

Bible Study Notes May 27, 2015

John 16:15-23 *All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you. A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father. Then said some of his disciples among themselves, What is this that he saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me: and, Because I go to the Father? They said therefore, What is this that he saith, A little while? We cannot tell what he saith. Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask him, and said unto them, Do ye enquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me? Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you. And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you."*

This Gospel is taken from one of the four chapters (14, 15, 16, 17) of the Gospel of John during and following the Last Supper in which Christ gives His final instructions to His disciples before going to His crucifixion. We have just celebrated the Feast of the Ascension and like the disciples back then, are gathered together awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. What better way to prepare for this than to revisit the Lord's final instructions and contemplate them? We hear the Word of God through reading the Scriptures, and yet there is an endless depth of meaning which is impossible to fully understand all at once. This is why it's important that we read the Scriptures daily and never cease trying to understand and integrate them more deeply.

St. Theophylact says that Christ keeps reminding the disciples of His death and departure in order to make them steadfast. This is so that they will not be panic-stricken when these things suddenly happen. Yet, they did not fully understand what He meant, since His words seemed contradictory (*a little while and ye shall not see Me, and again, a little while and ye shall see Me*). He then clarifies further: *ye shall weep and lament* (when I die on the cross) *but the world* (that is those Jews whose thoughts are of the world) *shall rejoice* (because they have destroyed Me, their enemy). *But your sorrow shall be turned into joy*, (while the joy of the Jews will end in grief, once I have risen from the dead and My name is glorified).

The Lord compares His death and resurrection to a woman undergoing the pains of labor. Travail necessarily accompanies childbirth, and deep sorrow must be yours before you can experience profound joy...let us understand the labor pangs as representing the grief of the apostles; the joy at birth—the comfort they received after the resurrection; the cessation of

labor pangs—the destruction of hades; and the birth itself—the resurrection of the Firstborn from the dead.

And your joy no man taketh from you... By saying this, the Lord assures the disciples that He will never die, but is eternally alive and will become for them the author of unending joy. *And in that day ye shall ask Me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you.* “After I have risen from the dead”, Christ continues, “I will send the Comforter, and He will surely come upon you and guide you into all truth. Then ye shall ask Me nothing. You will have no need to plead and beg as you did before (i.e.; *Whither goest Thou?* Jn. 14:5...*Show us the Father* Jn. 14:8). You will learn all things in the Spirit. Merely by uttering My name, you will receive from the Father what you desire.” By this the Lord reveals the power of His name to be such that we need merely call upon it and He will give us what we require, even without our making a specific request. (A footnote in the Commentary of Blessed Theophylact on the Gospel of John says that this evidently refers to the Orthodox practice of saying “the Prayer of Jesus.”)

St. Seraphim of Sarov once said, *“However prayer, fasting, vigil and all the other Christian practices may be, they do not constitute the aim of our Christian life. Although it is true that they serve as the indispensable means of reaching this end, the true aim of our Christian life consists of the **acquisition of the Holy Spirit of God**. As for fasts, and vigils, and prayer, and almsgiving, and every good deed done for Christ’s sake, are the only means of acquiring the Holy Spirit of God. Mark my words, only good deeds done for Christ’s sake brings us the fruits of the Holy Spirit. All that is not done for Christ’s sake, even though it be good, brings neither reward in the future life nor the grace of God in this life. That is why our Lord Jesus Christ said: “He who does not gather with Me scatters”.* (Luke 11:23)

Today, many Christians seem to believe that they have received the gift of the Holy Spirit at their baptism and this is true; yet infants also receive the breath of life at their birth, but can we say that they are fully mature? In much the same way, every Christian is called to grow into the fullness of the Grace of the Holy Spirit. As St. Paul says in Ephesians 4:13 *“Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”* This is why one of the cardinal rules of our spiritual life is to **strive without ceasing**. We must never let ourselves become complacent and think that we have already achieved our salvation and need not do anything further, but live as though we were on some kind of ‘Christian maintenance plan.’ Let’s resolve to get up every single day and make an effort to follow Christ, to remember Christ and to love Christ!