and John comes with her sons to Jesus, bows low, and makes a request **(20:20)**. When Jesus asks what it is, she asks that her two sons sit, one at the right and one at the left, of Jesus in his kingdom **(20:21)**. For these disciples the word “kingdom” still has connotations of privilege and power. Jesus addresses his answer not just to the mother but to the sons and obliquely to the other apostles **(20:22)**; “You do not know what you are asking” is plural in Greek). They have not realized that the kingdom will be attained only at the cost of suffering, first that of Jesus himself and then that of his disciples, although Jesus explained this clearly after the first prediction of the Passion (cf. 16:24-25). When Jesus asks the sons if they can “drink the cup” which he “is about to” drink (cf. “is about to be handed over,” 17:22), he is referring to the suffering which will be his lot (cf. “cup” as a metaphor for destiny in Ps 75:9, Isa 51:17, Jer 25:15, 17) about which he has just told them a third time. They betray their misunderstanding by responding blithely, “We can.” Jesus assures them that they will share the

Messiah's fate, but the allotment of places of privilege in the kingdom is not his to grant but his Father's **(20:23)**. The authoritative teacher of 19:6-9 is also the son who is humble before the Father's inscrutable mystery (cf. 20:14-15). It is the Father who prepares places for Jesus' disciples.

If James and John with their mother showed ambition, the other ten apostles now show indignation toward the brothers for seeking to put themselves forward **(20:24)**. Jesus once again must clarify the relations that should obtain between disciples. Calling the twelve together, he points out that domination and tyranny characterize the leaders of "the nations" **(20:25)** just as the pagans save their greetings only for their own kin (cf. 5:47), but this is not the case among his disciples. The way to become "great" among them is to minister to the others **(20:26)**; the way to be first among them is to be their slave **(20:27)**. The two statements are different formulations of the same paradox, the second more drastic than the first. The apostles have not learned that the true dignity, the true greatness of the Christian is to give of himself for others. We have heard that "It is enough for the disciple that he should grow to be like his teacher, and the slave like his master" (10:25). We now learn that the very meaning of the master's existence is not to be served but to serve, and that he is to give his life (lit. "soul") as a ransom for many **(20:28)**. The meaning of the suffering and rejection that the Son of Man is to experience is now clear: through his gift of himself even to death the barrier between men and their fulfillment will be removed. For the fourth time in the Gospel allusion is made to the figure of the Servant of the Lord whose sufferings on behalf of the people are detailed in four songs in the second part of the Book of Isaiah. At his baptism Jesus was proclaimed as the one in whom the Lord was "well pleased" (3:17, cf. Isa 42:1). After a day of healing he is proclaimed by the Evangelist to be the one who "took on our weaknesses and bore our diseases" (8:17; cf. Isa 53:4). When opposition has begun to harden against Jesus, Matthew sees him as the beloved of God empowered by the Spirit of God to bring justice to the nations, yet accomplishing his mission without raising his voice or damaging the weak (12:17-21, cf. Isa 42:1-4). Now in calling his death a "ransom for many" Jesus is echoing the fourth Servant song in which the Servant is said to bear the punishment for sins so that "many" could be free (Isa 53:5, 10-12). In calling for the disciple to be a "servant" (cf. v. 27) he is inviting him to participate in his own mission of giving his life for sinners. Jesus is slowly filling in the picture of his coming redemptive death and at the same time presenting it as the pattern of the lives of his disciples. With this teaching the special teaching of Jesus to the inner circle of disciples is brought to an end. In the following episode Jesus emerges into the full light of public acclaim.

A great crowd, such as we have not seen since the feeding of the four thousand (cf. 15:30-39, also 17:14), follows Jesus as he leaves Jericho **(20:29)**. Jesus' reputation has preceded him. Two blind men sitting by the road, hearing that he is approaching cry, "Lord, have mercy on us, son of David," recognizing him as the Messianic king **(20:30)**. As in the case of the children being brought to Jesus, the important people attempt to spare the Master from this nuisance by silencing them. But the blind men cry all the louder using the same words **(20:31)**. Hearing the cry of genuine need, Jesus stops and calls them, asking what they wish him to do **(20:32)**. When they ask that their eyes be opened **(20:33)**, Jesus is moved with compassion (cf. 9:36, 14:14, 15:32, also the master who cancels the debt in 18:27) and touches (cf. 8:3, 15, 9:29) their eyes. Immediately they see again and become his followers **(20:34)**. The miracle is the last of the healings in the Gospel. It is paralleled by the healing of the two blind men in Galilee (cf. 9:27-31), which seems to have been modeled on the healing outside of Jericho. With its recognition of Jesus as "Son of David" it prepares for the triumphal entry into Jerusalem; and with the great participle *splanchnistheis* it

places the whole coming ministry in the holy city, including the passion and death, under the rubric of compassion.

From the beginning of the Gospel the reader has known that Jesus is the Messiah, the expected son of David in whom God's promises of an everlasting dynasty for David would be fulfilled (cf. 1:1). With the education of the apostles completed for the moment, it is time for Jesus to enter the holy city where his mission is to be completed (cf. 16:21, 20:18). Building on the enthusiasm of the crowds who have been following him, he engineers his arrival so that he is seen to be fulfilling one of the prophecies about the messianic king. The prophet Zechariah had proclaimed to the "daughter of Zion"—a personification of Jerusalem—that her king would come to her, "humble and riding on a donkey and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden" (21:5, cf. Zech 9:9). Nearing Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sends two disciples into the village where he knows they will find the two animals mentioned in the prophecy, which they should bring to him (21:1-2). Foreseeing that someone might question what they are doing, he assures them that when they reply, "The master has need of them," the animals will be promptly dispatched (21:3). Of the twelve prophecies which Matthew solemnly cites as fulfilled by Jesus, this is the only one (21:4) whose fulfillment can be said to be "orchestrated" by Jesus. He has often presented himself as bringing various Old Testament themes to fulfillment. On the solemn occasion of his entry into kingship over the people of God, he uses his divine foreknowledge to bring about a literal fulfillment of a striking prophecy. The Messiah who could not assign places of honor in his kingdom (20:23) and who is "humble" (21:5, cf. 11:29) and a "servant" (20:27-28) knows that his Father has prepared the literal fulfillment of the prophecy.

The disciples carry out the command of Jesus (21:6), bringing two animals, even though the mention of two in the prophecy was simply an instance of parallelism, the second line specifying the kind of animal mentioned in the first. We are left with the awkward picture of Jesus being seated on both animals at once, after the disciples have placed cloaks on them (21:7). Like Solomon Jesus rides the mount of the kings (cf. 1 Kings 1:33, 38), yet he comes in lowliness. The one who enjoyed equality with God has humbled himself in order to enter his glory (cf. Phil 2:6-11, the New Testament reading on Palm Sunday). In no time a huge crowd appears, showing Jesus royal honors by spreading their cloaks on the road, like the officers who recognized Jehu as king after his anointing by the representative of Elisha (2 Kings 9:13). Others cut branches from trees and strew them before him (21:8). Crowds are now ahead of him and behind him, crying out words used in an Old Testament psalm to acclaim a victorious king coming to offer thanks in the temple. The Hebrew imperative *hōshî'ah-na'*, meaning "Please save us," was in the psalm (Ps 118:25a) a prayer of the crowd to God as they accompanied the king; in the mouths of the crowds accompanying Jesus it is an acclamation offered to Jesus as "the Son of David" (21:9). The next verse of the psalm is a blessing on the one who "comes in the name of the Lord" (Ps 118:26a). While the Hebrew read "Blessed in the name of the Lord is he who comes," both the Septuagint and the citation of the verse by Matthew make the prepositional phrase, "in the name of the Lord," a modifier of "comes" rather than of "blessed." The crowd sees Jesus as one blessed by God and coming on the part of God to bring good things to the holy city. They repeat their *ōsanna* (Greek transliteration of the Hebrew imperative) adding the phrase "in the highest," intending that their acclamation of the Messiah reach to the heavens. The reception of Jesus is viewed as a liturgical act. The people's acclamation of Jesus as the king entering on his reign (in the form, "Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.") is appropriately joined with the "Holy, holy, holy" of Isaiah's temple vision (Isa 6:3)

as the liturgical acclamation before the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer of the Roman rite.

While the praise of Jesus reaches to the heavens, the inhabitants of the city experience a kind of “earthquake,” asking, “Who is this?” (**21:10**). The divine king does not enter his earthly domain without disturbing its very core. The spiritual earthquake initiated by Jesus will involve the casting down of false idols and the rebuilding of lives around the Messianic king as Lord. The crowds respond to the question of the inhabitants: “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee” (**21:11**). Jesus is acknowledged as one like Jonah (cf. 12:41) or Elijah or Jeremiah or even John the Baptist (cf. 16:14) who all proclaimed the word and the will of God to the people. In particular many may have seen in Jesus the prophet like Moses whom the Lord had promised to raise up (cf. Deut 18:15, 18) and who was referred to as “he who is to come” (cf. 21:9, 11:3). In the whole pericope Jesus is presented as the omniscient prophet-king who will reign through his humble self-abasement.

Jesus wastes no time in entering the holiest place in the holy city, the house of his Father. His visitation bears out the simile of the “earthquake” (cf. v. 10), since he throws out the sellers and the buyers in the temple and overturns the tables of the money-changers and the chairs of those selling doves for sacrifice (**21:12**). The action is the closest Jesus comes to the prophetic gesture of the Old Testament prophets. In emptying the temple of financial transactions he is symbolically “purifying” Israel’s worship, just as God had promised, through the prophet Malachi, to enter his temple and “purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and then they will make the offering to the Lord as it should be made” (Mal 3:1, 3). Greed and gain will no longer replace the spirit of devotion; worship will no longer be self-serving. The prophetic anger of Jesus is a “zeal for God’s house” (Ps 69:10, although only the Gospel of John will cite this passage, cf. John 2:17), as he makes clear in his citation of Isaiah: “My house will be called a house of prayer” (Isa 56:7). By omitting the phrase “for all the nations,” Jesus both heightens the theme of prayer and leaves in the background the theme of salvation of the nations which has been evident in the Gospel from the beginning (cf. 1:1 with the mention of Abraham, father of nations, 2:2, 11, 8:11, 12:18, 21, 15:21, 28). The vindication of God’s rights over his house is matched by a denunciation of the temple-profaners drawn from the prophet Jeremiah, “but you have made it a robbers’ cave” (**21:13**, cf. Jer 7:11). Jesus moves among the Old Testament texts with sure freedom; he enters into them to make them his own. They are given a fresh and definitive meaning through him.

Jesus’ dramatic intervention into the temple routine could not but arouse the ire of the authorities. It was not an action to win them over unless they were open to the power and authenticity of his message. They will very soon determine that the disrupter must be eliminated. In the meantime Jesus replaces the buying and selling in the temple with acts of healing in that place (**21:14**), the only healing miracles in Jerusalem recorded in the Synoptic Gospels. The blind and lame come to him and are healed as their counterparts in Galilee were healed (cf. 9:27-30, 11:5, 15:30-31). The temple of God becomes again a source of blessing for the needy (cf. Ps 65:5, 132:15-16, 134:3). The pair “blind and lame” had also a special association with David who barred them from the temple because it had been said that the blind and the lame could prevent him from capturing Jerusalem (cf. 2 Sam 5:8). The humble Son of David here reverses the attitude of his predecessor, fulfilling the role of the true king who defends the weak (cf. Ps 72:12-13) and assures that proper worship is maintained in the house of God (cf. Ps 61:5-9, 2 Sam 6:15-19).

Jesus’ high-handed ridding the temple of commerce and his wonders of healing, together with the liturgical shouts of Hosanna which continue in the

temple even from children, are too much for the “chief priests and scribes” (cf. 20:18), who indignantly ask, “Do you hear what they’re saying?” (21:15-16). Yet again Jesus sees what is happening in the light of the Old Testament, asking the “experts” with irony whether they’d never read the text, “From the mouth of children and sucklings you have prepared praise” (cf. Ps 8:3 LXX). In confessing the Son of David, the unsophisticated know what the learned could not grasp (cf. 11:25). Having laid down his challenge to the Jerusalem authorities, Jesus retires from the city to spend the night in Bethany (21:17).

Returning to the city the following morning Jesus is quick to perform a prophetic action illustrating Israel’s failure to recognize him and its consequences. Being hungry he approaches a fig tree by the road, and finding only leaves he curses it, whereupon it immediately shrivels up (21:18-19). Looking for the fruit of virtue among the scribes and Pharisees he has found only the show of religion. The withering of the tree shows the inevitable end of those who reject divine love. But like everything else in Matthew’s Gospel, the action of Jesus is given an application to the apostles. In answer to their astonished question about how the tree withered so quickly (21:20), Jesus replies solemnly that through unhesitating faith they would share in the same power he demonstrated over the fig tree. They would do even greater things like telling “this mountain” to be lifted up and thrown into the sea with the result that it would obey them (21:21; cf. 17:20). He sums up the message: “Whatever you ask for in prayer, if you believe, you will receive” (21:22). In their own confrontation with the spirit of evil, the disciples need to know that the seemingly insurmountable obstacles of rejection and hatred (cf. 10:22) can be neutralized by faith and prayer. By relying on the power of the Lord and invoking that power with earnestness of faith, they will triumph over all obstacles. What seemed so formidable will suffer the fate of the demons in the pigs at Gadara (cf. 8:32, also 18:6, Rev. 19:20, 20:10, 15). The images of withering and of being swallowed by the sea coalesce to show that the power that resists God ends up being no power at all.

No sooner has Jesus begun teaching in the temple than the chief priests and elders of the people (cf. 16:21) go on the offensive, asking by what authority Jesus performs these prophetic actions and who gave him this authority (21:23). Jesus politely promises an answer if they will first answer a question of his own; he thus takes control of the argument (21:24). His question has to do with the openness of heart to the revelation of God. The interrogators are asked to examine their own reaction to the baptism preached and conferred by John: was it of divine or human origin? (21:25a). Jesus implies that a heart open to God would recognize John’s baptism as in accord with the will of God as expressed in the Old Testament. John was calling men to bring forth the good fruit of repentance so as to be ready for the coming judge and purifier (cf. 3:9, 11-12). The decision about John’s authenticity is the same as the decision about that of Jesus. A heart open to divine truth would recognize that truth in both men. No amount of explanation or defense by Jesus would convince a heart that had refused to see the divine in the teaching and action of Jesus. Confronted with the need to declare their judgment, the authorities consider not the truth of their answer but the repercussions for their own position. If they acknowledge that John’s baptism was from heaven, they will be asked why they did not believe in him (21:25b). John had already indicated that both the Pharisees, who were generally scribes, and the Sadducees, who were members of the priestly families, were a “brood of vipers,” not sincere in coming for baptism (3:7-8). Yet if the officials openly denied that John’s baptism was from God, they feared losing their control over the people, who held John to be a prophet (21:26, cf. 11:13-14, 14:5). In either case it was not truth that mattered but their retaining power. When

they confess ignorance, Jesus too refuses to answer their question **(21:27)**, implying that if they cannot “read the signs of the times” (cf. 16:3), nothing he could say would convince them. The problem is in their unwillingness to surrender to his lordship.

Yet Jesus does have a teaching for these officials. He asks them to think about a parable. A man with two sons asked the first to work one day in his vineyard **(21:28)**. Replying that he would, the son did not in fact go **(21:29)**. When the second son was asked the same thing, he replied that he did not want to go but later thought better of it and went **(21:30)**. Jesus asks which of the two did the father’s will **(21:31a)**. His hearers rightly answer the second, since what the father wanted was not words or promises but action. The authorities do not realize that while they are confident about their knowledge of the will of God they do not in fact carry it out, like the fig tree that bore a fine show of leaves but no fruit (cf. 21:19). Jesus points out that tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before the authorities **(21:31b)**, since they have believed John who “came on the way of righteousness” **(21:32)**; they responded to him, recognizing the need for repentance in face of the coming judgment. They were like the second son, who openly refused the father’s will but in the end did what the father wanted. The authorities on the other hand are like the first son; they claim to know God’s will but do not acknowledge their need for repentance when God’s representative comes among them. Jesus has made it abundantly clear that what his Father wants, and what assures entry into the kingdom of God, is not just hearing but acting on God’s word (cf. 7:24-27), doing the Father’s will (cf. 7:21, 12:50). The two primordial works are repentance and faith, from which flow all the other good works produced by the Christian. Performing a show of good works (cf. 5:20, 6:1-2, 5-6, 16, 15:2-6) without acknowledging a need to be saved from one’s sins avails nothing for salvation.

The short parable is followed by two longer ones in which Jesus reveals the sweep of God’s plan for salvation and his own role in that plan. In speaking of a man who owns a vineyard, he narrates the planting and fencing of the vineyard, the digging of a winepress and the erection of a tower in the same terms used by Isaiah in comparing Israel to God’s vineyard (cf. Isa 5:2, 7). In Isaiah’s song God expected from his vineyard the fruits of right judgment and justice. In Jesus’ parable the vineyard owner entrusts the vineyard to the care of tenants and departs **(21:33)**. When he sends servants to collect the fruits, the tenants mistreat them, beating one, killing another, stoning a third **(21:34-35)**. In fact the prophet Jeremiah had been beaten (Jer 20:2) and his contemporary Uriah was slain (Jer 26:23). A second, more numerous contingent of servants receives the same treatment **(21:36)**. Finally the owner sends to the tenants his son, sure that they will respect the son **(21:37)**. Jesus is at once placing himself in the line of prophets sent to Israel to claim the righteous behavior due to her lord, and distinguishing himself from the prophets as the son of God is distinguished from God’s servants. His vocation is the same, his identity is completely other: as beloved son of the God of the vineyard he shares the dignity of his father’s own nature. We hear the pathos of the father’s simple faith, “Surely they will respect my son.” God never loses hope in human beings, even though he knows that the redemption of the world will require the rejection of the son he sent to save them.

The vineyard tenants recognize the son as the heir to the vineyard and by a skewed reasoning assume that by getting rid of the son they can appropriate the vineyard to themselves **(21:38)**. Jesus’ opponents are choosing to rule God’s vineyard for their own purposes rather than as custodians of a divine trust. Expelling the son from the vineyard, as Jesus will be led out of the city to be executed (cf. Heb 13:12), they slay him **(21:39)**. As in the preceding parable, Jesus asks the authorities to pronounce their own condemnation by giving the

logical answer to his own question about the parable. When the Lord of the vineyard comes what will he do to these tenants **(21:40)**? Their answer is quite full: the owner will mightily destroy them and hand over the vineyard to other tenants who will produce its fruits for him at the proper times **(21:41)**. Jesus does not even need to tell them they have answered correctly but immediately asks another “Have you never read” question (cf. v. 16) in which he cites the same psalm from which was taken the acclamation at his entry into the city: “The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; by the Lord has this been done and it is marvelous in our eyes” **(21:42 = Ps 118:22-23)**. The psalmist is speaking about a king returning from victory in a battle in which he had been “encompassed by the nations” and “thrust down and falling” but was miraculously “raised” to “life” by the Lord’s right hand (cf. Ps 118:10-12, 13, 16-17). Jesus is telling the officials what will happen when the vineyard owner’s son is killed: he will be raised to life by the Lord to become the principal stone in a new edifice, the image of a building replacing that of the vineyard as a designation of the people of God. The authorities have answered rightly: their murdering of the son will result in the snatching of the kingdom from them and its being given to a race who will yield its fruit **(21:43)**. These non-Jews will be centered, organized around the son whom they will kill and who will mysteriously rise. A verse found in some manuscripts adds here the statement from Luke 20:18 that this cornerstone of the new edifice will also occasion being “crushed” for those who do not build on him **(21:44)**. The stone is a firm foundation or an instrument of destruction depending on how one relates to it.

The chief priests and Pharisees (first mention since the entry into Jerusalem) recognize these two parables (vv. 28-32 and 33-44) as directed at themselves **(21:45)**. By seeking to arrest this man who is prophesying the end of their power, they will actually be fulfilling his prophecy **(21:46)**. Saint Matthew reminds us that the authorities are afraid of the crowds (cf. v. 26) and that the people hold Jesus to be a prophet who speaks for God (cf. v. 11).

Jesus has yet another parable of rejection of the kingdom and its transfer to others. The parable of the wedding feast gives the impression of being added here. At the conclusion of the preceding parable the officials have already decided to seize Jesus. Saint Matthew inserts here the parable of the wedding feast to reinforce the lesson about the plan of God taught in the previous parable **(22:1)**. Both stories involve a father and a son. Here a king is holding a wedding banquet for his son **(22:2)**. Jesus had earlier intimated that he was the bridegroom of Israel (cf. 9:15), come to espouse his people to himself as the Lord had done in the Old Testament (cf. Hos 2:21, Jer 2:2, Ezek 16:7-14, Isa 54:4-8, 62:4-5). He now portrays himself as son of the divine king (for God as king, cf. Ps 47:3, 8-9, 95:3, 96:10, 97:1) whose wedding is blessed by the Father. The wedding is celebrated with a grand banquet, another sign of the blessings God has in store for his people (cf. Isa 25:6, 55:1-3, Jer 31:12-14, Matt 14:15-21). The two themes will be joined in the Eucharist, the “wedding feast of the Lamb” (Rev 19:9). They indicate the intimacy between God and man and that God himself is man’s nourishment. An interesting feature of the parable is that once mentioned, the son then disappears from the story.

As in the previous parable the Father makes three attempts to realize his design. There it was to receive the fruit of good works; here it is to people his banquet with guests. In both cases the first two attempts are abortive or inadequate and the third involves reaching out beyond the original chosen people. In the parable of the wedding feast the servants sent to call the invited guests meet first with simple indifference **(22:3)**. At the second invitation they are furnished by the host with a little speech in which he announces that the banquet is prepared, the bulls and fattened cattle have been slaughtered, and all is in

readiness **(22:4)**. The details, like those used to describe the vineyard in 21:33, show the meticulous care taken by the owner/king over his project. The speech ends with a fervent, "Come to the wedding feast." This time the servants meet with three kinds of lack of interest: one goes away to his own field, another to his business **(22:5)**, and the rest seize the servants, mistreat them and kill (cf. 21:35, 39) them **(22:6)**. In rage the king sends his armies to destroy those murderers and set their city on fire **(22:7)**. The assumption is made that all the inhabitants of the city were responsible for rejecting the king's invitation; the parable seems to allude to the holy city of the chosen people, Jerusalem, which would be destroyed by the Romans within forty years of Jesus' death. The rejection by the Jews of the invitation to the banquet of the kingdom leaves God free to open the kingdom to those not initially invited, that is, the pagans **(22:8-10)**. The servants of the king bring in whomever they find on the roads out of the city, good and bad alike, and so the wedding banquet is filled with guests.

At this point Jesus adds to the parable a sequel directed not so much at the Jewish authorities as at Christians converted from paganism. Some may have accepted external membership in the kingdom of God without the interior repentance and faith which would enable them to produce good works (cf. 7:19, 21, 24-25). Such would be the man who answered the call to the banquet without donning the appropriate garment **(22:11)**. One might say he had not truly clothed himself in Christ (cf. Rom 13:14, Gal 3:27). When the king addresses the guest as "friend" and questions him about his lack of a wedding garment, the man has no answer **(22:12)**. The king has him bound hand and foot and thrown into the "outer darkness" **(22:13)** where he will suffer the "weeping and gnashing of teeth" Jesus has already predicted for the weeds among the wheat and the bad fish among the good (cf. 13:42, 50 with 21:10), and for the "sons of the kingdom" who will reject him (cf. 8:12). Jesus sums up the moral of the whole parable in a pithy saying about the difference between being invited to a banquet and being chosen to remain: "For many are called, but few are chosen" **(22:14)**. In form, the terse two-part contrastive statement reminds one of the other recent saying of Jesus, "The last will be first, and the first last." In terms of the parable, the "few chosen" would be those who accepted the king's invitation in heart and deed.

In several parables now Jesus has shown himself to be the pivotal figure in a major shift in the identity of God's people. Thoroughly Jewish, regarding himself as the fulfillment of many strands of prophecy in the Old Testament, offering his people the blessings of the kingdom of heaven, Jesus knows that his own people will not accept him but pagans will gladly respond to him as the giver of life. Through their faith they will become the new people of God. The "kingdom of God" understood as the place where God rules on earth will thus be shifted by his death from the Jewish nation to pagans of many nations along with the few Jews who accept him as Lord. This major shift already had its roots in the Old Testament in many passages, going back to the Abraham story itself (Gen 12:3, 17:4-6), where it is prophesied that the nations will come to Zion and worship Zion's God (Isa 2:2-4, 56:6-8, 60:11-14, Tob 13:11, Zech 8:20-23, 14:16, Ps 47:8-10, 87:4-7). In the mysterious plan of God it was through the blindness of the Jerusalem authorities (cf. 15:14, John 9:39-41) in the Lord's time that this promise of the universal worship of the God of Israel was fulfilled. The workers hired at the eleventh hour (20:6-9), the tenants to whom the vineyard was given when the original tenants proved unworthy (21:41-43), those outside the city called to the banquet (22:8-10), those coming "from east and west to take their places with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob at the feast in the kingdom of heaven" (8:11), even the Magi (2:1-2, 11), are all indicators that Jesus has come to bring the promises of God outside the confines of Israel to the whole world. In his few days in Jerusalem he has made this divine plan crystal clear. It will be the task of

the apostles, working in the Spirit, to make this reign of God among the nations a reality (cf. 28:19).

Unable to arrest Jesus, the authorities decide they can “entrap” (only use of this verb in the NT; see the parallel passage in Mark 12:13) Jesus in his own words, thus having grounds to prove his teaching false (**22:15**). The first group to formulate a challenging question are the Pharisees, Jesus’ principal opponents (cf. 21:45). They send their disciples with some Herodians (supporters of the monarchy) who introduce their question with flattering words to the “teacher” (Master, rabbi), whom they acknowledge as “true” and as teaching “the way of God in truth”; they have discovered that Jesus in his teaching is not concerned to curry favor with the influential (**22:16**). They therefore ask what is his opinion about paying taxes to Caesar (**22:17**). He immediately sees through to their “wickedness” (cf. 9:4) and asks why they are putting him to the test (**22:18**), addressing them as “hypocrites,” a term he will use for the authorities seven times in the following chapter. In these few words he bears out the truth of their remark about his not caring for the officials’ opinions. As another time Jesus demonstrated a teaching by putting a little child before his hearers, he now asks for a symbol of Roman rule in Palestine, a coin for paying the tax; they bring a denarius (**22:19**). When he asks whose image and name are on the coin, they answer “Caesar’s” (**22:20**). From his divine perception of the relativity of all earthly powers, he teaches the utter transcendence of divine rule as well as the legitimate authority of earthly rule. “Then render the things of Caesar to Caesar and the things of God to God” (**22:21**). His words invite men to live for God while fulfilling their obligations in the earthly kingdom. He reveals that within each person is a sanctuary where God alone claims allegiance. We can and must give that allegiance whatever temporal obligations we are bound by. The demands of God have to do with conversion of heart, of recognizing the one who speaks for him, of acknowledging his lordship and doing his will. Such duties can be executed in any earthly kingdom. Never had the distinction between the transcendent and temporal domains and the legitimacy of each been so clearly stated. Jesus’ interrogators can only wonder at his answer, leave him and slip away (**22:22**).

The second attempt to trip up Jesus in his words is made by the Sadducees, who deny that there is a resurrection (**22:23**). They have found an argument which will show the absurdity of the idea of resurrection, which they know Jesus to have preached (cf. 16:21, 17:23, 19:29, 20:19). Like the Pharisees, they address the “teacher”: how could a woman who had seven successive husbands, each of whom died, live as the wife of all seven in the resurrection from the dead? (**22:24-28**). For the Mosaic Law required that a brother should marry his deceased brother’s wife (**22:24**, cf. the teaching of Deut 25:5-6 expressed in the words of Judah to his son-in-law Onan, Gen 38:8) in order to give children to his name. For Jesus the Sadducees go astray because they know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God (**22:29**). With regard to the latter, they do not realize that God is calling each human being to a personal relationship with himself powerful enough to transcend any relationship between two human beings including marriage. The ultimate fulfillment of each human person is intimacy with God, such as the angels enjoy permanently (**22:30**). The exclusive relationship between husband and wife on earth (cf. 19:6, 9) will be transcended in heaven. It is this understanding of the nature of man that could lead Jesus to extol the forsaking of marriage as a worthy goal for a human being (cf. 19:10-12). With respect to the Scriptures, Jesus asks if they “have not read” (**22:31**; cf. 12:3, 5, 19:4, 21:16, 42) what was spoken to them by God: “I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob” (Exod 3:6). When God spoke these words to Moses in the burning bush, these three patriarchs had

long been dead; if he was still their God, as he declared he was, then they must be alive well after their deaths. Jesus knows “from inside” that God is a God not of the dead but of the living (**22:32**); after all he has spoken with Moses and Elijah (cf. 17:3). Jesus reveals clearly that the Creator of human life intends that it come to full flowering beyond the grave. This teaching opens up dazzling perspectives to the crowds (**22:33**), and the Sadducees are silenced (cf. 22:34).

Unable to accept that Jesus has again foiled his opponents, the Pharisees “gather together” like the princes who gather against the Lord and his anointed in Psalm 2:2 (**22:34**). One of their experts in the Law asks a question to put him to the test (cf. 16:1, 19:3, 22:18): “Master, which commandment is the greatest in the Law?” (**22:35-36**). Whatever he answers, they will be able to find a way to prove that he has neglected a more important commandment. Without hesitation Jesus cites the commandment to love the Lord God with one’s whole heart and with one’s whole soul and with one’s whole mind (**22:37**, cf. Deut 6:5). The command is not one of the ten commandments nor is it a command or prohibition of any specific action. Jesus has found in Israel’s *Shema* (Deut 6:4-9) the expression of what Israel’s God most profoundly seeks from his creature, a love that engages his whole being. Only God is able to engage the profoundest capacities of the creature for love. This truth was already implied in Jesus’ answer to the Sadducees (cf. on 22:30). God seeks not a particular action or set of actions or refraining from actions on the part of his creature, but the creature’s total love. All the other commandments are simply specific expressions of this love. Any other commandment the lawyers could cite as “greater” would not touch the depth of what God seeks, which is a whole-hearted choosing of the divine will, a total “Yes” to God. Only through such an act of the spirit does man fulfill his nature as a creature in the image and likeness of God. Man is capable of knowing the infinite good and committing himself to it. Jesus reiterates that this is “the great and first commandment” (**22:38**).

But man lives among other men and women also in the image of God. There could be no love of God that did not love those who are in his image and who are capable of knowing and loving him. By appending a “second” commandment “like” the first, Jesus is giving his hearers a way of manifesting their love for the God who is, after all, invisible. He finds the formulation of this command in Leviticus: “You must love your neighbor as yourself” (**22:39**; cf. Lev 19:18). With the Old Testament Jesus grounds love of neighbor in the human person’s built-in love of his own existence. By its very nature the creature is attached to its own good, and the human creature to its own expansion in being. Since the human person is in the image of God it will be attached to its own existence at the same time as it is invited to affirm its dependence on the creator of being. These ontological and anthropological perspectives are latent in biblical thought and will later be developed and elucidated by Christian theology and philosophy. In proclaiming to the Pharisees that “on these two commandments hang the whole law and the prophets” (**22:40**) Jesus is giving his Church the firm foundation of its moral life. Love of God and neighbor will be the Christian’s first and last responsibility. The ten commandments themselves had already shown this twofold obligation, the first three commanding duties to the Lord and the other seven right behavior toward the neighbor.

The double commandment of love gives definitive expression to the demands of God on man that Jesus has already proclaimed. He has taught that we must love our enemies (5:44), forgive others from the heart (6:14, 18:21-22, 35), treat them as we wish them to treat us (7:12), do the will of his Father (7:21, 12:50), show mercy (5:7, 9:13, 12:7), give a cup of cold water to his “little ones” (10:42) and not despise them (18:10), serve only one master (6:24, 33, also 5:8), serve rather than seek to be served (20:26-28). These injunctions can be viewed

as specific manifestations of the twofold command of love. The love which Jesus commands is the full flowering of the faith in him which is the fundamental response that he seeks (cf. 8:10, 9:22, 13:58). By acknowledging him as Lord we receive the Spirit that cleanses us from sin and empowers us to imitate his love (cf. 20:28). He does not ask of us a love which he does not give us the power to exercise.

Jesus has only one unfinished piece of business vis-à-vis the Pharisees in Jerusalem. Having condemned their rejection of him and eluded their theological traps, he unequivocally asserts his identity as Messiah. It is his turn to question the Pharisees, “gathered together” like the hostile nations of Psalm 2:2 against the Lord’s anointed (**22:41**; cf. 22:34). He asks what they think about the Christ: whose son is he? The answer is clear to every Jew: God’s anointed is a descendant of David (**22:42**; cf. 1:1, etc.). Jesus then points out an apparent inconsistency in the messianic psalm 110. Since the psalm is attributed to David, who is speaking “in the spirit,” how can David, in the first line of the psalm, refer to his own son [descendant] as his lord? (**22:43**). For David quotes a statement made by God to the Messiah: “The Lord said to my lord, ‘Sit at my right until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’” Jesus quotes in full the Old Testament verse which will be cited more frequently in the New Testament than any other verse (**22:44**). The psalm implies that the Messiah is in some way greater than David himself, particularly if the term “lord” (*kyrios*) is accepted in its Septuagint significance as referring to God himself, Yahweh. Jesus does not draw out the obvious implication but leaves his hearers to draw the conclusion, simply asking, “If David calls the Messiah ‘lord,’ how can this Messiah be [nothing more than] his ‘son’?” (**22:45**). Clearly the Messiah is to be of a higher order than any member of the Davidic dynasty.

Jesus has emerged from the debates with the Pharisees as the clear victor, for no one was able to answer him or dared from that day on to ask him any more questions (**22:46**). Jesus has confronted the authorities with the mystery of his person, a mystery to which all his actions and words have pointed and which men must accept to be saved. Greater than David, greater than Solomon, greater than Jonah, greater than the sabbath, greater than the temple, this man is to be honored as Lord. Only those who acknowledge him in faith can receive the messianic blessings he brings. With this clear and provocative statement to the officials in Jerusalem Jesus has completed the work of his public ministry. In the discourses of the three following chapters he will describe the various fates of those who accept or reject him.

Jesus now turns to the ordinary people (“crowds”) and his disciples (**23:1**) and speaks of the scribes and Pharisees who occupy the seats of Moses (**23:2**), i.e., interpret and administer the Law. Jesus affirms and supports their teaching authority. Everything they say should be done and observed; however their deeds should not be imitated, for “they speak but do not do” (**23:3**). Jesus, of course, on several occasions did not do what the Pharisees taught, as in the matter of picking grain or healing on the sabbath (cf. 12:1-14). Yet he chastised the Pharisees for clinging to their own human regulations about sabbath observance and sacrificial offerings (cf. 15:3, 9) while ignoring essential precepts of the Law like honoring one’s parents (cf. 15:4-6). The believer is bound to obey the precepts of the Law that enjoin behavior in accordance with the will of God which is love (cf. 12:7, 11-12, 19:17-19, 22:37-39). The Pharisees and scribes must be obeyed when teaching these things, even if they do not act according to them. Jesus upholds their authority much as he upheld that of the Roman emperor (cf. 22:21).

The critique of Jesus is based on the fact that the officials “bind up heavy loads” and place them on men’s shoulders without exerting a finger to remove

them **(23:4)**. These burdens (cf. 11:28) are the regulations by which human beings sought to ensure the observance of the divine will. If certain clear external requirements were fulfilled, man could assure himself that he was pleasing to God, even if he closed his heart to those who found these regulations burdensome or even impossible to bear. External conformity would replace conversion of heart; ritual would replace love, and the purpose of the Law would be frustrated. Once again Jesus demonstrates his compassion (cf. 9:36, 11:28-30, 12:11-13, 14:14, 15:32). The Pharisees are interested only in the show of religion, the “glory of men” (cf. John 5:44, 12:43). All their works are performed “to be seen by men” **(23:5)**, cf. 6:1, 2, 5, 16) rather than to be seen by God. Jesus gives examples of behaviors that have no purpose other than to call attention to the supposed holiness of those who practice them: the widening of phylacteries, those containers of the Shema¹ worn by pious Jews on forehead and arm (cf. Deut 6:8); the lengthening of the tassels originally meant to “remind” the wearer of “all the commands of Yahweh so that he might perform them” (cf. Num 15:38-39); love for the first places at banquets and in synagogues **(23:6)** and for salutations in the market places and for being addressed by men as “rabbi” **(23:7)**. For people such as these religion has become a means of self-glorification.

Jesus contrasts with the scribes and Pharisees the absence of self-exaltation that must obtain in his Church. He abolishes the title “Rabbi” among his followers since they have only one teacher **(23:8)**, i.e., the Christ (cf. v. 10); they all enjoy equal status as “brothers” (cf. 12:49-50). No human being is to be called “Father” since they have been given life by their one “Father in heaven” **(23:9)**; cf. 5:45, 48, 6:1 and esp. 6:9, 7:26, 32, 18:14). Any man who is called Father in the Christian community is no father in his own right but only as a representative of the Father in heaven and his Son Jesus Christ, from whom comes all life. Nor is anyone to be called “teacher” (word used only in this verse in the New Testament), since Christ is the one teacher **(23:10)**; the verse repeats the idea of verse 8 but with a Greek instead of a Hebrew title. The picture of the church that emerges from these verses is similar to that of 12:46-50: Jesus, Son of the heavenly Father, makes men his brothers by teaching them when they welcome his word.

Jesus goes further: not only will there be no distinctions, no honorary titles in his Church, but the “greater” among his disciples will be their servant (*diakonos*; 23:11; see already 20:26). Holiness, closeness to God, will consist not in lording it over others, in calling attention to oneself, but in serving. This was the stance of Jesus himself (cf. 20:28) and so must be the stance of his brothers (cf. John 13:14-16). The Pharisees served themselves rather than others: Jesus now identifies their fault as their exalting of self, and contrasts it with the “humbling of oneself” which he has already taught as the requirement for entering the kingdom of heaven (cf. 18:3-4). Jesus knows that his followers will be tempted by the same desire for greatness as the Pharisees (cf. 18:1). In his pithy teaching, “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted” **(23:12)**, he rejoins a major theme of the Old Testament (cf. Job 22:29, Prov 29:23, Ezek 21:31, Ps 147:6), one enshrined also in the Magnificat of Saint Luke’s Gospel (cf. Luke 1:48, 52). A humble person accepts his identity as a child of God, not trying to be someone greater than he is, not rejecting the particular greatness the Lord has given him. A humble person enjoys the being he has been given and gives it back to God in thanksgiving and service. A humble person seeks not to dominate but to serve. The humble person par excellence is Jesus (cf. 11:29, Phil 2:8), who came not to be served but to serve (cf. 20:28). Authority in his church will be the authority of service. The Christian pastor will be

modeled on Christ, in whose name he works. He will extend into the Church of his time the humble service of Christ.

But Jesus must return to the denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees to make clear the deadliness of their arrogance. In the remainder of the chapter he will utter seven “Woes,” condemning in ever more severe language the crimes and punishment of arrogant leadership. The officials make rules that exclude people from the kingdom of heaven and by so doing bring about their own exclusion from it (**23:13**); they are not interested in welcoming people into God’s family. At this point a saying from Mark 12:40 and Luke 20:47 about devouring the property of widows and making a display of lengthy prayers is inserted in some manuscripts of Matthew’s Gospel (**23:14**) but does not seem to have been part of Matthew’s original. The Pharisees will traverse sea and land to make a single convert, but when they have done so they will make him twice as fit for hell as they are (**23:15**). This can only be because they infect the new convert with their own arrogance rather than leading him to humble submission before God.

The third Woe (23:16-22) is longer, the longest of the seven. Jesus’s opponents are “blind guides” because they are so focused on the wording of oaths that they miss the spiritual significance that gives meaning to the oaths. They value the gold of the temple as a more sacred commodity than the temple itself (**23:16**), forgetting that this gold has religious value only because of its use in the temple, the house of God. The dazzle of the rich mineral has blinded these “fools” (cf. Deut 32:6, Ps 94:8, Jer 5:21) to the spiritual presence of the Lord, which “sanctifies” the gold (**23:17**). Similarly they blindly prize the gift on the altar more than the altar itself which sanctifies the gift (**23:18-19**). As so often Jesus arouses their attention by the questioning mode (vv. 17, 19; cf. 22:42-45, 21:25, 31, 40). In the second section of the Woe, vv. 20-22, Jesus amplifies his point in three parallel statements of rising importance. He treats the altar and the temple in reverse order from verses 16-19 and adds a final comment on heaven as a reality by which one swears (cf. 5:34). Swearing by the altar includes swearing by all the objects on it (**23:20**); swearing by the temple means swearing by the God who dwells there (**23:21**); swearing by heaven means swearing by the throne of God situated there and the one who is seated on it (**23:22**). Jesus draws the religious attention of men from preoccupation with objects of earth to the divine person at the heart of Jewish religion. One’s humble attitude to him is of more importance than reliance on human casuistry.

In the fourth Woe Jesus resumes the epithet “hypocrites” from the first two Woes (cf. 23:13, 15). As in the third Woe Jesus drew attention from material objects to the person behind the objects, so now he draws attention from insignificant tithes to the weightier matters of the Law. Persons were obliged to pay tithes on agricultural produce; the scribes and Pharisees applied the precept to the tiniest herbs—mint and dill and cummin, but neglected the Law’s (and God’s) major concerns—justice (cf. Exod 23:2, Lev 19:15, Deut 1:16-17, Ps 82:3) and mercy (cf. Mic 6:8) and faithfulness (cf. 1 Sam 12:24). It was not simply that these officials put minor legal matters on the same level as essential principles, but that they focused on the former even to the neglect of the latter. It was easier to assure one’s holiness by performing a petty obligation than by assuring that the rights of the needy and afflicted were respected. Again Jesus calls men to the intention of God that man should mirror God’s goodness to his creatures. Jesus would not mind if men paid tithes on tiny plants as long as they paid appropriate attention to the Law’s essential demands (**23:23**). Jesus underscores the blindness of the leaders (cf. 23:16) with a hyperbole: they will carefully strain out a gnat from a drink while mindlessly swallowing a whole camel (**23:24**). Cautious in minutiae they thwart the Law’s true purpose.

The fifth Woe castigates preoccupation with external purity as opposed to inner purity. Scribes and Pharisees purify the outside of chalice and dish but fill the inside of them with plunder and self-indulgence (**23:25**, unless it is the leaders themselves who are filled with these vices, as in the parallel saying in Luke 11:39). It is purity of heart that God wants (cf. 5:8); interior virtue takes priority over ritual cleanness. The “blind Pharisee” (cf. vv. 16, 17, 19, 24, John 9:39-41) is called to purify the inside of the cup, that is, eliminate vice, so that the outside too will be automatically purified (**23:26**). Again Jesus opposes exterior and human regulations with the interior and divine Law (cf. 15:7-9).

The contrast between exterior and interior is applied directly to the scribes and Pharisees in the following Woe (**23:27-28**). These “hypocrites” are like whitewashed tombs which outwardly appear comely but inside are full of dead bones and all rottenness. In Jesus’s angry words one can smell the stench of vice. Jesus explains the simile by saying that the officials outwardly appear to men to be just (a favorite word of Saint Matthew, cf. 10:41) but inwardly are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness, a pair of vices similar to that of 23:25. The concern for human appearances was already chastised by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. 6:1-2, 5, 16). Jesus’ pretention to a knowledge of men’s souls could not but rouse the fury of the authorities, and Jesus shows that he is aware of this in the final Woe.

As in all the Woes except the third the leaders are addressed in the final Woe as “hypocrites.” They build the tombs (cf. 23:27) of the prophets and adorn the sepulchers of the “just” (**23:29**; cf. 23:28), claiming they would never have been implicated in the shedding of the prophets’ blood as their ancestors were (**23:30**). Jesus sees in their claim a recognition that they are truly “sons” of their ancestors because they behave like them (cf. the use of “sons” of the “heavenly Father” in 5:44-45: sonship = imitation) in murdering the prophets (**23:31**). In this most terrible and timely of Woes Jesus forecasts his own imminent death at the hands of the officials, telling them to finish off what their ancestors began (**23:32**). Jesus has spared no words in denouncing the arrogance and iniquity of the Jewish leaders. Nothing but an acknowledgement of their sins and repentance, nothing but an acknowledgement of the truth of Jesus’s judgment, can soften their hearts and win them forgiveness, but with the exception of a few (cf. John 3:1-2, 7:50-51, 19:39) they could not make this submission.

The rage of Jesus culminates in a proclamation of final judgment on these “serpents” and “brood of vipers” (term used by John, 3:7, and then by Jesus, 12:34). How will they escape the judgment of gehenna (**23:33**; cf. 5:22, 29-30, 10:28)? Their rejection of the Author of life must end in death. Picking up on the theme of slaying of prophets from the seventh Woe, Jesus asserts that in the future he will be in a position to send to his people prophets and wise men and scribes; some of these they will kill and crucify, and others they will whip in their synagogues and drive from city to city (**23:34**). The risen Christ will send (*apostellō*) men like the apostle James who will be killed (cf. Acts 12:2) and Paul who will be whipped (cf. Acts 16:22-23, 2 Cor 11:23-24) and hounded from town to town (cf. Acts 13:50, 14:5-6, 19-20, 16:39, 17:10, 13-15). Jesus had already predicted this whipping (10:17) and persecuting (10:23) to his apostles. Those who preach Christ will suffer his same fate. On the persecutors of Jesus’s envoys will fall the punishment of all who shed the blood of just men from the just Abel (a type of the “just man” of 23:29; cf. Gen 4:8-12) till Zechariah (a type of the “prophet” of 23:29; cf. 2 Chr 24:20-22) son of Barachiah (name similar to that given to the father of the Zechariah of Isa 8:2 (Jeberechiah) or the father of the prophet of Zech 1:1 (Berechiah)), slain in the court between the temple and the altar (**23:35**). This Zechariah would be another of the servants sent to claim the produce of the vineyard (cf. 21:38-39) only to be put to death. The rejection of

Christ crystallizes all the opposition of men to God throughout history, and in that sense he is the cause of their judgment (John 3:17-18, 12:47-48). The punishment that comes on “this generation” (**23:36**; cf. 11:16, 12:41, 42, 45) is that which comes on all who reject God’s loving offer of salvation.

Jesus’s blistering invective against the leaders ends in an impassioned lament over the holy city. The twofold addressing of Jerusalem betrays his deep sorrow. The city where God chose to dwell (cf. Ps 132:13-14, 46:5-6, 48:9, 87:1-2) has slain the prophets (cf. vv. 31, 34) and stoned (cf. 21:35, Acts 7:58-59) those sent (cf. v. 34) to her. Jesus, whose language during the speech has begun to sound more like that of God than that of man (cf. vv. 25-28, 34), now openly applies Old Testament divine imagery to himself. How often he wished to gather the children of Jerusalem under his wings, like a mother bird her chicks (**23:37**). The Jews often spoke of taking shelter under Yahweh’s wings, whether the expression denoted the wings of the cherubs spread over the ark in the Temple and considered to be the throne of the Lord, or figurative wings of a protecting mother bird (cf. Pss 17:8, 36:8, 57:2, 61:5, 63:8, 91:4). Not just in his earthly life but as God of the Hebrews Jesus has wanted to shelter his people in his love, but they did not wish it: God’s willing is met/thwarted by man’s unwilling. The Jews have refused to become little children drawing life from their Father (cf. 18:3-4, 19:13). Therefore their “house will be left” to them (**23:38**, conflation of Jer 22:5 and 12:7), that is, the temple of God will be left deserted of its God at the resurrection of Jesus when his body becomes the definitive and eternal temple of God (21:42-43, 27:51, John 2:19-22). The reference to the Temple fits Jesus’ addressing of “Jerusalem” (v. 37), the suggestion of the wings of the cherubs over the ark in the pre-exilic Temple, and the Temple as the goal of Jesus’ triumphal entry and the object of his cleansing action. The whole speech ends with Jesus’s solemn pronouncement (**23:39**) that the officials of Jerusalem will see him no more until they are compelled to bless him when he “comes in the name of the Lord” (cf. 21:9), that is, appears in triumph at the final judgment (cf. 25:31-32, 26:64). At that moment they will know that the one they have rejected is Lord in the glory of his Father (cf. 16:27).

The scribes and Pharisees will be left to their fate. Meanwhile Jesus must instruct his disciples about what they can expect during the waiting period between his death and his coming as judge. Jesus leaves the temple area, but his disciples are still ravished by the grandeur of its buildings which they point out for Jesus’s admiration (**24:1**). As he indicated cryptically at the end of the previous chapter (cf. 23:38), Jesus solemnly prophesies that the temple will be leveled, not one stone left upon a stone (**24:2**). As he takes his seat on the Mount of Olives opposite the Temple, the disciples alone approach to inquire when these events will happen and what will be the sign of Jesus’s final coming and the “completion of the age” (**24:3**). The latter phrase is found in Matthew alone (cf. 13:39, 40, 49); it refers to the coming of Jesus as judge.

Jesus’s first response is a warning to the disciples not to be misled by deceivers (**24:4**). Many will come in his name declaring that they are Christ, and many will be fooled by them (**24:5**). Many persons will take part of Christ’s message and make a plausible case for their own messiahship; these are seeking their own glory, like the Pharisees (cf. 23:5-7), not Christ’s. Nor should the disciples be shaken when they hear of wars and rumors of wars, since such things “must happen,” that is, are part of the unfolding of God’s plan (cf. Dan 2:28), but they do not constitute the “end” of that plan (**24:6**). Jesus develops the theme of war with allusions to the prophecies of Azariah in Second Chronicles (“nation against nation,” 2 Chron 15:6) and Isaiah (“will rise against,” Isa 19:2). To wars Jesus adds famines and earthquakes in various places (**24:7**).

Christians should not be surprised at these apocalyptic events, which are, as it were, the last manifestations of evil against the approaching benign kingdom of God. It will be important for Christians to hold on to the promise of God in faith as they suffer these cataclysms. They are the “beginning of pangs” (**24:8**) like the pangs of a woman about to give birth. Christians will suffer as did their Lord (cf. 12:38, 16:24). They will be a particular target of persecution because of the name of Christ: they will be handed over (cf. 10:17, 19) to tribulation and killed (cf. 23:34) and hated by all peoples (24:9; 10:22a has simply “hated by all”), as Jesus himself is hated (cf. John 15:18-19). Those who adhere to a transcendent God are hated by those who do not wish to relinquish control in this world. Jesus repeats the teaching of the Apostolic Discourse (Chapter 10) but now directs it to all the disciples. He echoes the language of Daniel in saying that “many will fall away” (cf. Dan 11:41), but he is referring to Christians whose faith will not carry them through the “pangs.” These will “hand one another over” (cf. 24:9) [to persecution] and hate (cf. 24:9) one another (**24:10**). The trials have progressed from distant wars to natural disasters to external persecution to internal strife. Jesus foresees dissension even within the Church. Many false prophets will “arise” (cf. v. 7) and like the false Christs (cf. v. 5) will deceive many with spurious teaching (**24:11**). Through the increase of lawlessness, the love (only use of the noun *agapē* in Matthew) of many (fourth use of this word in three verses) will “grow cold” (**24:12**; the latter verb a hapax in the New Testament). The love which Jesus has commanded (cf. 5:44, 22:37-39) and manifested in the world will seem to evaporate among the hatred and degeneracy of mankind. Only the Christian who does not lose faith during these times but “endures to the end” (cf. v. 6) will be saved (**24:13**), as Jesus has already taught in 10:22b. While working for the Christian transformation of society, Jesus’ disciples must not expect an earthly utopia or be surprised by the violence of the opposition they encounter. Their faith in the triumph of Jesus and its ultimate manifestation must carry them through. The “end” will come only when Jesus’ “gospel of the kingdom” has been proclaimed in the whole world as a “witness to all the peoples” (**24:14**). The gospel which Jesus himself has proclaimed (cf. 4:23, 9:35) will be carried by the disciples to “all nations” (cf. 28:19) of the world, since God wants all men to be saved (1 Tim 2:3-4). The proclamation of the saving mystery of Jesus is a “witness” to men of the divine plan and offers life to those who accept it.

Till now Jesus has spoken of the sufferings to come in general terms. He now presents some graphic signs of the coming of the end and advises his disciples how to behave when they occur. The foulest profanation of divine things that occurred in the Old Testament was the erection of the statue of Zeus in the Jerusalem temple by Antiochus Epiphanes IV in 167 B.C. The apocalyptic seer Daniel called this statue the “detestable thing causing the desolation of the holy place” (cf. Dan 9:27, 11:31, 12:11, 1 Macc 1:54). Jesus applies this phrase to the situation that will immediately precede his final coming: God’s very presence on earth will in some way be profaned (**24:15**). The reader is cautioned to exercise his intelligence in order to recognize this profanation. When it happens (“then,” cf. vv. 9, 10, 14) those in Judea should flee to the hills away from the cities (**24:16**), the man on a roof must not descend to collect his possessions from his house (**24:17**), nor the man in the field turn back to fetch his cloak (**24:18**). Readiness for the inbreaking of God must take precedence over clutching the things of this world. Jesus pronounces a special woe for those with child or nursing infants at the breast; they are engaged in the transmission of life at the moment when life on earth is coming to an end (**24:19**). Returning to the theme of flight (cf. v. 16), he tells disciples to pray that they not have to flee in winter because of the cold or on the sabbath because of the proscription against movement (**24:20**). For “then” (cf. v. 16) there will be great tribulation (cf. v. 9), such as has not been since the

beginning of the world till the present nor ever will be **(24:21)**. Again the Lord alludes to the vision of Daniel (cf. Dan 12:1) concerning the distress associated with the “disastrous abomination.” The trials of the Jews in the time of the Maccabees are taken by Jesus as an emblem of the trials preceding his final coming (cf. 1 Macc 9:27). So great will the suffering be that “no flesh” would be saved unless God were to shorten the number of days of suffering; for the sake of those whom God has chosen that number will be shortened **(24:22)**. This section of the discourse ends as the previous section with an opening for salvation (cf. 24:13).

A new section opens with the now familiar “then.” Jesus varies the theme of 24:5, warning disciples not to believe if someone says, “Behold, here is the Christ, or there” **(24:23)**. For there will rise up (cf. v. 11) false Christs and false prophets (cf. v. 11) who will perform great signs and wonders so as to deceive (cf. vv. 4, 11), if possible, even the “chosen” **(24:24; cf. v. 22)**. Here the Lord is alluding to the warning of Deuteronomy against prophets who promise signs and wonders which then come about but who use their success to lure people away from the true God (cf. Deut 13:2-4). Jesus implies that the disciples will have some internal criterion for recognizing who are false and who are genuine prophets, something like the principle enunciated in the Sermon on the Mount: “by their fruits you shall know them” (7:16). The one whose life is in conformity with the will of God as manifested in Jesus and his Church is the one to be believed. The disciples are forewarned that genuine authority will be contested **(24:25)**. Jesus gives a vivid application of the false reports of v. 23: if the Christ or the prophet is reported to be in the desert, people should not go out to see (cf. 11:7); if he is reported in the inner chambers, they should not “believe” **(24:26; cf. v. 23)**. The “coming of the Son of Man” (designation not seen since 19:28, 20:18, 28), which is what the disciples will be waiting for (cf. v. 3), will be as clearly discernible as lightning flashing from the east to the west **(24:27)**. One will be as instinctively aware of it as vultures are of the rotting corpse where they gather **(24:28; or does this mean the flocking of eagles to the body of the risen Christ?)**. Those who live in a faith communion with the risen Christ will instinctively recognize him when he comes. The images of these two verses draw attention to the sky where the Son of Man will come (cf. v. 30, 26:64, 1 Thess 4:16-17).

After recounting the woes of the period of waiting and warning against false messiahs and prophets, Jesus is ready to launch into the magnificent description of his final coming. After the “tribulation [cf. vv. 9, 21] of those days” will occur the celestial phenomena that the Book of Isaiah prophesied would accompany God’s punishment of the Babylonian oppressors and the liberation of his people (cf. Isa 13:10). The sun will be darkened and the moon will not give her light and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken **(24:29; Jesus moves the clauses on the sun and the moon from the end to the beginning of the verse; the references to stars “falling” and to “the powers of heaven” come from Isa 34:4, the prophecy of Yahweh’s vengeance against Edom)**. No one who hears this verse can ever forget it, so graphic a reminder it is of the divine power to change the framework of our existence. For Jesus one can only say that a new creation is being envisaged; the world will need to be remade by the creator so that it contains no evil. The elimination of the heavenly bodies from the sky leaves room for the appearance of the sign of the Son of Man, to be seen by all the tribes of the earth who will mourn as they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory **(24:30)**. Jesus replaces the heavenly bodies; men mourn (word originally from the expression “beat the breast”) because the reckoning of their sins is at hand. Jesus echoes the mysterious passage in Zechariah which recounts the mourning of various tribes in Judah for one “whom they have pierced,” mourning like that for a

“firstborn son” (cf. Zech 12:10-14). Here the tribes are the nations of the earth, over whom dominion was given in Daniel’s vision of the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven into the presence of the Ancient of Days (cf. Dan 7:13-14). Jesus has adroitly, powerfully, and succinctly applied to himself and his final coming key Old Testament passages about God’s final judgment entrusted to a human figure in a context of grief. He becomes a cosmic figure destined for the elimination of evil from the universe. “Power and glory” (cf. 16:27) are his defining attributes. He will execute his will and radiate divine glory. The purpose of his coming will be to gather his “chosen,” those who have been faithful to him throughout the trials (cf. vv. 22, 24), into his kingdom (**24:31**). This Son of Man, who is Jesus himself, will have the angels at his service (cf. 4:11, 13:41, 16:27) to be sent “with a great trumpet” (cf. Isa 27:13) to gather his people from the four winds (Zech 2:10) from one end of heaven to the other (Deut 30:4). The three Old Testament allusions in this verse all refer to God’s gathering of his scattered people—whether from Assyria and Egypt, from Babylon, or from the “ends of the heavens”—back to his holy land and city. Promises of the Law and the prophets are to be fulfilled at the final coming (*parousia*) of Jesus. Jesus is the way the prophecies are fulfilled.

Jesus recedes from the glorious vision to revisit the theme of how the disciples will recognize the coming of the end. He uses the fig tree to teach a lesson, although a very different one than he taught via a fig tree in 21:18-19 or 7:16. The becoming tender of the branches of the tree and its putting forth leaves are automatic signs of summer’s approach (**24:32**). The wars, natural disasters, persecutions, worldwide preaching, idolatry, terrible tribulation, false messiahs, heavenly cataclysms which Jesus has spoken of in this discourse are signs that the Lord’s coming is imminent. There is an inevitability about this coming that is like that of the attraction of the corpse for the vultures (cf. v. 28). Jesus’ purpose is not so much to answer the disciples’ question about “When” his coming will occur (cf. 24:3) as to show that the world’s woes are to be resolved at his coming, whenever it may be. The turmoil that he has described is to be seen as the preparation of his establishment of the kingdom of peace. One might even say that the turmoil is a sign of hope: it is what the Lord has come to turn to good. Seeing “these things” the disciples will know that Christ “is near, even at the gates” (**24:33**). In fact, Jesus solemnly declares that a striking manifestation of “these things” will take place before the generation of his contemporaries passes away (**24:34**). He is referring to the destruction of the Temple by the Romans that would take place in 70 C.E., which could be regarded as a sign that God’s kingdom on earth was no longer to be found in Israel but in the body of Christian believers. The final coming of Christ has, as it were, begun to occur in the destruction of the Temple, continues throughout the ages, and will be fully manifest at an unknown future time. Just as the generations of men “pass away” (cf. 24:34), so the heavens and the earth will “pass away” (**24:35**), while the Lord’s words proclaim a definitive state of things that will not pass away but unfold in the fullness of time. When “that day” will occur is not known by the angels of heaven or by the “Son” (cf. 2:15, 3:17, 11:27, 14:33, 16:16, 17:5) but only by the Father (cf. 6:9, 11:25-27, 16:27). Here the Son of God who has so often in the Gospel, and in this discourse in particular, manifested divine attributes and spoken as one who knows the mind of the Father shows that as a human being he shares in the human ignorance of what it is not necessary for man to know (**24:36**). It will be a natural step from this truth to the teaching that men and women must be ready at every moment for the inbreaking of God into the world (cf. vv. 42ff.).

Since it is not given to men, not even to the Son of Man, to know when they will be called to account for their lives on earth, it is necessary to live in

constant readiness for that moment. Jesus illustrates the consequences of not doing so with the story of Noah (**24:37**). Before the disaster people were preoccupied with eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, right up till the day “Noah entered the ark” (**24:38**; cf. Gen 7:7). They did not see the disaster coming and so were swept away; so will it be at the coming of the Son of Man (**24:39**). Two persons may be engaged in the same activity, for example, men working together in a field (**24:40**) or women grinding at the mill (**24:41**), but only the one whose heart is set on God will be “taken” [to God] and the other will be left. No human association can substitute for the individual person’s alertness for God.

For the rest of the chapter Jesus develops this theme of alertness. Men must “watch,” for they do not know on what day their Lord (master?) will come (**24:42**). Every day they must be ready for him. Jesus illustrates the concept with a mini-parable. If a householder knew at what watch of the night a thief would “come” (verb used four times in five verses), he would “watch” and not allow his house to be broken into (**24:43**). So too the disciples must be “ready” because at an hour they do not expect the Son of Man will come (**24:44**). Vigilance and readiness are synonymous. The remainder of the discourse, before the final great judgment scene, will consist of three developed parables on readiness.

The first parable has in common with the mini-parable of vv. 43-44 the theme of watching over a household. Here it is a question of a servant in charge of feeding a household of slaves. Jesus asks who is the faithful and prudent servant whom the master assigns to give food to the slaves at the proper time (**24:45**). Blessed is the servant whose master finds him doing so when he “comes” (**24:46**). Jesus seems to have in mind authorities in his church who will be responsible for “feeding the flock” (cf. Acts 20:28, Matt 14:16), yet nearly every Christian will have similar responsibilities for ministering to the needs of those entrusted to him. Here the disciple shows his readiness for the Lord by keeping to the Master’s instructions even in the Master’s absence. He not only “hears” but “does” (cf. 7:21, 24). His obedience is the offspring of genuine faith. The Master will accordingly reward him by placing him over all his possessions (**24:47**). But Jesus gives more time to describing the unfaithful servant who says “in his heart” that the Master is late in coming (**24:48**) and sees in the delay an excuse for beating his fellow servants and eating and drinking with drunkards (**24:49**). This man’s Master, coming on a day he does not expect and at an hour he does not foresee (**24:50**), will “cut off” the servant, allotting him a share with the “hypocrites” where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (**24:51**; same formula in 8:12, 13:42, 50, 22:13). The man qualifies as a hypocrite since he is unfaithful to his profession (cf. 6:2, 5, 16, 15:7, 16:3, 22:18, 23:13-15, 23-29). Not a doer of the word, he can have no part with Christ.

The second great “readiness” parable, like the first, extols those who are “prudent” (cf. 25:2). Jesus likens the kingdom of heaven (cf. 22:1, 23:13) to ten virgins who, taking their lamps, go to meet the bridegroom (**25:1**). Their task is to welcome the bridegroom when he comes with his bride to the wedding feast. Jesus has already hinted that he is the bridegroom of Israel (cf. 9:15, 22:2). His final coming can be seen as his taking his spouse, the Church, to himself. The wedding feast is the celebration of this union between God and his people (cf. Rev 19:7-9). God will be the host, the bridegroom, and the food of this banquet. Of the ten virgins, five were foolish (cf. 7:26) and five wise (**25:2**; cf. 7:24, 24:45). The former brought with them no oil for their lamps (**25:3**), failing to consider that the bridegroom might be late (like the master of the previous parable, cf. 24:48). The prudent virgins brought vessels of oil with their lamps (**25:4**). At the bridegroom’s delay all nodded and fell asleep (**25:5**). At midnight came the cry, “The bridegroom is here; go out to meet him” (**25:6**). All rose to trim their lamps

(25:7), but the foolish found that their oil had run out and tried to borrow from the others **(25:8)**. The prudent virgins refused, knowing that giving away their oil would prevent them from fulfilling their own responsibility; they recommended that the foolish virgins go off to the merchants and buy oil **(25:9)**. No sooner had they left than the bridegroom came, the prudent virgins entered the wedding feast with him (cf. the Emmanuel theme, 1:23, 9:15), and the door was closed **(25:10)**. The last clause has a deathly finality. Finally the other virgins arrive beseeching the master to open to them in the same words as the false disciples in the Sermon on the Mount: “Lord, Lord” **(25:11)**; cf. 7:21-22). But the master will solemnly declare, as he did to those false disciples, that he does not know them **(25:12)**; cf. 7:23). The moral of the story is clear: “Watch therefore, for you know not the day nor the hour” **(25:13)**. The parable is a memorable expansion of the theme of 7:21-23. In both cases disciples failed to take seriously the demands of the Gospel, the one group mistaking miracle-working for discipleship, the other not taking to heart the priority of the kingdom. The foolish virgins are like the disciples who receive the word with joy but have no deep root in them (cf. 13:20-21). They do not follow through on their allegiance to the master (cf. 6:24).

Jesus expects the grace he will win for mankind to bear fruit in good works (cf. 7:16-20, 12:33-37, 5:14-16, 7:24-25, 12:50, 13:23, 21:18-19). In the final parable about readiness for his coming, he likens the help that comes to the disciple through faith to weights of precious metal known as “talents” and used as money. A man going on a journey calls his servants and entrusts his property to them **(25:14)**. To one he gives five talents, to another two, and to a third one, to each according to his ability to put the money to work by investing it; then he departs **(25:15)**. The first two servants quickly go off to trade with the money and double the values they received **(25:16-17)**. The third servant digs a hole in the ground and buries his master’s money **(25:18)**. After a long time the master of these servants comes and settles accounts (cf. 18:23-24) with them **(25:19)**. The first two proudly bring their earnings and hear the commendation of the master: “Well done, good and faithful [cf. 24:45] servant, over small things you were faithful, over many I will place you; enter the joy of your master” **(25:20-23)**. “The master’s joy” is the equivalent of the wedding feast in the previous parable, but here there is the added reward of some authority in the kingdom (cf. 19:28). After hearing the reward of the first two servants, the third begins his account with an excuse: knowing that the master was a “hard” man (adjective applied in the LXX to punishers of Egypt, Isa 19:4, and to rebellious Israel, Isa 48:4), reaping where he did not sow and gathering where he did not scatter **(25:24)**. He feels that by providing seed money to others who will use it to produce goods or new wealth, the master is taking what he did not work for. The servant overlooks that it was the man’s initial fund that provided the wherewithal for the development of the new wealth. He is pusillanimous and cautious, lacking faith in the power of God’s gifts to multiply themselves, that is, to be “seeds.” He “fears” capital investment, does not see God’s gift as something to be put to work and returns it undeveloped **(25:25)**. He seeks to control what needs to grow by being given away. He has not trusted in the power of the gift. The master calls the servant “wicked and lazy,” since he knew his master’s habit and intention but lacked the trust to act in conformity with him **(25:26)**. He ought to have put the money with bankers so that on his return the master could recover his money with interest **(25:27)**. His unused talent will be taken from him and given to the one who multiplied his five talents. The wicked servant could not be said to have possessed the master’s talent because he did not accept it in all its potential. Since he does not really have what he seems to have, Jesus can say that what he has will be taken away, while those who have accepted the gift in its potential for growth will receive even more **(25:29)**. The saying is a duplicate of 13:12; in

both cases the person who “has” is the one who submits his life to the power of God in Jesus, allowing this power to make him fruitful. It is impossible truly to accept Jesus in one’s heart without being changed in one’s behavior. The third servant never really opened his heart to receive the dynamic power of the Lord and his word (cf. the unforgiving servant who loses the forgiveness he received by not allowing it to make him a forgiving person, 18:32-35). In failing to accept the Lord he has made himself a “useless servant” to be thrown into the “outer darkness,” where there is the “weeping and gnashing of teeth” of those who have refused to accept the saving power of the Lord (**25:30**; cf. 8:12, 13:42, 50, 22:13, 24:51).

Jesus has briefly portrayed his final coming in 24:30-31. He now ends the Eschatological Discourse with a magnificent description of the judgment he will execute at this coming. As “Son of Man” (cf. 24:37, 39, 44) he will “come” (24:30, 42, 44, 25:10, 19) in his glory (19:28, 24:30) and all the angels with him (13:41, 49, 16:27, 24:31; the last phrase is drawn from the description of Yahweh’s coming to the Mount of Olives at the eschatological battle in Zech 14:5, where the LXX reads “holy ones” for “angels”). He will then sit on his throne of glory (**25:31**, cf. 19:28), his rightful place as King. All nations will be gathered before him to be separated into two groups, as a shepherd separates sheep from goats (**25:32**). Jesus has already reported that “all the tribes of the earth” will see him and mourn (24:30) and that his angels will gather his chosen ones (24:31); now it is all the nations who are gathered for judgment. The two groups that were likened to sheep and goats are actually called sheep and goats as the “shepherd” places them respectively on his right and his left (**25:33**). Jesus now calls himself the “King” (cf. 2:2, 21:5), a title he attributed to his Father in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. 5:35). His judging of men is exercised in communion with his Father who has “blessed” those on his right hand, who are now invited to inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world (**25:34**). Their lives on earth were lived in such a way that they can receive membership in the kingdom as a son would inherit his father’s estate. They did not enjoy the fullness of this inheritance as long as they were persecuted on earth. Their “inheritance” is the equivalent of the “wedding feast” of the Son (cf. 25:10) and the “joy” of the master (cf. 25:21, 23). It was what the Father earmarked for those who would be faithful to his Son.

We are now told exactly how these faithful “sheep” showed their faithfulness to the Messiah. Those who by faith and repentance have acknowledged Jesus as Lord receive the forgiveness of sins and the power to love as children of God, brothers and sisters of Jesus. Their faith empowers them to love the poor and needy as Christ loves them. Christ can even be identified with these needy ones since he cares for them and wants their relief. The disciple of Christ will thus be known by his extending to others the same love he has received. And so the criterion for being counted among the “sheep” at the last judgment will be the disciple’s living by the grace he has received and showing divine love to the needy, God’s “clients.” Jesus goes so far as to identify any human being in need with himself, the person we have come to perceive as divine and human. The neighbor for the Christian holds the place of God. The Christian fulfills the command and will of God by coming to the help of the neighbor. Christ claims that the neighbor’s hunger is his own; when the disciple assuaged it he ministered to God himself. The disciple gave drink to the thirsty Jesus, received Jesus the stranger as a guest (**25:35**). He clothed the naked Jesus, visited him sick, came to him in prison (**25:36**). Already in the Old Testament the virtuous man was characterized by feeding the hungry and clothing the naked (cf. Ezek 18:7, Job 22:6-7, Isa 58:7, Tob 4:16). These beneficent actions go beyond the largely negative precepts of the Decalogue yet

are an essential part of Israel's code of behavior. God's people must "love the stranger", for they were strangers in the land of Egypt (Deut 10:19) and must imitate the God who "sees justice done for the orphan and the widow, who loves the stranger and gives him food and clothing" (Deut 10:18). Turning one's back on the needy is the equivalent of turning one's back on God.

The "just" will not realize that in ministering to the poor they were ministering to Christ himself (**25:37-39**), but the "King" will solemnly declare that he can be identified with "one of these least brothers of mine," so that what they did to such a person they did to him (**25:40**). The "brothers" of Christ include both those who "do the will of [his] Father in heaven" by following Jesus (cf. 12:49-50, 10:40, 42) and those who are needy and therefore the object of Christ's care. The Christian must imitate the kindness of God himself. This he can only do by acknowledging Jesus as Lord (8:9-10, 10:32-33, 16:15-17), trusting in his heavenly Father (6:25-33, 10:28-31), confessing his sins (4:17, 9:12-13, 11:20-24, 12:41), obeying the Master by keeping the commandments and following him to the cross (19:17-21, 10:38, 16:24, 22:34-40), forgiving his enemies (6:14-15, 18:21-22, 5:44-45) and seeking to serve rather than be served (20:26-28). The services rendered by the "just," the "sheep" of the pericope, are the final flower of a life surrendered to Christ in faith.

While the just made use of the "talents" committed to them by Christ, those on the King's left did not. While the "blessed" enter into the kingdom prepared for them, the "accursed ones" are consigned to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels (**25:41**). Jesus' words imply that a chief angel rebelled against God (cf. 4:1, 13:39; called Satan in 4:10, 12:26), drawing other angels with him. The fire which is their punishment is the pain of their permanent alienation from God which they freely chose. The human created spirit who refuses the invitation of divine love in Jesus shares in the same rebellion and in the same fate. In particular these persons did not cooperate with the will of God by ministering to Christ in the needy: they gave him neither food nor drink (**25:42**), did not welcome him in the stranger or clothe him, did not visit him when he was sick or in prison (**25:43**). They were not aware that it was Christ they failed to "minister to" (**25:44**). Solemnly the King will declare that in neglecting to serve "one of these least ones" they neglected to serve him (**25:45**). The neighbor was the touchstone by which they might have encountered Christ. These will go off to eternal punishment, but the just to eternal life (**25:40**; cf. 7:14, 18:8-9, 19:16, 17, 29). Jesus' public life and teaching thus concludes with the ultimate gift he has come to bestow on mankind, life forever. This gift includes the joy of the master, the inherited kingdom, the wedding feast. It will be the fruit of the Lord's Passion which now begins.

The Jesus of the discourses in the last three chapters has spoken as one uttering divine judgments and asserting his role in the future definitive establishment of God's kingdom. The narrative of the two chapters that follow will show him in stark contrast as rejected by men and put to a shameful death. The majesty of his final discourses will be dimmed as he proceeds to save mankind through his humiliation. Having finished his words (**26:1**) he identifies the Passover feast, which is to begin in two days, as the moment of his being "handed over" to be crucified (**26:2**), the death he announced in the third prophecy of the Passion (cf. 20:19). From the early days of his mission in Galilee he has aroused opposition, as John his predecessor had done. One might see the opposition beginning even at his birth (cf. Chapter 2 of the Gospel). From the moment of his entry into the holy city he has provoked the opposition of the authorities, finally denouncing them in unsparing terms. The authorities must act soon, and Jesus sees the feast of Passover as an appropriate time for him to

sacrifice himself as an innocent lamb to take away the sins of the world (cf. the allusions to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah in 3:17, 8:17, 12:17-21, 20:28, 26:28, 63, 67, 27:57-60). The “Son of Man” who has just been portrayed as victorious in glory (cf. 24:27, 30, 37, 40, 44, 25:31) is now to be handed over to a criminal’s death.

At the same time as Jesus announces his impending death the “chief priests and the elders of the people” are “gathered together,” like the princes of Psalm 2 gathered against the Lord and his anointed (Ps 2:2; cf. also 22:34). These groups were mentioned in the prophecies of the Passion (cf. 16:21, 20:18) and at Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem (cf. 21:15, 23, 45), but they were not specifically addressed in Jesus’s denunciations of the Pharisees and scribes, perhaps, in the case of the priests, because of their priestly character. But along with the Pharisees these two groups will have responsibility for Jesus’ death. They gather in the palace of the high priest Caiaphas (**26:3**) and together plan to arrest Jesus by trickery and kill him (**26:4**). Their original intention is not to take him on the feast, lest there be turmoil among the people (**26:5**), who had greeted Jesus as the Son of David (Messiah/King) coming in the name of the Lord (21:9), and who looked on him as a prophet (cf. 21:11, 46; cf. 22:33).

During his brief time at Jerusalem Jesus seems to have stayed at the village of Bethany on the east side of the Mount of Olives (cf. 21:17). As he reclines at table in the house of “Simon the leper” (**26:6**; see also Mark 14:3), a woman approaches carrying an alabaster jar of very precious ointment and pours it over his head (**26:7**). Anointing of the head with oil was a custom at banquets (cf. Ps 23:5), but the costliness of this oil is viewed as a waste by the disciples who become indignant (**26:8**). They have just heard Jesus identify service of the poor as the criterion for entry into the kingdom of heaven (cf. 25:34-40), and they see how much money might have been obtained for the poor by the sale of the ointment (**26:9**). But the point of the story is made by Jesus in an extended speech (26:10-13). Knowing the disciples’ objection, Jesus chastises them for interfering with the woman, who has “done a good work” to him (**26:10**). She has recognized the sacredness of his body which is to be given for the salvation of the world and seen it as worthy to be honored with the greatest of earthly riches (reminding us of the gifts of the wise men, cf. 2:11). Jesus declares that there will always be poor people to be succored, but his corporeal presence is soon to be gone (**26:11**). It is appropriate that the body of the Lord should be richly anointed before his burial (**26:12**). While the Lord must be served in his poor it will always be appropriate for human beings to apply some of their wealth for the adornment of the body of the Lord in his sacramental presence. The richness of liturgical adornment is a necessary sign of the holiness of the body that saves us, provided the poor are not being thereby neglected. The customary anointing of the head at banquets has been turned by Jesus into the customary anointing of the body that occurs before burial. The coming humiliation of the Lord is thus seen as worthy of the highest honor. Jesus underlines the importance of the woman’s gesture by making it an integral part of the proclamation of his Gospel throughout the world (**26:13**). The honor given by this woman to the body of the Lord at the time of his death is to be kept in the Church’s memory. What she did for the Lord reminds us of the lavish washing of Jesus’ feet with the tears of the sinful woman (cf. Luke 7:36-38, 44-46). Do these women represent the Church as the spouse of Christ?

Without explanation one of the twelve apostles goes to the chief priests (**26:14**) to ask what they will pay him if he hands Jesus over to them (**26:15a**). The conjunctive adverb “Then” introducing this episode suggests that Judas’ action might have been caused by the lavish waste of ointment in the previous episode. This connection is made more explicit in the Gospel of John, where it is

Judas who protests against the waste of ointment (cf. John 12:4-6) and is called a “thief.” Matthew has prepared us for Judas’ betrayal in his list of the names of the twelve apostles, which ends “...and Judas Iscariot, the one who was to betray him” (cf. 10:4). The priests’ response to Judas’ question is given in the words of Zechariah about the wages given to the shepherd of God’s people: “They paid him thirty pieces of silver” (**26:15b**; cf. Zech 11:12). The prophet/shepherd in Zechariah recognizes this sum as the price of a slave (cf. Exod 21:32) and scornfully throws the money into the Temple treasury, as Judas will do (cf. 27:3-5) for a different reason. Judas is willing to betray the Lord for a paltry amount, while the woman at Bethany spared no expense in honoring him. From the moment he receives the money he seeks a favorable opportunity to hand Jesus over (**26:16**; cf. v. 2, where it seems to be God who is handing Jesus over). It will be Judas who makes it possible for the authorities to have Jesus arrested at a time and place where the people will not be witnesses (cf. 21:46, 26:5).

Passover approaches. Matthew identifies the “first day of unleavened bread,” normally the day following the Passover meal (Exod 12:6, 15-18), as the day when Jesus will celebrate the Passover. The disciples approach him to ask where he wishes them to prepare for the meal to be eaten (**26:17**). Jesus sends them to an unnamed person in the city with the message: “The teacher says, ‘My time is near; at your house I will celebrate the Passover with my disciples’” (**26:18**). Once again (cf. 26:2) Jesus closely links his redeeming (cf. 20:28) death with the Passover feast, even though the officials had decided not to have him put to death during the feast (cf. v. 5). The “time” (*kairos*) of Jesus must be the moment of his being handed over to men to be put to death and to rise from the dead; since Peter’s affirmation of faith this has been the stated goal of all his activity (cf. 16:21, 17:22-23, 20:17-19, 28). The term is synonymous with the “hour” of Jesus (cf. 26:45 and often in the Gospel of John, cf. John 2:4, 7:30, 12:23, 13:1, 17:1). Jesus has already shown he knows this hour is quickly approaching (cf. 26:2). Presumably the person to whom the apostles are sent will be someone who knows Jesus as “the Teacher” and is well disposed toward him. The Passover meal will be an occasion for the Teacher to celebrate “with” his disciples (cf. 1:23, 9:15, 25:10). The disciples do as Jesus has ordered (cf. 21:6) and prepare the Passover (**26:19**). The story is reminiscent of Jesus’ sending of two disciples to fetch the donkey from its owner before the entry into Jerusalem. In both cases Jesus foresees what the disciples will find, but the earlier story is richer in details and includes the fulfillment of prophecy.

When evening comes he is at table “with the twelve disciples” (**26:20**, cf. v. 18). As they eat, Jesus solemnly declares that one of those present will hand him over (**26:21**). He knows both what Judas has done and foresees what is to happen, as in the previous pericope. How much was Jesus thinking of the line from Psalm 41, “The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me” (cf. Ps 41:10b)? He has predicted that his death will occur in connection with the Passover; now he reveals that one of his own chosen twelve will set his execution in motion. The psalm would have provided Jesus with a Scriptural “precedent” for this eventuality. He would be rejected not just by the authorities but by one from his own inner circle. Deeply grieved by his remark, the disciples one by one ask him, “Surely I am not the one, Lord?” (**26:22**). Their question shows both the strength and the weakness of their allegiance to him: they are pained at the thought of losing him yet aware of their own capacity to betray him. In place of a response to their queries, Jesus repeats his point using a vivid image for table fellowship: “He who dips his hand in the bowl with me, he is the one who will hand me over” (**26:23**). The fellowship that should be sealed with a meal together is to be torn asunder by one of the participants. In his all-knowing providence Jesus knows that the “Son of Man goes his way as is written about

him" (**26:24a**); that is, that he himself must submit to the death he has foretold because the Scriptures themselves foretold it. Jesus is referring at least to the poems of the Suffering Servant (see references at 26:2), but also to passages like the psalm verse about the table companion mentioned above, the psalm verses that will be alluded to in the Passion narrative, and indeed many similar verses in the Psalms that speak of an innocent sufferer who puts his trust in God and is raised up (cf. Ps 41:11). It is through the death of Jesus that mankind will be ransomed from sin and death (cf. 20:28, 26:28). But this benefit for mankind will not prevent Judas from experiencing the consequence of his rejection of the Messiah. Jesus pronounces woe on that man through whom the Son of Man is handed over (**26:24b**). It would be better for that man if he had never been born (**26:24c**). The rejection of divine love leaves a man eternally frustrated: he has rejected the one gift which would have fulfilled him. One might hope that even such a man might repent and be forgiven at the moment of death, as Jesus says the man would be forgiven who speaks a word against the Son of Man (cf. 12:32a). But as long as he perseveres in his rejection of the Spirit who is revealing and offering to him divine love, he is condemning himself to eternal pain (cf. 12:31, 32b, 18:6, 24:51, 25:30, etc.). Judas, who will hand him over, following suit after the other disciples, asks the same question they asked (**26:25**), replacing "Lord" with "Rabbi" (= *didaskalos*, cf. v. 18). Jesus' response, "You have said it," implies that Judas has forced an affirmative answer from him. It is unclear whether the others heard this answer. Matthew does not tell us when Judas leaves the meal but we hear no more of him until he arrives in the Garden of Gethsemane with armed men to arrest Jesus.

Having shown his knowledge of the betrayer and "while they are eating," (same formula as in v. 21) Jesus, "having taken bread and blessed [God], broke it and having given it to his disciples said, 'Take, eat; this is my body'" (**26:26**). In a single instant with actions and word he indicates that his body is to become food, indeed the basic staple of life, for believers. The four verbs, "take," "bless," "break," and "give" are those used to describe the feedings of the five thousand (cf. 14:19) and the four thousand (15:36, with "give thanks" in place of "bless"). In this last meal he will take with his disciples and in a Passover context, he makes bread the sign of his body to be slain for others. The context of the meal suggests that he is a sacrificial victim like the paschal lamb slain for the feast. The references to the Songs of the Suffering Servant, particularly the application to Jesus of Isaiah 53:4 in 8:17, would associate Jesus with the Servant who was "led like a sheep to the slaughter" (Isa 53:7) and so with the paschal lamb. The difference from the paschal lamb lies in the fact that Jesus is voluntarily offering himself in sacrifice by taking the bread and making it a sign of his gift of himself to the Father (cf. the "blessing" over the bread) and to his disciples. Far from meeting death passively, he appropriates it and makes it a life-giving event, an action of salvation. His action and words at the supper make it clear that what happens to him the next day will be a conscious act of worship which will save mankind. The core meaning of the redemptive act is thus presented in a single verse, the implications of which will be developed throughout the New Testament.

Much that is implied in the giving of bread is made explicit in the giving of the cup, which follows immediately. "And having taken a cup and having given thanks, he gave it to them saying, 'Drink from this, all of you [**26:27**]; for this is my blood of the covenant to be poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins [**26:28**].'" Three of the actions taken with respect to the bread are repeated here: "taking," "giving thanks," and "giving," the fourth—"breaking"—not being necessary. The thanksgiving offered over the cup renders the wine an embodiment of Jesus' thanks for all those things he will have mentioned or included in his thanksgiving

prayer: the all-embracing object of thanks would be the Father's redemptive plan now being brought to fulfillment in the saving death and resurrection of his Son. The whole history of the chosen people has moved to this point; the salvation of the world flows from it. Jesus would praise the Father for the infinite fruits of this action, the grace multiplied in many persons down the ages and reaching back even into the past. The wine offered to the Father would contain Jesus' thanks for all this. It would be a "thanksgiving sacrifice" that would truly "honor" God (cf. Ps 50:23); man's acknowledgement of the bounty of God is a conformity to the will of God that allows God to give man the fullness of his gifts. The wine offered in thanks immediately becomes the bearer of these future gifts to those who will then drink it. The act of thanksgiving multiplies the gifts one has received. Jesus' own thanksgiving becomes a source of gifts for his disciples.

As he had done with the bread, Jesus accompanies the giving of the cup with words that give the full meaning of what is offered (**26:28**). The conjunction "for" joins the explanation of the contents of the cup with the command to drink. As he identified the bread with the thank-offering that was his own body, so Jesus takes the wine that was part of the paschal ritual and identifies it as his blood to be drunk by others. It is his "blood of the covenant," taking the place of the "blood of the covenant" made by the Lord on Sinai (cf. Exod 24:8, Zech 9:11). Jesus has saved till this moment the revelation that his own body and blood, separated from each other in his sacrificial death, were to be the bond uniting God and his people permanently. He was establishing the "new covenant" prophesied by the Lord in Jeremiah (cf. Jer 31:31-34), as the wording attested in the accounts of Saint Luke and Saint Paul makes explicit (cf. Luke 22:20, 1 Cor 11:25). This blood is "poured out for many," not just for the disciples present but for all the Lord wishes to make part of his covenant. Like the blood "poured out" in the sacrifice of the Sinai covenant, Jesus' blood would bind men and women into the very family of God. Specifically it would be poured out "for the forgiveness of sins," a phrase that appears after the word "repentance" in the Marcan account of John the Baptist's preaching (cf. Mark 1:4) but was omitted in Matthew's account. Saint Matthew has saved the phrase for this climactic event in the Savior's life. Jesus has come to the moment of fulfilling the meaning of the name given him by the angel in the appearance to Joseph (cf. 1:21). He had established his power to forgive sins early in his ministry (cf. 9:2-6) and later had indicated that his own life was to be a "ransom for many" (20:28), i.e., a payment that would restore men to the divine friendship. Jesus himself is the "covenant" or bond of union between God and men, as foretold in the songs of the Servant of Yahweh (cf. Isa 42:6), whose mission is to "bear the sins of many and be handed over for their sins" (Isa 53:12). In words of immense power Jesus has made himself the fulfillment of Old Testament cultic practice and prophecy. He has indicated that his impending sacrifice is both the ultimate means of reconciliation with God and is to be given to men as food. The power of the apostles to "do this in memory" of him (cf. Luke 22:19, 1 Cor 11:24-25) is not stated in Matthew's account. The apostles are simply told to "eat" and "drink," but one might infer that since the sacrifice is to benefit the "many," future generations would have to have some way of participating in it. As Jesus multiplied the few loaves for thousands of people, so through his envoys he will multiply the bread of his body and the wine of his blood for "many."

While Jesus in Matthew's account does not give the apostles the charge to do what he has done, he does indicate that the meal he is sharing with them is a sign of the eschatological banquet in heaven. He declares that he will not again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when he "drinks it new with them" in the kingdom of his Father (**26:29**). Once again we have Matthew's Emmanuel theme (cf. most recently vv. 18, 20). Jesus makes a continuity between the sacrificial

meal he is sharing with the disciples and the meal fellowship he will share with believers forever in the kingdom of heaven. In addition to associating a meal in God's presence with the covenant (cf. Exod 24:11), the Old Testament had presented God's future salvation as a "banquet of rich foods, a banquet of fine wines" on God's mountain (Isa 25:6; cf. Jer 31:12, Matt 8:11, 22:1-10, also Pss 22:27, 63:6). The Eucharist is both a memorial of the Lord's saving act and a foretaste of this eschatological banquet. The simple food and drink he offers is nothing less than the divine life of eternity. Those who eat this banquet will see the light of life (cf. Ps 36:9-10) and praise God with joy (cf. Pss 63:6, 22:27). Jesus here defines the kingdom of God as eternal communion with him in the presence of his Father. The Eucharist is mankind's entrance into the company of the divine persons.

The sacredness of this final meal is confirmed by its accompaniment by the singing of hymns, that is, of the psalms of the Hallel (Pss 113-118) with which the Passover meal closed. The men leave the room where the meal was celebrated and move to the Mount of Olives to the east of the city, across the Kidron Valley (**26:30**). It was here that Jesus had pronounced his final discourse on the coming of the end (cf. 24:3) and here, at the town of Bethany, that he stayed while at Jerusalem (cf. 21:1, 17, 26:6). By leaving the city at night with only the Eleven, he is providing Judas with an opportunity to have him apprehended apart from the "crowds" (cf. 21:46). He knows that it is "this very night" (**26:31**) that the Eleven will be offended (cf. 11:6, 13:21, 57, 15:12, 24:10) by his coming arrest, losing faith in him and deserting him. He the shepherd of Israel (cf. 9:36, 2:6, 15:24) will suffer the fate prophesied by Zechariah: he will be struck (in accordance with the Father's plan) and the sheep of the flock will be scattered (Zech 13:7). As we know from Jesus' later teachings, it is the fate of the Messiah to be put to death as a sacrifice (cf. 20:28, 21:39, 26:2, 26-28). But the immediate sequel to the sacrificial death is his being "raised up" (**26:32**) after which he will precede the disciples into Galilee. As in the prophecies of the Passion the resurrection follows immediately upon the death; the two are facets of the same mystery. Jesus' desire to meet the disciples in Galilee reflects both his repudiation of the city which has repudiated him (cf. 23:37-39) and his sense that "Galilee of the nations" (cf. 4:15) where many nationalities were represented would be a suitable launching place for the mission to the gentiles (cf. 8:10-13, 28:16, 19). The scattered disciples will be reunited by the risen Lord and commissioned to be his representatives among the nations.

Peter, whom Jesus has designated as the "rock" on which his church is built (cf. 16:18), has still not learned not to contradict the Lord (cf. 16:22-23) and protests that if everyone should be offended by Jesus (cf. v. 31a), he himself will never be offended (**26:33**). The humble Jesus who is submitting to his Father's plan is also the Lord who knows the future; he solemnly declares that that very night, before the cock crows (around midnight), Peter will have denied him three times (**26:34**). Peter who does not know himself thinks in terms of triumph; the Lord who knows all submits himself to defeat. Beginning to sense that his master must die, Peter declares that even if he had to die with the Lord, he would still not deny him (**26:35a**). Peter's well-meaning but brash self-confidence would have to be shattered by the experience of weakness before he could learn from the Lord instead of dictate to him. Peter's leadership of the group is already shown in the fact that all the disciples echo his protestations of allegiance even to death (**26:35b**; cf. 14:28, 16:13-16).

Arriving at the Mount of Olives Jesus goes "with them" (cf. vv. 18, 20, 29) into a place called Gethsemane and asks the disciples to sit there while he goes apart to pray (**26:36**). Matthew has already shown Jesus praying at night after the first multiplication of the loaves (cf. 14:23). Despite the divine authority with

which Jesus has spoken in the last weeks of his life, faced with the ordeal of being put to death by his people and deserted by his friends, he must commune with his Father in heaven. Taking along Peter and the two sons of Zebedee (cf. 4:21, 20:20), Jesus begins to be sorrowful and distressed (**26:37**). The same three who witnessed his transfiguration (cf. 17:1) now witness his humiliation. Nowhere in the Gospel has the Matthaean Jesus shown such weakness and pain. The powerful rabbi, the new Moses, loses his lordly demeanor. Jesus voices his distress in the words of a psalm: "Sorrowful is my soul [cf. Ps 42:6, 12, 43:5] even to death" (**26:38a**). Jesus makes his own the anguish of all the psalmists who experience the absence of God. He asks the disciples to remain there and watch with him (**26:38b**). He who is "God with us" (cf. 1:23) seems to need the comfort of men. He also wishes the disciples to learn something from him about prayer, particularly the prayer of "watching." He had stressed the need for vigilance in the Discourse on the End (cf. 24:42, 25:13). A man must keep God in mind so as to be prepared for the onslaught of evil and the coming of the Judge. Jesus will keep his eyes on his heavenly Father in order to receive the Father's strength for carrying out his will. This is a "watching" that comports trust and petition. Going a little farther he fell on his face in prayer, petitioning his Father that if it be possible, this "chalice" might pass from him (**26:39a**). The "cup" of either blessing or punishment was an Old Testament image for the destiny that a person must drink (undergo; cf. Pss 11:6, 75:9, Isa 51:17, 22, Jer 25:15, 17, Ezek 23:32-33). In an earlier conversation with James and John Jesus had recognized the necessity of drinking a cup of suffering (cf. Matt 20:22-23); as the hour approaches for quaffing the cup he shrinks from it, "tempted as all men are" (cf. Heb 4:15) to evade the divine will. Jesus feels the horror of all men before death but also the unimaginable horror of one who is pure love rejected by those whom he loves and to whom he offers eternal life. But if Jesus' revulsion at his approaching betrayal and death demonstrates his full humanness, he shows also that his deepest will is fixed on God. Like the psalmist, his profoundest joy is to do the Father's will which he loves with his whole being (cf. Pss 40:9, 119:14, 24, 97, 111, 143, 167). His plea for the passing of the cup from him is completed with the prayer for what he most wants: "Nevertheless, not as I but as you will" (**26:39b**). Firm adherence to the Father's will would sustain him in the sufferings to come (cf. Ps 119:46, 51, 61, 69, 87, 92, 95, 143, 153, 157, 161).

Jesus' prayer in distress ought to have been a model for the disciples' own prayer, but when he returns to them he finds them sleeping (**26:40**). His gentle reproach is addressed to Peter but expressed in the plural: "And so you were not able to watch one hour with me?" The disciples have not only failed to comfort and support him, they have disobeyed him, since he uses the same expression, "Watch with me," as he had in his command (cf. v. 38b). "One hour" was little to ask, but the three disciples must have been worn out from the tension of the recent days. Jesus renews the exhortation to watch, adding the imperative "pray" and explaining the need for these activities: "lest you enter into temptation" (**26:41a**). The soul that does not vigilantly keep its eyes on the Lord and call on his help will fall away from the divine will in suffering (cf. 13:21-22, 21:22). The apostles will easily be scattered when their master is apprehended. Jesus knows from within the conflict a man experiences between his passions and his higher will: the latter he calls "the spirit" and the former "the flesh": one is eager but the other weak (**26:41b**). The vocabulary is that of Saint Paul (cf. Rom 8:4, 13, Gal 5:16-17), although the term "spirit" does not have here the overtones of the Holy Spirit which it has in Paul. Man is pulled by many conflicting forces; it is his choice to see that these forces are governed by his highest faculty. When the spirit of man is open to God, then the divine Spirit can inform his own spirit and his decisions.

Again a second time Jesus moves away to pray. While the words of his prayer are similar to those of the earlier prayer, they show a greater resignation: “My Father, if this cannot pass away without my drinking it, let your will be done” (26:42; cf. 20:22). Jesus’ commitment to the Father’s will is here expressed in exactly the same words as the petition in the prayer he taught his disciples (cf. 6:10). Jesus succumbs to an unjust death only because his heart somehow knows his Father wants it for a benevolent purpose. He knows that his death will be the ransom of many (cf. 20:28, 26:28), although the human cost of that death is now weighing him down, perhaps even blinding for a time his conscious understanding of the Father’s plan. He will die with an adherence to the Father’s will that is unaccompanied by mental clarity (cf. 27:46). When he returns to the three disciples and again finds them sleeping, the evangelist gives an excuse for them: “for their eyes were heavy” (26:43) and does not say that Jesus wakes them.

Leaving the three Jesus goes apart and prays a third time. Matthew does not give the words this time but says they were the same as before (26:44). Returning to the [three?] disciples Jesus actually tells them to sleep on and rest (26:45a). From now on he must face his fate alone, declaring, “Behold the hour is near and the Son of Man is being handed over into the hands of sinners” (26:45b). The “hour” is the event of his death and rising for sinners; the word has not been used in this sense by Matthew but will be frequently so used by Saint John (cf. John 2:4, 7:30, 8:20, 12:23, 27—the latter two passages being John’s version of the Agony in the Garden, 13:1, 17:1; cf. Mark 14:35, 41). In Luke’s Gospel the hour of the Son of Man becomes the “hour” of the forces of “darkness” ranged against him (cf. Luke 22:53). The “being near” of the hour recalls the being near of the kingdom of heaven (cf. 3:2, 4:17, 10:7); it is the Passion and death of the Lord which will usher in the kingdom: Jesus’ self-gift for men can be said to *be* the kingdom since it reestablishes mankind in the right relationship with the heavenly Father. The kingdom of heaven is the assembly of mankind gathered into Christ’s return of love to the Father. It is at the same time the communion of men with each other in the love of the Son. Jesus’ words apparently awaken the disciples, for he orders them, “Get up, and let us be going. Behold the one who is betraying me is near” (26:46). The final sentence has three words in common with Jesus’ sentence in the previous verse (v. 45): “Behold...is near...handing over”; the temporal “nearing” of the “hour” is matched by the spatial “nearing” of the betrayer. Jesus will be ready to meet the betrayer rather than being caught unawares, thus obeying the precept he had given in the Eschatological Discourse: “Stay awake, because you do not know either the day or the hour” (cf. 25:13, also 24:42-44). Jesus’ readiness to embrace the will of God is a model for disciples.

Judas has gone to “the high priests and elders of the people” and obtained from them a “large crowd” armed with swords and clubs. Knowing where Jesus is to be found he leads this crowd to Gethsemane (26:47). Though “one of the twelve,” he has taken money to lead Jesus’ enemies to where they can seize him without the knowledge of the people (cf. 26:14-16). “The one handing him over” has given his companions a sign for recognizing the one whom they are to arrest: it is the one whom Judas will kiss (26:48). Immediately Judas goes up to Jesus, greets him as “Rabbi,” and kisses him (26:49). The loving greeting is the exact opposite of Judas’ murderous intents; the hypocrisy recalls that experienced by the psalmist, whose persecutors “speak words of peace to their neighbors but with evil in their hearts” (Ps 28:3); “With their mouth they utter blessing, but in their heart they curse” (Ps 62:5). Of Judas can be said, “His speech is softer than butter, but war is in his heart. His words are smoother than oil, but they are naked swords” (Ps 55:22). Jesus cannot even rely on one of his own inner circle; he

could say with the psalmist, “If a rival had risen against me, I could hide from him. But it is you, my own companion, my intimate friend! How close was the friendship between us. We walked together in harmony in the house of God” (Ps 55:13-15). The psalms seem to be spoken by Jesus, who in turn gives them a most apt realization.

Knowing Judas’ treachery, Jesus still calls him “friend,” ordering him, “[Do] what you are here for” (26:50). Resigned to the Father’s will, Jesus is eager to embrace it. Coming forward at Judas’ signal the men lay hands on Jesus and take him into custody. One of Jesus’ company attempts to defend the Lord; stretching out his hand he draws his sword, and striking the high priest’s servant cuts off his ear (26:51). Jesus profits from the incident to teach a lengthy lesson. Ordering the man to return his sword to its place, he states a general principle: “All who take up the sword will perish by the sword” (26:52). This is Jesus’ version of the Old Testament truth that evil is its own punishment: the wicked man “digs a pitfall, digs it deep; and in the trap he has made he will fall. His malice will recoil on himself; on his own head his violence will fall” (Ps 7:16-17; cf. Ps 9:16-17). To shed the blood of another man is to violate the will of that man’s Creator and so to withdraw oneself from the Creator’s favor and gift of life. To slay another man is to cut oneself off from life. The way of the heavenly Father is to “offer the wicked man no resistance” but to “turn the other cheek” (cf. 5:39) and not to retaliate. Jesus carries out in his own life what he has preached to the crowds. But he also challenges the faith of the man who had attacked the servant, asking if he did not think Jesus could invoke his Father to provide him instantly with more than twelve legions of angels (26:53). The disciples had had ample proof of Jesus’ access to divine power. Jesus himself had already spoken of “his” angels (cf. 16:27, 13:41, 24:31; also 4:11). The disciples are asked to trust that the arrest of Jesus is part of the plan of God, who does not choose to save his Son from a criminal’s death. Finally Jesus indicates by means of a rhetorical question that the arrest is the fulfillment of what the Scriptures say “must” happen. Matthew has been at pains to show how Jesus fulfills certain Scripture passages; he has solemnly cited eleven such passages, most recently in 21:5, and will cite one more during the Passion (cf. 27:9-10). Jesus himself has applied “the Scriptures” to himself (cf. 21:42) and to his own context (cf. 4:4, 7, 10, 12:7, 40, 13:14-15, 15:7-9, 18:16, 19:4-5, 21:16, 22:43-44, 23:39, 26:31). The Scriptures record what “must” happen because it is ordained by God; Jesus has used the impersonal verb (*dei*) already to announce his Passion (cf. 16:21). The Scriptures foretelling his Passion would be first of all the Songs of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah, particularly Isa 42:2-4, 49:4, 50:5-9, 52:13-53:12, but several passages in the Passion narrative allude also to the Psalms in such a way that Jesus can be found everywhere in the Psalms. In a more general sense Jesus embodies the whole Old Testament pattern of suffering ending in salvation. He himself will be the new Exodus, the new Passover, the new Covenant, the new Kingdom. In him God’s plan for Israel will come to fruition.

The Matthaean Jesus, always a teacher, has a further word for the “crowds” who have come armed against him. He underscores the fact they are working in secrecy: they might have arrested him openly as he sat teaching daily in the temple (26:55). “As to a brigand” have they come to him with swords and clubs? He is being treated as a criminal (Isa 53:12), a disrupter of society, even though he counseled obedience to Caesar (cf. 22:21). But this injustice, he says again, is the fulfillment of the writings of the prophets (26:56a, cf. v. 54). At the Lord’s utter lack of resistance to his captors, all the disciples, “leaving him fled” (26:56b). The Lord is determined to suffer the fate he has prophesied; the protestation of Peter and the disciples that they would “die with” Jesus (cf. v. 35) evaporates.

Jesus is led to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and elders are “gathered together” (cf. 26:3) in a united front against Jesus (**26:57**). We learn that Peter has not altogether fled but “follows him from a distance” up to the courtyard of the high priest, and going in he sits with the servants to “see the end” (**26:58**). Peter’s timid following of the Lord will soon provide the occasion for him to deny his Lord publicly three times; at last he will know his utter need for forgiveness. Inside the palace the chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin are seeking false witness against Jesus in order to have him put to death (**26:59**). Their decision is already made—they simply need a pretext to justify it. Jesus could again say with the psalmist, “False witnesses rise against me, breathing out fury” (Ps 27:12). While many such witnesses come forward a suitable one is not found until two men come forward (**26:60**) and declare that Jesus had said he could destroy the temple of God and in three days rebuild it (**26:61**). This saying of Jesus is not recorded in Matthew but is found in the Gospel of John, cf. John 2:19. The witnesses seem to have confused two statements of Jesus: in the Eschatological Discourse he had prophesied the destruction of the temple (cf. 24:3, and in the prophecies of the Passion he had spoken of rising after three days (cf. 16:21, 17:23, 20:19; cf. also 12:40). To speak of the destruction of the temple could be interpreted as an attack on God, and to claim to rebuild it in a few days could be blasphemy. The high priest rises and asks if Jesus has no answer to what has been testified against him (**26:62**). When he is silent, like the lamb before its shearers (cf. Isa 53:7, Ps 38:14-15), the high priest adjures him by the living God to tell them if he is the Christ, the Son of God (**26:63**). The high priest has abandoned the testimony about the temple for a more crucial issue. He knows enough about Jesus to know that he is claiming a special relationship with Israel’s God and that people recognize him as the messianic king, the Son of David (cf. 21:9, 15-16, 22:41:45), whom God referred to as his son (cf. 2:7, 2 Sam 7:14). In fact, Jesus has accepted Peter’s confession of him as “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16-17, 20). If Jesus will confess before the Sanhedrin that he is the Messiah, they might convict him of claiming a special familiarity with God. When Jesus answers, “You have said [it],” he is putting the decision about his identity back where it belongs, on those who have experienced his ministry and must make their own conclusions. He is asking Caiaphas to make up his mind about who Jesus is (cf. 21:27). Yet he will not leave the Sanhedrin without an unmistakable declaration of his heavenly dignity. To his brief first answer he adds, “Nevertheless I tell you, after this you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven” (**26:64**). His hearers will know that he has designated himself as “Son of Man”; they see that he is claiming to be the Messiah of Psalm 110 to whom God said, “Sit at my right.” He is further claiming to be the Son of Man whom Daniel saw coming on the clouds of heaven into the presence of God to receive from God sovereignty over all nations (cf. Dan 7:13-14). Thus Jesus claims a superterrestrial dignity, a close intimacy with the God of Israel and of creation, and a lordship over all peoples. The Gospel has prepared us for this “self-definition” of Jesus by recording his use of the term Son of Man to apply to himself (cf. 8:20, 9:6, 10:23, 11:19, 12:8, 32, 40, 13:37, 41, 16:13, 27-28, 17:9, 22, 19:28, 20:18, 28, 24:30 (in connection with “coming on the clouds of heaven”), 37, 39, 44, 25:31, 26:2) and by Jesus’ appeal to Psalm 110 to suggest that the Messiah is part of the divine world (cf. 22: 43-45). As a sign that he has just heard an unbearable attack against God, the high priest tears his garments, saying, “He has blasphemed.” Witnesses are no longer necessary; the Council has now heard the blasphemy from Jesus’ own lips (**26:65**). Jesus has trespassed into the territory of the religious authorities, claiming to usurp their control of Israel’s religion. The authorities sense that Jesus is demanding nothing

less than their submission, their surrender to the call of God in Jesus. Their hold on authority blinds them to the truth; they are not able to relinquish the truth as they have learned it for the higher truth of the actual presence of the divine in their midst. They have no choice but to destroy this threat. Caiaphas has only to ask for their verdict; they answer that he is guilty of death **(26:66)**. While this may be true according to Jewish law, Jesus has not committed a capital crime in Roman law, so another argument against Jesus will have to be found if the governor is to allow Jesus' execution to be carried out.

Jesus' judges now show their contempt by spitting on his face and striking him with their fists **(26:67a)**. He is again one with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah whose face was the target of spittle (cf. Isa 50:6; also Job 30:10). For uttering the truth he is struck like the prophet Micaiah (cf. 1 Kgs 22:24) and beaten like Jeremiah (cf. Jer 20:2, 37:15). Other officials mock Jesus' reputation as a prophet (cf. 21:11, 46) by slapping **(26:67b)** this "Christ," asking him to "prophecy" to them the identity of the ones striking him (26:68). With his supernatural knowledge (cf. 9:4, 21:2, 26:31, 34) this might Jesus have done, but it would mean succumbing to the human demand for a sign, a demand he resolutely refused (cf. 12:39, 16:4). It is necessary for him to "suffer grievously" at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes" (cf. 16:21). He is absorbing in his own person the human hatred for God so that that hatred may die in his death.

We have left Peter in the courtyard, waiting to "see the end" (v. 58). It is not enough for Jesus to have been rejected by the Jewish authorities; he must now be denied by the leader of his fledgling church. As he sits outside, a serving girl approaches him, saying that he too was "with Jesus" the Galilean **(26:69)**. Her statement is literally true but also suggests the profounder spiritual sense of the preposition "with." Jesus, who is "God with us" (cf. 1:23) has established a spiritual bond with the disciples (cf. 18:20, 26:20, 29, 36, 38) which will last forever (cf. 28:20). Peter is "with Jesus" in this deeper sense, a fact which makes his betrayal all the more distressing, both to Jesus and to himself. Peter denies being a companion of Jesus "before all," stating, "I do not know what you're talking about" **(26:70)**. Another girl sees him going out through the gate and says to those who are there, "This man was with Jesus the Nazarene" **(26:71)**. Again Peter denies it, this time with an oath that he does not know the man **(26:72)**. After a while those standing around approach and say to Peter, "Truly you also are one of them, for even your speech gives you away" **(26:73)**. Then Peter begins to curse and swear that he does not know the man **(26:74a)**. Each denial has become more vehement. Immediately a cock crows **(26:74b)**. The prophecy of Jesus has come true (cf. v. 34). Peter's weakness (cf. 41) has allied him with the officials who rejected the Lord out of malice and hatred. His concern for his own skin is like the authorities' hold on power. Peter recalls his Master's prophecy of a few hours ago and going outside weeps bitterly **(26:75)**. His bitter remorse is the only course left open to him if he retains his commitment to the Lord. He has come to know himself as one without the moral strength to follow through on his commitment. His "mourning" is blessed (cf. 5:4) because it opens him to his need for divine forgiveness. On Peter's faith in this unmerited forgiveness will the Church of Jesus be built (cf. 16:16-18). Peter will dispense to others the forgiveness he himself has received (cf. 16:19, 18:18, 21-22, 33). No more will he be able to trust only in his own resources (cf. 16:22, 26:33-35).

When morning comes all "the chief priests and elders of the people" (cf. 26:3) consult (cf. 12:14, 22:15) how to have Jesus put to death **(27:1)**. Not permitted by Rome to put anyone to death, they must exact a sentence of death from the Roman official. Having bound Jesus they lead him away and hand him over to Pilate the procurator **(27:2)**. At this point Saint Matthew breaks the story

to tell the fate of Judas who handed him over. Having seen Jesus condemned by the Council, Judas has a change of heart (same word as in 21:29, 32) and returns the thirty pieces of silver (cf. 26:15) to the chief priests and elders **(27:3)**, confessing that he has sinned in handing over innocent blood. Having obtained what they wanted, the authorities have no interest in Judas' conscience and leave him to himself **(27:4)**. Throwing the money into the temple he departs, and going away hangs himself **(27:5)**. Judas cannot live with the knowledge that he has set in motion the death of one who was pure love. He could not, as Peter had done, shed tears that would have opened him to the forgiveness of the one who a few hours earlier had called him "Friend" (cf. 26:50). The desperate man could not accept life as a sinner, as one in need of redemption and love. As such he stands as a sign to all of the crucial importance of letting oneself be forgiven. To the procuring of the murder of an innocent man, Judas adds another murder.

But Matthew turns rather to the chief priests and their dilemma of how to dispose of the money. Their decision will give him the opportunity for the final solemn citation of prophecy in his Gospel. The money cannot be put in the treasury since it was the price of blood **(27:6)**. Taking counsel with each other (cf. v. 1), they use the money to purchase a field belonging to a potter which they will dedicate as a burial ground for strangers **(27:7)**. For that reason the field is called "field of blood" even to the time of the writing of the Gospel **(27:8)**. From this incident comes the phrase "potter's field" to designate a graveyard for nameless people. For Matthew the incident is the fulfillment of a prophecy of Jeremiah: "And they took the thirty silver pieces, the price of a man who was priced at the value set by the sons of Israel [27:9], and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord had commanded me" **(27:10)**. It was not Jeremiah but Zechariah who received as wages for shepherding the people of Judah the paltry sum of thirty pieces of silver, which he was then instructed to throw back into the temple treasury (Zech 11:12-13, cf. 26:15). For Matthew the passage is valuable for showing how cheaply Jesus was valued; the throwing back of the silver into the treasury illustrates the contempt with which the whole transaction was treated. Zechariah says nothing about a potter's field; the fact that Jeremiah utters a prophecy in connection with a visit to a potter's house may explain why the quotation is attributed to him; Jeremiah also purchased a field (cf. Jer 32:6-9). The purchase of a potter's field with the thirty pieces of silver is not attested either in the Hebrew or Greek Scriptures. Matthew may have been relying on a version that has not survived. Finally, the last phrase of the cited passage, "as the Lord commanded me," is found in the Greek of Exodus 9:12. Matthew's final "fulfillment text" has the effect of grounding the death of Jesus in a rich Old Testament background.

Matthew now picks up the narrative interrupted at verse 2 for the account of Judas' end. Jesus is made to stand before the Roman governor, who asks him if he is the king of the Jews **(27:11a)**. The Jews must have decided, after hearing Jesus' implicit declaration of kingship the previous evening, that "king" was the title most likely to win a condemnation from the Roman authority. The "kingship" of Jesus, though not "of this world" (cf. John 18:36), would be interpreted by the governor as a political threat to the hegemony of Rome. Jesus indicates the ambiguity of the word in his cryptic answer: "You say it" **(27:11b)**. He means, "That is the category by which you might best understand me, but your understanding is limited to the political dimension." In the Gospel of Saint John Jesus will bring out the meaning more clearly: "My kingdom is not of this world....I am a king. I was born for this, I came into the world for this: to bear witness to the truth; and all who are on the side of truth listen to my voice" (John 18:36-37). Jesus' kingship is exerted over souls who have recognized his divine authority, souls who give him the "obedience of faith" (cf. Rom 1:5, 16:26).

People of all nations will be judged by him as worthy or unworthy of membership in his everlasting kingdom (cf. 25:31-34).

The chief priests and elders now have their chance to make their accusations against Jesus heard, to which he answers nothing (27:12). When Pilate asks if he doesn't hear what things they are accusing him of (27:13), Jesus answers him not a single word, to the utter amazement of the governor (27:14). Jesus might have defended himself, asked for evidence of his crimes to be produced, even exposed the hypocrisy of his opponents as he had so often done. But the culmination of his work is to suffer the injustice inflicted by man without protest or recrimination, and by absorbing it into his person to bring it to death so that he may remove its power and rise from it to an eternal resurrection. By his silent submission to hatred and lies he will overcome their power to destroy man. Jesus once again enters into the portrait of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah, "never opening his mouth," like a lamb that is led to the slaughter-house, like a sheep that is dumb before its shearers (cf. Isa 53:7, Matt 26:63). The figure of the Passover lamb (cf. 26:2, 18) and that of the suffering servant here coalesce, neither of which would have been understood by Pilate, who had apparently never seen such silence in the face of accusation.

In order not to condemn Jesus without evidence, Pilate takes the case to the "crowd." He recalls the custom of releasing to the crowd on the feast a prisoner of their choice (27:15). Having in custody a particularly notorious prisoner named Barabbas (27:16), he asks the assembled crowd whether they want him to release Barabbas or Jesus called Christ (27:17). Surely the crowd would prefer the release of a man who had caused no public harm to that of a notorious criminal. Pilate has no wish to condemn Jesus, knowing that the Jews handed him over out of envy (27:18). He has correctly diagnosed the motives of the authorities: they resent the popularity of the upstart Galilean preacher who has lashed out at their self-serving hypocrisy and their reluctance to surrender religious power (cf. 15:7, 21:12-15, 45-46, 23:13-36). Before Pilate, seated on his judicial bench, can receive an answer from the crowd, he is interrupted by a message from his wife, telling him to have nothing to do with "this just man" since she has suffered much that day from a dream about him (27:19). The conjunction of the themes of the "just man" and the dream remind us of the Joseph episode at the beginning of the Gospel (cf. 1:19-20). The dream could be interpreted as a heavenly message to Pilate through his wife and might have reinforced his sense that Jesus is innocent.

A few days earlier Pilate may have banked on the popularity of Jesus with the people, but now the chief priests and elders have cajoled the crowd to demand Barabbas and the execution of Jesus (27:20). When the governor asks which of the two he is to release (a repetition of the question in v. 17), they answer, "Barabbas" (27:21). Pilate makes a second attempt to free Jesus, asking what he is to do with Jesus called Christ; they answer, "Let him be crucified!" (27:22). Pilate makes a final attempt, asking what wrong Jesus has done, but they only cry out the more, "Let him be crucified!" (27:23). Thus the crowd not only acquiesce in the seizure of Jesus but become complicit in his death. The public base of support that has accompanied him from the beginning evaporates. Not only the persuasion of the authorities but the sight of a powerless Messiah have turned the mob against Jesus. They demand for him the ignominious Roman punishment of crucifixion, turning against the one they had enthusiastically welcomed only a few days before. Disciples, leaders, and crowds have all rejected their Lord; Pilate can only capitulate. Seeing that his efforts are of no avail and that a riot is brewing, he washes his hands in a symbolic gesture in front of the people, claiming that he is "innocent" (cf. v. 4!) of the blood of this man and telling them to see to the business (27:24). The "whole people" then

say, “His blood be on us and on our children,” taking full responsibility for the death of Jesus (27:25). He releases Barabbas to them, but Jesus he has scourged—“a punishment inflicted on slaves and provincials after a sentence of death had been pronounced on them” (Bauer 873)—and hands over to be crucified (27:26). The governor has sacrificed his judicial responsibility for the preservation of order. His protest of innocence does not absolve him from the crimes of pusillanimity and perversion of justice.

To the formal punishment of scourging the governor’s soldiers add a ritual of mockery for his supposed kingship. Taking Jesus to the praetorium (governor’s residence), they gather to him the whole cohort (27:27). Stripping him, they put a scarlet cloak around him (27:28) to suggest majesty, and weaving a crown from thorns they place it on his head and a reed in his right hand for a scepter. Kneeling before him, they mock him, saying, “Hail, king of the Jews” (27:29), and spitting on him as had the Jewish leaders (cf. 26:67), they take the reed and strike his head (27:30). Jesus’ third prophecy of his Passion (cf. 20:19) is fulfilled in this mocking by the gentiles. The soldiers delight in making fun of a member of a subject people who claims to be its supreme authority. Jews and gentiles are united in their scorn for Jesus. When the soldiers have finished mocking him, they take off the cloak and clothe him in his garments and lead him away to crucify him (27:31). As they leave the city they come upon a man from Cyrene named Simon and conscript him to carry Jesus’ cross (27:32). The fact that the man’s name is remembered suggests that he became a member of the Church.

No more is said in this Gospel of the “Way of the Cross.” Coming to the place called Golgotha, which means “Place of the skull” (27:33), Jesus is given wine mixed with gall to drink; the action echoes Psalm 69:22a, “For food they gave me gall.” Jesus fulfills the role of the psalmist who was attacked for his allegiance to God; taunts against God fall on him (cf. Ps 69:8-10). But after tasting the mixture, Jesus does not wish to drink (27:34). The wine may originally have been intended as a narcotic, which Jesus would then refuse, but the evangelist has brought the action into line with the psalm. The crucifixion itself is mentioned only in a participle, “Having crucified him” (*staurōsantes*; cf. also *phragellōsas* for the scourging, 27:26). In another reminiscence of the psalms, those who have crucified Jesus divide his clothing, casting lots for it (27:35). This is the first clear reference to Psalm 22, the great individual lament of a man persecuted by his people and abandoned by God who nonetheless becomes the center of an everlasting community of praise. In v. 19 of the psalm the speaker’s persecutors treat him as already dead by dividing and casting lots for his clothing. Sitting down, the soldiers keep guard over Jesus (27:36). They place over his head the charge for which he is condemned: “This is Jesus the King of the Jews” (27:37). The sentence meant in mockery is a statement of the truth. Jesus is inaugurating his kingdom on the cross. He will be king of the Jews and of the world, as the sequel will show. He reigns in the very moment of giving his life.

Fixed on the cross Jesus now endures his final mockery. Two thieves (cf. 26:55) are crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left (27:38): like the Suffering Servant he is “reckoned among the lawless” (cf. Isa 53:12). The passersby blaspheme him wagging their heads in derision (27:39) like the persecutors in Psalm 22:8. They tell the one who “destroys the temple and in three days rebuilds it” (cf. the testimony of the false witnesses in 26:61) to save himself if he is the son of God (as he admitted to the high priest that he was, cf. 26:63-64) and to come down from the cross (27:40). In the words of John Meier, “The enemies of Jesus see his sufferings as a proof that he is not God’s Son; Matthew sees them as a proof that he is. It would have been human to come down from the cross, it was divine to hang there” (*Matthew* 348). The son proves his sonship in carrying out the will of his Father (cf. 22:28-31), acting like his

Father in showing love for his enemies (cf. 5:44), offering the wicked man no resistance (cf. 5:39). The chief priests together with the scribes and elders deliver an extended mockery (**27:41**). First they gloat over the fact that the one who “saved others” (cf. 1:21, 9:22) cannot save himself. Again there is the irony that precisely in not saving himself from death he is saving the world from its sin. Second, the religious leaders ridicule his claim to be king of Israel; were he to come down now from the cross (cf. v. 40) they would believe in him (**27:42**). Like Israel before them they fall into the trap of putting God to the test: we will believe if he conforms to our demands and expectations (cf. Num 14:22, Deut 6:16, Ps 95:9, Matt 12:38-39, 16:1-4). The demand for a sign is exactly the opposite of faith. Finally the leaders quote knowingly or unknowingly the taunt of the psalmist’s persecutors: “He trusted in God, let him deliver him now if he takes pleasure in him” [cf. Ps 22:9], for he said that he was the son of God (**27:43**; cf. v. 40). The three specific charges made against Jesus before the Sanhedrin (cf. 26:61, 63) and the Roman governor (cf. 27:11) have now been thrown back in his face. In addition Jesus’ reliance on God, the reliance he preached to others (cf. 6:30, 10:29-31), has been challenged. That Jesus felt the taunt will be shown in his final utterance. The mockery that began with the mention of the two thieves crucified with Jesus concludes with their reviling of Jesus in the same way (**27:44**). Even the criminals spurn him. Matthew knows nothing of a “good thief.” The sinners he came to save want no part of him.

At noon on this day darkness replaces light (cf. Amos 8:9) and lasts until about 3:00 p.m. (**27:45**). Abandoned by all, Jesus experiences abandonment even by his Father. Toward the end of the period of darkness he breaks for only the third time (cf. 26:64, 27:11) the silence he has maintained since his arrest, crying out in a loud voice the opening line of Psalm 22: “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” (cf. Ps 22:2), which Matthew cites in Aramaic and then renders in Greek (**27:46**). We have already encountered three allusions to this Psalm in the Passion narrative. Now Jesus uses its opening line to express his profound sense of desertion by his Father, even as he continues to cling to him as “My God.” Here is the epitome of his suffering. Not physical pain, which the Gospel implies but does not speak of directly, not the scorn of his own people and their leaders, not the injustice of his death can equal the suffering of feeling the remoteness of his loving Father. Hearing Jesus call, “*ēli, ēli,*” some of those standing by scoff that he is calling Elijah (**27:47**), the prophet who ascended to heaven and was expected to return (cf. 11:14, 16:14, 17:11-12, Mal 3:23). They do not know that Jesus has been in intimate converse with both Elijah and Moses (cf. 17:3). One of the scoffers runs to take a sponge, soak it with sour wine, place it on a reed and give it to Jesus to drink (**27:48**). Matthew sees the offering of the vinegar, the Roman soldiers’ drink, as another fulfillment of Psalm 69:22, this time of the second half of the verse (Ps 69:22b), although the offering of the wine may have been a kindly act. But the rest of the group tell the one with the sponge to wait in order to see if Elijah comes to “save” (cf. vv. 40, 42) him (**27:49**). Up to the moment of death Jesus is flooded with taunts. Now with another great cry, this time wordless, he gives up his spirit (**27:50**). The malice of men has done its work. The spirit of the Son of Man, Israel’s King, the Son of God has been extinguished.

The world-shaking influence of the event is immediately demonstrated. The veil of the temple, at the entrance of the Holy of Holies which once contained the ark of the covenant, is rent in two from top to bottom (**27:51a**). Now that Israel has rejected its God, all men will have access to him, as Jesus had prophesied (cf. 21:41-43, 22:8-10, 8:11-12). At the same time the earth quakes and rocks are rent (**27:51b**). The God who shakes the earth (cf. Ex 19:18, Job 9:6, Ps 18:8, 68:9, 77:19, 104:32, Nah 1:5, Hab 3:6) is breaking the old order to make earth

into the kingdom of God through the death of his Son. As a result of the quake tombs are opened and many bodies of holy men who have died are raised **(27:52)**. Matthew portrays the resurrection of the dead as occurring at the moment Jesus' sacrifice is completed. Coming forth from their tombs after their rising, these risen Jewish saints come into the "holy city" (cf. Isa 52:1) and appear to many **(27:53)**. But even as the faithful ones of Israel are raised, Matthew portrays the salvation of the gentiles in the person of the Roman centurion. He and those with him keeping watch over Jesus, seeing the earthquake and the things that happened were exceedingly afraid, saying, "Truly a son of God was this man" **(27:54)**. The pagan soldier has made the same confession of faith made by Peter after the walking on the water (14:33 and cf. 16:16). Jesus, designated the son of Abraham at the beginning of the Gospel (1:1), has brought about the fulfilment of the promise that Abraham would be the father of many nations (Gen 17:4), a fulfilment frequently alluded to in the Gospel (cf. the wise men from the east, 2:1-2; the centurion at Capernaum, 8:10-12; the "Servant of the Lord," 12:18-21; the vineyard tenants, 21:41, 43; the wedding guests, 22:8-10, the last judgment, 24:32). The centurion has been able to see in the death of Jesus what Jesus' own people could not see in his life or death. Henceforth it would be the pagan nations that would bring forth the fruit sought by God from his people, the fruit of good works issuing from faith.

Yet Jesus is not entirely deserted by his own. Many women were there looking on from a distance; these had followed Jesus from Galilee to minister to him **(27:55)**. This is the first time we hear that Jesus was accompanied by women on his journey to Jerusalem, although the mother of the apostles James and John has made an appearance in one episode (cf. 20:20-21). The women are more loyal to their Lord than the apostles who have fled. Matthew names them: Mary of Magdala, a town at the south end of the Sea of Galilee, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee **(27:56)**. Only the third of these has been previously mentioned by Matthew. The first two will reappear two more times at the sepulcher of Jesus.

It is now necessary that Jesus be buried. As evening approaches, there comes a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph, who had become a disciple of Jesus **(27:57)**. He goes to Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus; Pilate orders that the body be given **(27:58)**. Taking the body, Joseph wraps it in clean linen **(27:59)** and places it in a new tomb of his which he had hewn in the rock, and rolling a great stone at the entrance of the tomb he goes away. The conjunction of "tomb" and "rich man" recalls what was said of the Servant of Yahweh: "They gave him a grave with the wicked, a tomb with the rich, though he had done no wrong and there had been no perjury in his mouth" (cf. Isa 53:9). Matthew's allusion to yet another detail of the Fourth Song of the Servant (cf. 8:17, 20:28, 26:26, 28, 55, 63, 27:14, 38) invites us see other details of the Song, such as the servant's innocence and freedom from perjury, as applicable to Jesus. Indeed the final three verses of the Song tell how the Servant's humiliation in death wins life for him and a numerous posterity (cf. Isa 53:10-12), and these will be the fruits of Jesus' death. At the end of the burial scene the two Marys are left sitting opposite the tomb **(27:61)**. It will be women who first experience the reality of the resurrection.

The day after the burial is devoted by Matthew to the activity of the Jews in seeing that Jesus' body is not removed from the tomb. It appears that Jesus died on "Preparation Day," that is the day before the Sabbath. When Preparation Day is over, the high priests and Pharisees "come together" (cf. 22:34, 26:3) to Pilate **(27:62)**, telling him that they remember "this impostor" declaring while he was still alive, "after three days I will rise" **(27:63)**. Matthew has not recorded Jesus saying this to any but his disciples; presumably the statement passed from them to the

Jewish officials, who would connect it with Jesus' purported claim to rebuild the temple "in three days" (cf. 26:61). The authorities ask Pilate to order the tomb to be secured until the third day, lest Jesus' disciples come and steal him and tell the people he had risen from the dead. In that case the later deception would be worse than the first (27:62). The effect of the guard will ironically be only to make more wonderful the disappearance of the body from the tomb. Pilate assigns them a guard of soldiers with which to make the tomb as secure as they know how (27:65). They depart to secure the tomb, sealing the stone in the company of the guard (27:66). The seal would be a further guarantee that the stone would not be moved (cf. Dan 6:18). Chapter 27 ends with the apparent obliteration of the life of Jesus.

But now the third day dawns, the day after the Sabbath. As first light appears the two Marys who were present at the cross and burial return to see the tomb (28:1). "And behold," says the evangelist, "there was a great earthquake (28:2a). This is now the sixth time the evangelist has mentioned an earthquake (cf. 8:24, 21:10, 24:7, 27:51, 54) and there will be yet one more. The maker of the earth is making the earth yield up its dead. An angel of the Lord coming down from heaven and approaching the stone rolls it away and sits upon it (28:2b). His appearance is like lightning and his clothing white as snow (28:3). He partakes of the glory of the transfigured Lord (cf. 17:2). First recounted is his effect on the guards. In their fear they are shaken (lit., "quake," cf. v. 2a) and become like dead men (28:4). But the angel says to the women, "Do not be afraid" (28:5a), a divine exhortation heard at key points throughout this Gospel (cf. 1:20, 10:26, 28, 31, 14:27, 17:7) and throughout the Jewish Scriptures from Genesis to Zechariah (e.g., Gen 15:1, 26:24, Exod 14:13, 20:20, Deut 3:22, 7:21, Isa 41:10, 13-14, Zech 8:13). The angel knows that the women seek Jesus who was crucified (28:5b), but he is not there, for he has risen as he said (cf. 12:40, 16:21, 17:23, 20:19). The angel invites the women to come and see the place where he lay (28:6). He summons them to go quickly and tell Jesus' disciples that he has risen from the dead and that he will go before them into Galilee where they will see him (28:7). The angel ends with a solemn declaration that he has acquitted himself of his message: "Behold I have said it to you." In obedience to the angel the women, leaving the tomb quickly, "with fear and great joy" run to tell the news to Jesus' disciples (28:8). The fear and the joy are perfectly compatible: a sense of unworthiness to be in the presence of this greatest act of God and joy that this act means life for mankind. These two emotions are the emotions of all who have understood the event of Easter morning.

But before they can deliver their resurrection message, "Behold Jesus comes to meet them, saying, 'I greet you.'" The greeting is difficult to translate with appropriate dignity: JB has "Greetings!"; RSV has "Hail!"; others suggest "Welcome," "Good day," "Good morning," "Hello." It is the same greeting spoken by the angel to Mary (Luke 1:28), which the JB renders "Rejoice...!" The note of joy is certainly appropriate to Easter morning. The tone of the word here is vastly different from Judas's hypocritical greeting in the garden (26:49) and from the ironic and malicious greeting of the soldiers mocking Jesus (27:29). The women come forward to grasp the feet of Jesus and prostrate (cf. 2:11, 8:2, 9:18, 14:33, 15:25) before him (28:9). Jesus repeats to them the admonition of the angel, "Do not fear," and tells them to go and announce to "my brothers" that they are to go to Galilee where they will see him (28:10). Those whom Jesus called his brothers already in Galilee (cf. 12:49-50) have not ceased to be so in spite of their cowardice. Implied in Jesus' words is the forgiveness of sin won by his sacrificial death and resurrection; those who accept the forgiveness of their sins will become brothers of the firstborn Son: "These are the ones he chose specially long ago and intended to become true images of his Son, so that his Son might

be the eldest of many brothers. He called those he intended for this; those he called he justified, and with those he justified he shared his glory” (Rom 8:29-30). This is now the third time that Matthew has reported Jesus’ intention to show himself to the disciples not in Jerusalem or Judea but in Galilee, which at the very beginning was called “Galilee of the nations” (4:15). There where so many nations intermingled would be the appropriate starting place for a worldwide gospel. It is there, not in the headquarters of Judaism, that the apostles would witness the risen Lord.

After the women depart the guards revive, and some of them return to the city to report to the chief priests all that had happened (**28:11**), that is, how they had been stunned by the earthquake, the rolling away of the stone, and the brilliant appearance of the angel. The priests cannot permit this story to be circulated. Gathering together with the elders and taking counsel together (cf. 27:1, 7) they give the soldiers bribe money (**28:12**), telling them to say that Jesus’ disciples came at night and stole the body while they were asleep (**28:13**). This was precisely what they had feared might happen (cf. 27:64). The priests have no qualms about lying, ordering others to lie, and offering bribes, to say nothing of rejecting the inescapable truth of the resurrection. They do not even see the illogicality of having the soldiers testify to something that happened while they were asleep or even testify that they had failed in their duty to keep watch. The officials promise that if the matter comes to the ears of the governor, they themselves will conciliate him and see that the soldiers need not fear punishment (**28:14**). They are prepared to hide the truth from even the highest secular official. The soldiers take the money and do as they have been advised, assuring that their story of the empty tomb would be the official Jewish version even to the time of the writing of the Gospel (**28:15**).

The apostles now follow the Lord’s instructions to go to Galilee (**28:16a**). Matthew denotes them as “the eleven disciples,” a term that appears only here in the New Testament. With the defection and suicide of Judas the Twelve have been reduced by one; elsewhere they are referred to simply as “the eleven” (cf. Mark 16:14, Luke 24:9, 33, Acts 2:14) or once as “the eleven apostles” (cf. Acts 1:26). Matthew’s expression shows that the term “disciples” sometimes refers not to Jesus’ followers in general but to the apostles in particular, as in the expression “the twelve disciples” (cf., 10:1, 11:1, 20:17); see also 26:17-19, 26, 35, 36, 56, 28:7-9. Matthew uses the term “apostle” only once, when he lists the names of the Twelve (10:2). In a Gospel which has stressed Jesus as “teacher,” his adherents are first of all learners (“disciples”) before they are missionaries (“apostles,” men sent out). We now learn that it was to a “mountain” in Galilee that Jesus had directed the apostles (**28:16b**). Was it the mountain of the Transfiguration (cf. 17:1, also 5:1, 15:29)? Seeing him, the apostles prostrate before him, as had the women (cf. v. 9), although some doubted (**28:17**) as had Peter while walking on the water (cf. 14:31, the only other use of the word in the New Testament). Matthew seems to be recording the fact that the doubt Jesus often met with in his ministry did not disappear after his resurrection but continued to be a feature of the nascent Church. Jesus then approaches the Eleven and tells them that all power in heaven and on earth has been given to him (**28:18**). Earlier he had told them that all things had been handed over to him by his Father (cf. 11:27). Now he reveals that through his resurrection he has received lordship over the whole created world; he has the power to bring all creatures into his kingdom. It will be the apostles’ task to “go forth” and make disciples of all nations (**28:19a**), baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (**28:19b**), teaching them to observe all that Jesus had commanded them (**28:20a**). One may see hear the three main tasks of the apostle and of the bishops who succeed them. First one makes disciples of men

by preaching to them the good news about Jesus, in particular his death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins. This is the prophetic office. Next the apostle integrates believers into the community of the risen Lord, the “Ecclesia” or Church, by means of a sacred sign of new life and birth, the sacrament of baptism which had first been used by John the Baptist (cf. 3:6, 11). This is the priestly office of the apostle. Jesus himself had been baptized by John (cf. 3:13, 16), and John had foretold that Jesus would provide a baptism that would give the Holy Spirit. In giving the command to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is reminding the apostles of all those places in the Gospel where he spoke of the God of Israel as his Father, with whom he enjoyed the intimacy of an equal even while submitting to the Father’s will. He now reveals that a third divine person shares the unity of the Father and the Son and is to be given together with the Father and the Son to new disciples. Those who have become believers and have been baptized will share in the sacred meal instituted by Jesus the night before he died. Finally, the apostle has the task of instructing baptized believers on the appropriate behavior of those brought into the family of Christ. This would include Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, which we can now understand as the New Law first lived by Christ himself and now enjoined on those empowered to live that Law by his life communicated in the sacraments. The principal commandments Christians will carry out will be love for enemies, forgiving of wrongs, trusting the heavenly Father, not paying back evil with evil, fidelity in relationships, purity of speech, interior and confident prayer, not judging a brother, serving others, becoming as a child, denying oneself, doing good rather than pretending to do it or simply talking about it, persevering in faith. These good works are not produced by the Christian’s good will or effort but by the Holy Spirit working in him, conforming him to Christ. Faith and baptism flower in the charity that is the chief virtue of the kingdom of God. This final office of the apostle is the kingly office, by which all flesh is subdued to the divine Messiah.

Jesus’ final words to the disciples express the goal of his mission: “And behold I am with you all days even to the end of the age” (28:20). At the very beginning of the Gospel Jesus was introduced as Emmanuel, “God with us” (1:23), and Matthew has never failed to underline the close fellowship of Jesus “with” his disciples (cf. 9:15, 12:3-4, 30, 17:17, 26:18, 20, 36, 51; also 18:20). In Jesus, crucified and risen, God has come to dwell with men forever. At the end of Matthew’s gospel Jesus does not “ascend into heaven,” as in the other Gospels, but in John Meier’s phrase “ascends into the Church.” These words of Jesus are addressed to his disciples as representatives of the whole Church, the family of God. However in a special way they are addressed to the Eleven as men entrusted with the preaching of the Gospel. Jesus’ final sentence needs to be read in conjunction with the threefold instruction to the apostles: make disciples (*mathēteusate*), baptize (*baptizontes*), and teach (*didaskontes*). In their preaching the Lord will be with them to keep them faithful to the Gospel even in persecution, where the Spirit of his Father will be speaking in them (cf. 10:20). In their baptizing it will be he who incorporates men and women into his sonship; their sacramental action will be analogous to their power of binding and loosing (cf. 18:18). In their governing the behavior of the faithful, Jesus will be teaching through them; he who welcomes them welcomes him (cf. 10:40). Jesus is with the appointed ministers of the Church in order to be made present in all believers. In Matthew ecclesiology and Christology are one.