

Gospel of John - episode 34

Chapter 16 part 2 & 17 part 1

Welcome to our sharing on Chapter 16 of St. John's Gospel. Let us begin with 16:16. Jesus said to his disciples, "in a short time, you will no longer see me, and then a short time later, you will see me again". Now, if you remember that he is speaking the night before he died, then it means a very short time. He will be three hours in Gethsemane, then arrested, and most of them won't see him again until three days later when he appears again in the Resurrection. That is the first level of meaning. There is another level regarding the church: the short time is God's Kairos time. Psalm 90:5 says that "with the Lord a 1,000 years is like a single day". Jesus rose from the dead on the morning of the third day. This is in chapter 20, but I will give you a short comment here: Jesus rose from the dead very early on the morning of the third day. If you consider that a 1,000 years is a single day on God's 'time clock', then we are living early on the morning of the third day of the third millennium. So, the time for his return is very soon on our time clock, not just his! So, you see that there are different levels of message in the text. Before the Resurrection, there's no way the disciples can understand this.

Here is 16:17-19. "Then some of the disciples said to one another, What does he mean? In a short time, you will no longer see me, and then in a short time later, you will see me again because I'm going to the Father. What is this short time? We don't know what he means". You see, that's John's way of getting us to look at the different ways in which you can interpret the timing of the Lord's return. 16:19 says that Jesus knew that they wanted to question him. So, he said, "you are asking one another what I was saying". He is able to read their minds. Their problems accepting the Resurrection will force them to begin to see Jesus with the eye of the spirit rather than the eye of the flesh.

During the 3 1/2 years of the ministry, they saw Jesus with the eye of the flesh; they felt him, but once the Resurrection occurs, everything changes. Saint Paul told the early Christians in 2 Corinthians 5:16-17, who were battling this notion: "from now onwards, we do not judge anyone by the standards of the flesh. Even if we did know Christ in the flesh, that's not how we know him now. For anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation. The old creation is gone, and there's a new one here. It's all God's work". Paul explains that a completely new era has dawned on them, so even if they knew Jesus in the flesh prior to this, that's not the way it is now. The church is now dealing with the Risen Lord in the spirit. Only a small number of witnesses saw Jesus in Resurrection appearances. For the rest, it was going to be spiritual seeing.

In John chapter 20 Jesus will say to Thomas, "blessed are those who have not seen and have believed", which is the condition of the whole church apart from the first witnesses. We have a beautiful testimony from Saint Peter in 1 Peter 1:8-9. He congratulates the early Christians saying, "you did not see him and yet you love him, and still without seeing him, you are already filled with a joy so glorious that it cannot be described, because you believe". In other words, everything that had been promised in the final discourse, Peter says that they have experienced, but without seeing Jesus in the flesh. Most of them had not seen Jesus in the flesh. He said, "not only that, but you are sure of the end to which your faith looks

forward, which is the salvation of your souls". So, 'seeing Jesus' becomes a completely different reality to what it was before the Passion and Death of Jesus. Saint Paul also says in 1 Corinthians 13:12, now, in our lifetime we see a dim reflection, like in a mirror. In other words, our ability to see, spiritually is not all that great, but there will come a time when we will see him face to face. The knowledge we have now is imperfect, but one day we will understand everything. That time is when our eyes are opened in death.

Here is Jesus' response in 16:20. "I tell you, solemnly, you will be weeping and wailing while the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy. A woman in childbirth suffers because her time has come, but when she has given birth to a child, she forgets the suffering in her joy that a man has been born into the world. So, it is with you. You are sad now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will be full of joy, and **that joy**, nobody can take from you". Now, not only John, but the Synoptic Gospels say that when the Apostles saw Jesus on the evening of Easter Day, they were so ecstatic with joy that they were dumbfounded; they couldn't speak. They just stood there; Jesus had to coax them into conversation.

So, what Jesus promised them here will happen, but they must let go of wanting his physical presence and open up to the new spiritual reality. The new way of seeing and understanding will be given when the Holy Spirit is poured out upon them. This will enable them to walk with God in the way that Jesus has asked in the final discourse. A new level of spirituality will be opened up to them. They will begin to see God and be seen by him in a new way. They will come to know God and be known by Him through a personal relationship. They will begin to love God and be loved by Him in a new way. That is what Peter and Paul say to the early Christians. It is so incredible for us to experience. Because of this their sorrow will be turned into joy, when they realise that **Jesus is who he said he was**; that **Jesus' sacrifice does what he said it was going to do, and that Jesus's victory is what he said it was going to be**.

The Synoptic Gospels say that Jesus prophesied 3 times that he would be persecuted, crucified, and that he would rise from the dead. So, it's in this experience that they begin to know him in a way they've never known him before. The writings of the early church illustrate clearly the difference between the way people see and don't see. In 1 Corinthians 2:10-16, Paul says that the spiritual one (the one living on the level of above) is the one who sees, knows and understands. But the unspiritual one (the one who has stayed on the level of below) doesn't understand or see anything. This is a good commentary on John's Gospel, even though it was written years before John's Gospel was written!

So, "you will be weeping and wailing". The weeping and wailing of the disciples during the Passion of Jesus isn't just because of what's happening to Jesus. It's also because of what's happening to themselves also! Each one of them must go through a 'spiritual passion and death' for the old man to die and the new man to be born. While Jesus is being crucified physically, they will go through a death to their own way of life too. Their weeping and wailing involved regret, mourning, repentance for their sins, and for their failure to stay with Jesus and so on, but they will have their resurrection too, just as Jesus had his Resurrection. I will show you this in Chapter 20, where John gives a lot of attention to the church rising from the dead.

So, What is going to happen between Friday and Sunday? This is Thursday night. Jesus compares their pain to that of a woman giving birth. He deliberately uses this image because this is the language of the prophets. When they wanted to talk about the sufferings and victory of the messianic age, they spoke about a woman giving birth. We have an important text from Isaiah 26:16-19, in which he makes a confession to God on behalf of the whole nation. He says, 'Lord, we've had a phantom pregnancy. We've only given birth to the wind!' "We have not given salvation to the Earth. No inhabitants of the world have been brought to birth. Your dead will come back to life. Your corpses will rise again. Wake up and sing, you dwellers in the dust". The old Israel failed because it lived on the level of below and it was pre-redemption time, it was not capable of giving salvation to the world. It required the God-Man to accomplish that. So, no matter what they tried to do for God, it just didn't produce the divine fruit that was needed. It took the One who was from above, the One who was both divine and human, to accomplish this. Therefore, in accomplishing this, Jesus becomes **the source of our joy**, for the whole human race. Jesus is new Isaac. When we come into the Passion John illustrates Jesus as the new Isaac.

The text here is speaking about the Passion and Resurrection at the time of Christ, but it's also indicating something at the end of the world. In the end times, there will also be weeping and wailing and great distress before the final victory of Christ. This is what Saint Mark says in chapter 13:19-20. This is the 'long distance' weeping and wailing. For in those days, prior at the time of the Antichrist and the return of Christ, there will be such distress that it will have no equal since the beginning of creation, nor will it ever be like that again. If the Lord hadn't shortened the time, not even the elect would survive. That is a summary of what he said. So, I want you to see that the two levels here: one is what is happening at the time of Christ, and the other is the long distance forecast for what will happen prior to the final glorious coming of Jesus.

The prophets spoke about these events as birth pangs: Cf. Zephaniah 1:14-15. It is only at the time of the Parousia (the final glorious coming of Jesus), which St. Matthew dedicates Chapter 24 to - that Jesus will be revealed as the King of Kings and the Lord of lords in Revelation 19. So in between the first going of Jesus and his final return, the church travels through the night of history, the journey she's embarking on now. Jesus needs to tell her how to survive. We have already been told that if you remain in this special relationship with the blessed Trinity that you will survive. Now he deals with another angle. From 16:23, he says, "I tell you most solemnly, anything you ask for from the Father, he will grant in my name. Until now, you haven't asked anything in my name. Ask and you will receive so that your joy will be complete".

What Jesus says is that in the church's long journey throughout the centuries, she must have a vibrant prayer life. She must be in contact with the Blessed Trinity. She must be in that mutual abiding, and Jesus must be able to reign in the hearts of all believers. It is with the Resurrection that the disciples will really experience the mutual love of the Father and the Son. They will discover a union so deep that they realise that they have been loved divinely, because God is love. Now, we were told that in Chapter 15:9, "as the Father has loved me, so I have loved you".

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit allows the Blessed Trinity to set up their temple in the hearts of all believers. It's not the physical building in the town that is the church. **It is the heart of the believers.** We



will pray out of this union we have with the Father, the Son in the Holy Spirit. That prayer will be heard, for it is called in Jesus' name. This prayer is universal, as I have said already. It involves all of Jesus's children. It is not selfish or small. In fact, it is **the Our Father**. We will see this in chapter 17. So, all these privileges that will only come after the Resurrection.

Let us continue. Jesus says in 16:25. "I have been telling you all this in metaphors, but the hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in metaphors, but tell you about the Father in plain words". That is when they are able to take it! "When that day comes (when the Holy Spirit comes) you will ask in my name, and I don't say that I shall pray to the Father for you because the Father loves you for loving me". This is the most divine thing we can experience, to be loved divinely by the Three Persons of the most Holy Trinity. There is no greater privilege or joy that we can have. Jesus says that the Father will love you in a very special way just because you love him. The disciples say to him, "at long last, we understand what you're talking about". This is brilliant! It is beyond the 11th hour: It's one minute to midnight in terms of the Passion and Death of Jesus, and the 12 he chose say to him, "now you're speaking plainly and you're not talking in metaphors!" Now we understand everything. We realise that you came from God.

They make this wonderful statement. Yes, we believe! Jesus said, "you believe at last?" He has just told Peter that he will deny him three times – that very night! Do you remember that in chapter 13? You've probably forgotten by now. So much has happened since then. He said, "listen, you are all going to be scattered". They don't realise that the prophecy of Zechariah will be fulfilled in 3 hours - that "the shepherd will be struck and the sheep will be scattered". He said, "you will all be scattered, each going his own way and leaving me alone, but I am not alone because the Father is with me", and he said, "I've told you all this so you will have peace in me. But in the unbelieving world you will always have trouble. But be brave, I have conquered the world". They are the final words of the discourse of Jesus.

So, Jesus has been summarising things that he has said before, except the final thing that you don't understand because you're going to be scattered very soon. Just as the beloved disciples think they have understood, they haven't; they won't understand this mystery until after the very bitter experience of the Passion of Jesus. Even the day of Resurrection, which we celebrate as something utterly joyful, to them, it was very painful. It was only at the end of the day that they would see Jesus.

The last thing Jesus says to them is that in the unbelieving world "you will have tribulation". This is very important if you study the Book of Revelation, because the tribulation described there is awful. So, the world will cause trouble for the church because it will oppose it's teaching. **It will cast God out. It will expel Christ** from different countries which is happening as we speak. It will persecute the church in different parts of the world. It will create saints and martyrs, and will continue opposing right to the very end, until Jesus returns.

Thank you for listening. Goodbye. God bless you.

INTERVAL



Welcome to our sharing on the second half of St. John's Gospel. We now begin Chapter 17 with it's wonderful Priestley prayer of Jesus. I will give you an introduction to it because we mustn't read it superficially. We have now emerged from the upper room with it's wonderful, warm, loving atmosphere. Jesus has been telling us about our calling in God and our mission to the world when he returns to the Father. There are only two things left for Jesus to do on the Earth. One is to pray and intercede that his mission and all that he has taught and prepared for will become a reality. This is what he does in chapter 17. Then he must pay the price for this to happen - chapters 18 and 19. Afterwards the new era begins in chapter 20, so, it's all action as soon as we have completed chapter 17.

The earthly side of Jesus's ministry is over, and the heavenly side begins. Jesus is alone in this intercession, and alone in paying the price also. Therefore, this particular Passover is both an ending, and a beginning. It brings the Mosaic Covenant to an end. By the time Jesus breathes his last on the cross he has fulfilled every prescription of the Mosaic Covenant. Thus, it is closed, and he cuts a New Covenant for us in his own blood. From this point the New Covenant or the New Testament takes over. We have been in the warm, loving environment with Jesus during the final discourse; now we have an extraordinary experience which only John gives; we are invited into the intimate conversation between the Father and his Son. We have the sense of being drawn into the Holy of Holies; we come with a sense of awe and wonder to hear this dialogue between the Father and the Son.

In this dialogue Jesus is shows us what to do. He has invited us to live a heavenly life on Earth and to live at the level of above. Now, the early Christian teachers understood this very well. That is why I want to read what Saint Paul says in Colossians 3:1-4. "Since you have been brought back to true life with Christ - you see, they understood that they died with him, and they also rose with him from the dead. They didn't understand it immediately, but the Holy Spirit revealed it -. "Because of this", he said, "you must look for the things that are in heaven, where Christ is sitting at God's righthand. Let your thoughts be on heavenly things (the level of above), and not on the things the Earth (the level of below), because you have died, and now your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ is revealed, (in the Parousia) and he is your life, you will be seen to be like him" because each one of us becomes another Christ.

So, the early church teachers understood the implications of what we have looked at in the final discourse of Jesus. I mentioned to you before that there were famous people in the Old Testament who gave final discourses, and they finished the discourse by praying for their disciples. That's exactly what you see Jesus doing now. Having taught them everything he begins to intercede for them. John treats the prayer of Jesus differently from the Synoptic Gospels. Yet if you take the issues that are in the Our Father prayer in Matthew and Luke, you will see that John covered them. He has covered approaching God as Father, and how we need to hallow his name; to glorify him, and pray for his kingdom to come, and that the issue is doing God's Will on Earth as it is in heaven. All of that is covered, but in John's own unique way. When he comes to the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus, he will deal with the main issues, but also from his own unique angle because John sees things much deeper than the Synoptic Gospels do, being a great mystic himself and the disciple closest to Jesus during the ministry. Also, he was the one who lived with

our Blessed Mother after the Resurrection; he would have received profound understanding and insight from her.

Just in case you wanted to know, is John 17 the same as the Our Father? It is the same and different. John goes much deeper than the Synoptic Gospels. The overall concern in John's treatment of the Our Father, the prayer of Jesus, is, of course, God's Kingdom. Everything we have looked at in the final discourse has the issue of establishing God's Kingdom on Earth. Jesus did his part, now the Church has to do hers. But it's all the work of God, and the end product is that 'God's Will be done on Earth as it is in heaven'. That is what God wanted from the beginning, and he doesn't change his mind. Jesus has completed the work that he was sent to do. He has prepared his church to take up the challenge into the future. This has to be done in every generation and every century, as long as there are souls to be saved until the final glorious coming of Jesus. Even though John deals with the same issues as you have in the Our Father, the Gospel of Matthew and Luke are different because instead of just proclaiming the Our Father, as they do, he brings us inside of this conversation into a very private moment between Jesus and the Father.

You feel you are inserting yourself into this communion between the Father and the Son. It is perfectly clear from this prayer that we are about to see that **the Son knows the Father** and that he is completely confident that his prayer will be heard. Now, if you've heard me at all in the final discourse, Jesus has told the disciples that if they have the right relationship with the Father their prayer will be heard, so we go to God in complete confidence. You will notice when we get into this prayer, that it is entirely for the church. Jesus is facing the greatest trial of his life; he is facing massive injustice and torture for himself, yet there is no concern for himself. Only at the very end of the prayer does Jesus use the expression, 'I want', and I'm going to make you wait for what he actually wants, because I'd spoil it if I told it in the beginning. Everything is for us, for the children. Everything is for the future; for the Kingdom of God.

This prayer concentrates completely on what the Father wants for his children and what he wants the children to do for the Father. So, you see that this is the prayer of agape love. It is the prayer that puts everyone else first. As you read it, you are drawn into God's Presence. It's like as if, spiritually, you are on your knees or on your face in adoration for the sheer privilege of being allowed to participate in this. There are many words in John 17 because it is a public prayer. Jesus didn't need these words; the prayer is for us. Back to John 11, when Jesus stood before the tomb of Lazarus, he also made a public prayer. The second thing he said was, "Father, I know you always hear my prayer". So, there is the confidence of the child turning to the Father. He told the people around him that he said that prayer for their sake.

So, all the words in John Chapter 17 are for us also. Jesus didn't need to do it at all. If Jesus said 'Abba', it was enough. That's really all that needed to be said. I want to illustrate this for you. I want to say something about **THE GREAT ABBA**. Abba is the word that a small child in the Middle East, and especially in Israel, calls their daddy. It expresses all the love, possessiveness and wonder that the child has for the dad. Many years ago, on a pilgrimage to Israel, I asked the Lord, if it were possible for me to hear the real meaning of the word Abba? He allowed me to have an experience that really mattered. I was in in a souvenir shop with pilgrims I was bringing around the Holy Land buying their souvenirs to go

home. I wasn't interested, so, I stood at the door and looked up and down the street. A Jewish mother with a little boy about 2-3 years old was nearby; she was at the counter paying her bill. The little lad was ran back and forth to the door, and she was afraid he was going to get into trouble. So, I decided to watch. I looked at him. He was sallow faced with curly hair, dressed very simply with no shoes. I said to myself, 'Jesus would have looked like that'. He was a very beautiful child. Since the child was so interested in looking down the road, he must have been looking for someone. Then a young man, who looked like someone in his 20's suddenly came around the corner and walked towards us. As soon as the child saw him, he lifted his two arms into the air and cried out, 'Abba, Abba, with total excitement. The young dad ran towards the child, picked him up and wrapped him around his shoulders and held him. I saw the image of the shepherd and the sheep at that moment. I looked at the expression on both their faces. The young father's expression said, 'I'm the king of the world because I have this wonderful son'. The face of the child said, 'I'm the king of the world because I have this incredible dad'. The two of them were literally glorying in each other. That is John 17!

That is the meaning of Abba. Jesus knows that the moment he says 'Abba', everything is said. Contemplative souls understand that if you say Abba, you don't need to say anything else because it's all there. The word Abba, spoken by the Son, provokes a response from the Father which says, 'My Son' - which I've just illustrated. You see this in both the Baptism and the Transfiguration of Jesus in Luke's Gospel. Jesus prayed but we weren't told what he said, but the Father said, "**This Is My Son**. He's the beloved. My favour is on him. Listen to him". So, there you have the excitement of the Father acknowledging "this is my Son". You have this mutual glorification of the Father and the Son. This is John 17. It's really very wonderful. The communication between Jesus and the Father reveals the relationship between them.

In the first half of the Gospel we remember Jesus saying, "I only do what my Father tells me to do". "I only say what my Father tells me to say", and so on, and the "Father and I are one". We didn't realise what it was like to enter into that communion of eternal divine love between the Father and Son. The Son completely trusts the Father for everything. The Father trusts His Son to do everything for Him on the Earth. So, it's love, trust, humility and openness between them. It is this wonder that we're invited to enter into. Here is another thing: **Abba is the key to Heaven**. When Jesus turns that key, all the power, beauty and glory of God's love and God's redemptive graces pour out upon the Earth. Jesus teaches us how to open the gates of heaven and let all the glory of God come down upon the Earth to try and save it. So, in the prayer, Jesus says, 'I am your son, and the Father is saying, 'and I am your Father'. Because one affirms the other great things happen. Through this prayer, Jesus teaches us - not by instruction, but by example - on how to approach God. He wants to say to us, 'just copy what I have done'.

So, let's look at some of the text. This is John 17:1, "After saying this, Jesus raised his eyes to heaven, and he said, Abba, the hour has come". But of course, Abba and his Son, his only Begotten Son, knew about this hour from all eternity. They knew everything. Abba lives in eternity, not in time; His Son speaks within the time zone saying, "the time has come (that is God's Kairos-time for intervention in history). We might expect him to say, 'it's going to be very difficult. I need you to be around; I need help, you must surround me with angels and all the rest'. Not at all. It's the exact opposite of that. He says, "**Father,**

glorify your Son so that your Son may glorify you! Now, this is to happen during all the terror that will come in chapters 18 and 19.

What does glorify mean? It means, Father, reveal your Son, and your Son is going to reveal you. It's there in these terrifying events that finally we will be able to say what the executioner said about Jesus: **"That man was a son of God"**. He had to be. The way he responded to the terror that we meted out to him - only a son of God could do that. To get your own executioner to bow in worship before you - that's some achievement! Don't forget that the executioner was a pagan Roman soldier, caught up in all the wrong religions, wrong worship and probably living an immoral life... To get that person to bend the knee was something else. So, Jesus does not look at what is about to happen to him physically. He looks at the opportunity given to him to truly reveal what God is like. Since "the Father and I are one", they will be mutually revealing each other in the whole drama of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus. **We** don't think that the Father is present, but the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are **THREE PERSONS IN ONE GOD**, and they work as one unit.

In 17: 2, Jesus says, "through the power over all mankind that you have given him, let him give eternal life to those you have entrusted to him. Two major statements there. I will revisit them, but I'll introduce them now. We were told in Chapter 13:1, that 'Jesus knew that everything was in his hands'. He had authority over what was going to happen to humanity. Everything was in his hands. If he didn't save the human race, it would be lost to Heaven. It was that simple. So, he had full authority from God, and he says, "I want you to let me use this authority to give eternal life to all the ones you have entrusted to me".

Now, I want you to notice all the ones you have entrusted to me. As we went through the Gospel, we realised God wants everyone to be saved; the Saviour was sent for everybody, but some do not respond. It is those who respond, who open up and become beloved disciples, branches of divine, and members of the Mystical Body of Christ are the ones that the Father has given the Son, and the Son wants to give them everything, including eternal happiness and eternal life.

We'll continue this in the next episode. Thank you for listening. God bless you.