

## Gospel of John - episode 32

### Chapter 15 part 3

Welcome to our continued sharing on John Chapter 15. I want to pick up on 15:12-13, where Jesus repeats again what he has said several times already that loving is the issue in the Kingdom of God. He has just told us in verse 11 that he gives us his own joy. He is anxious that this joy will be well grounded so, he says, “this is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you”. That’s exactly what he said in chapter 13:34. He keeps emphasising this. But what love is it? You’re going to tell me ‘you’ve explained it many times already’. ‘Yes, I have’, but Jesus wants to add to it. This is 15:13, “a man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends”. We already know that this is divine love, self-giving love, that it is sacrificial, totally for the other, for building up others.

But now we come to the stage that you would actually lay down your life. Saint Maximilian Kolbe illustrated this very well in Auschwitz during the Second World War when he laid down his life for a man he didn’t know. This was the agape love that Jesus was talking about, that you would give your life so that somebody else could live. As far as the world is concerned, that is inexplicable. It doesn’t make sense, but there is testimony from Auschwitz that when Maximilian stepped forward to offer his life for somebody else, that the guards were so shocked, they said nothing! They said there was a stillness in the air as if time itself had stopped, because with this act of divine love coming through a human being, time had stopped and eternity touched them all. The survivors of the camp said that the cruelty of the camp was never as great afterwards. Of course, the victory over that great evil came soon afterwards. It seemed to stop the cruelty.

We’ve said that the Father is the source of this Love, and He gives everything to his Son, who gives everything to us. So, in terms of laying down one’s life, the Father laid down his life in giving us his only Son, knowing what we were going to do with him. Then when the divine Logos became man - we call him Jesus as the Incarnate One - he also laid down his life for us. He says that this incredible sign of self-giving would also always be in the church. I came across a very interesting statement from Tertullian, who lived between 160 and 225 AD; he wrote a book called Apologetics. This man was from Carthage, and he said that one of the astonishing reactions of the Romans persecuting the Christians was that they said, “these Christians, how they love one another!” So, if your persecutors have to admire you, there’s something special there. Laying down of one’s life is something very special and characteristic of Christianity.

Let’s come to 15:14-15. Jesus has already given everything. Then he said, “You are my friends if you do what I command you. I shall not call you servants anymore because a servant does not know his master’s business. I call you friends because I have made known to you everything that I have learned from my Father”. Wonderful stuff. The Book of Wisdom 7:27 says that Wisdom makes human beings into friends of God and prophets. Now, you know that Wisdom was one of the great manifestations of God in the Old Testament. In this Gospel John presents Jesus as Wisdom Incarnate, and here he is turning his disciples

into friends of God and prophets! How did they become friends of God? I'm asking that question so that if anybody needs to join them, that you will know how to join them.

- 1) They became friends of God by joining Jesus and participating in his mission.
- 2) through hearing the Word of God through Jesus and internalising it.
- 3) they allowed Jesus, who was present with them for three and a half years to change them and to train them to become saints.
- 4) They allowed the grace of God and the power of God to work within them.
- 5) They learned through Jesus how to give themselves to others, how to serve others.

So, these are the steps if we want to join them and become friends of God and prophets. You need to be in the company of Jesus all the time. You must let him work with you. So, the beloved disciples began this journey by being disciples of Jesus, first of all, by becoming his followers. Now, you can be a follower of somebody simply because you admire them and you like looking at them and you like listening to them. Becoming a disciple is deeper because you're going to associate yourself with that person's ministry. They become servants of Jesus. This is very interesting.

The Synoptic Gospels make that clear also - that they became servants of Jesus. Go back to Exodus 4:10: you will see that Moses was a servant of God also. Amos 3:7 says that God never does anything without telling his servants, the prophets first. Having become disciples and followers, they became servants of Jesus, and then his companions. Now, St. Mark's Gospel emphasises that when Jesus chose the twelve, he chose them to be his companions, that they would join him in a completely new way. Other disciples did not travel around or stay with Jesus to live the same life as him. They lived their own lives and just did what he asked. So, the 12 became his companions, and his cooperators in the mission. Now, as we come to the end of Jesus's life and mission, they become his inheritors. After Jesus returns to the Father, they not only inherit his mission and everything that goes with it, they become his ambassadors, his personal representatives to the world, with his authority to teach and preach the message of Redemption.

Now, if you want to see this process, it is described in the first Book of Kings, in the story of Elijah and Elisha. Elijah called Elisha to follow him. The first thing that Elisha did was to literally follow him. He became his servant and companion, and afterwards his inheritor. As Elijah was taken up into heaven, his cloak - which represented his authority for mission - fell to Elisha. We will see exactly the same thing with Jesus and the Apostles. When Jesus returns to the Father in the Ascension, then the "cloak" representing his mission, falls upon the 12. That's the 11 plus Matthias at that particular stage. So, from now on they walk in union with God and each other. That is the triangle I described to you in the last session. They become ambassadors. "I call you friends", Jesus said, "because I've made known everything to you". This is extremely important. Jesus revealed everything. That means everything he knew about the Father, about himself, everything about God's Will for the human race; everything about Redemption and everything they needed to know in order to be God's representatives. Jesus has opened his heart to them, and we're going to see on the cross that his heart will be opened up to the whole human race.

When we come into the Passion, we will realise that John picks up something that the other Gospel writers omit. Pilate, as a representative of the world power in Rome, as a personal representative of Caesar, wore a ring, and stamped on that ring was 'Friend of Caesar'. That was his authority to act in the name of Caesar. So, we will find that when the Sanhedrin really want to manipulate him, they will say, "you're no friend of Caesar!" They will be referring to the fact that it is the stamp on his ring that gives him authority. So, when Jesus says to his disciples that, "you are my friends", he says that from now on they are his ambassadors, just as Pilate was the ambassador for Caesar. It's just little things like that can make a difference to the text. So, let's come to 15:15. "I shall not call you servants anymore because a servant doesn't know his master's business". A servant simply obeys. So that stage is over. "I call you friends because I have made known to you everything I have learned from my Father". At this stage they don't remember everything, but he has told them in chapter 14 that when the Holy Spirit comes, He will bring everything to their minds.

Then in 15:16 something very important is stated: "you did not choose me. No. I chose you". Now, You'll probably think, 'well, that's just ordinary! Of course, he chose them! But you have to realise who Jesus is, that as the only begotten Son of the Father; as Love Incarnate on the Earth; as Wisdom Incarnate on the Earth, he chose 12 men who make an extraordinary group representing the diversity that will be in the church later. Some of them were older than Jesus. Some of them were very young, like Thomas and John. Some of them were uneducated, like the four fishermen. Some were learned, like Bartholomew, Nathaniel and Philip. Some were from experienced situations like the older men; some were raw recruits like Peter. It was the transformation of this this motley crew that probably had nothing in common except their citizenship and religion, that is so amazing. To bring them together and form them into a community of love; to get them to become a community of equal brethren was a first-class miracle - to bring them to the point where, regardless of whether they had education or not that they could come to produce spiritual fruit.

These are the miracles behind the Gospel that we don't even look at. We don't notice. Not only were they to bear fruit for the Lord, but fruit that would last. Now, what do you mean by fruit that would last? The church is alive 2,000 years later! That's fruit that lasts. We know if we take fruit off a tree, that the fruit isn't going to last. It's going to disintegrate in a few days. The spiritual fruit that lasts means that the vibrant energy that was put into the church has kept it alive against all the odds, through all persecutions, all difficulties and struggles throughout the centuries. That is the miracle behind "I chose you". Now, there's something else there of course; it is that **the Lord is saying to us** - the readers of the Gospel - and to all of us who are participating in this programme, "**I CHOSE YOU**". Your background or your education doesn't mean anything to me. What matters is that you have opened your heart and your life to let the Word of God become incarnate in you, that you've allowed love to be born in you.

That's what makes the difference as far as Jesus is concerned. So, he is speaking this directly to us. I'm pointing that out in case, in reading the Gospel, you say to yourself, 'well, they were lucky. Jesus chose them. I'm not in the same position'. The thing is, you are. God is not a respecter of persons. Every human being is equal in his eyes. This was not written for the twelve Apostles. It was written for you. It was written for you to hear **I chose you**. It's absolutely fantastic. The Lord wants to take each one of us and

bring us into intimacy with God, where he can reveal himself so that we can be effective ambassadors for him in the world. So, “I have chosen you. You didn't choose me”. We might think, ‘well, I got interested in religion, or I began to study the scriptures, or I did a theology degree, or whatever I did’. No, no, no. **It's the Lord** drawing you through whatever channel he has drawn you to come to this point where you can meet him face to face and open your whole being to him. That's what he wants. “You did not choose me. I chose you, and I commissioned you to go out and bear fruit, fruit that would last”. If you look at the history of the Church, of the saints and martyrs throughout the centuries, you see the extraordinary testimony that they left for the world.

Verse 16 ends this way, “and then the Father will give you anything you ask in my name”. Now, notice the condition. You've been chosen, you respond. You're commissioned to bear fruit, fruit that will last. In this situation of being a fruit-bearing branch, actually allowing God's Will to be done in the earth of your life as it is in heaven, God, of course, will answer your prayer. Because, in that situation you will be praying for God's Will to be done upon the Earth. A selfish prayer is not even considered. It's just not there. So, the Father will give you anything. This, of course, means that we have the same interests God, which is the salvation of souls, which is that the mission of Jesus be accomplished upon the Earth.

Then Jesus repeats for the third time in just a few verses, **“what I command you is to love one another”**. Love is everything. Love is the essence of our life. It's the heart of the church. Some of the saints were able to articulate this. Saint Thérèse of Lisieux said, “I want to be love in the heart of the church”. So, she understood the message very clearly. So, the inheritors of the Gospel are the ones who will establish this love upon the Earth and let God have his throne. Now, his throne is in the hearts of the believers; it is made of love because God is love. So, if we don't have a heart of love open to him; if we don't love him with all our hearts and all our whole being (Deut 6:4-10), He doesn't have a throne. Hebrews 12:14 says, “without holiness, no one will ever see God”. That's why Jesus says here that you have to live this reality, producing this fruit in order to have a truly effective prayer life.

Prayer is not a case of saying words to God with Him responding to any idea that comes into in our head. It's nothing to do with that. Prayer is this love relationship where we express what God wants to do for His children. So, when we say, ‘Lord, heal my brother’, yes, he does. He wants to heal them. When we say, ‘Give peace to these people who are troubled’, yes, He wants to give them peace. But we're not asking for anything for ourselves because we've laid down the self so that divine love could be born in us. We just need to realise that the essence of life is love. If you ever want to pray for anything for yourself, say: “Jesus, pour your love into me. Let me become love”.

Thank you for listening. Goodbye. God bless you.

### **INTERVAL**

Welcome to our sharing on John's Gospel. We come towards the end of Chapter 15 now, where Jesus speaks about the fact that the beloved disciples are going into a hostile world. So, we have to look at this uncomfortable reality, but Jesus wanted to keep them grounded in the truth. In 15:18, Jesus said, “If the



world hates you, remember that it hated me before you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. But because you do not belong to the world, because my choice, withdrew you from the world, therefore the world hates you". So, the logic is clear. "Remember the words I said to you", Jesus said, "A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they kept my Word, they will keep yours also. But it will be on my account that they do all this, because they do not know the One who sent me. If I had not come, if I had not spoken to them, they would have been blameless. But as it is, they have no excuse for their sin. Anyone who hates me, hates my Father". So now we come to the very uncomfortable, cruel situation that Jesus is actually in. He has to warn his disciples that they are going to receive the same treatment as himself. We have looked at the fact that they become his inheritors, and that means they also inherit the cross. They inherit everything from him so that includes persecution from the unbelieving world, the cosmos. Let's look at this for a few minutes. We've been in a wonderful atmosphere of peace, love and intimacy with God and with each other. In this family atmosphere of the final discourse of Jesus, we've almost forgotten that Judas left the room and that 'night had fallen'. We have not been there thinking about the fact that as Jesus speaks to them there are people outside at the same time preparing a cross for him; organising themselves to torture and kill him. This awesome, ugly reality is present. So, the worldly politics of power, control and manipulation of the many by the few is just waiting for them to emerge from the Cenacle. As long as the Apostles are enclosed in the Cenacle with Jesus, everything is okay. The moment they go out, it will be hell on Earth. So, Jesus reminds them that they will have to live out their special relationship with the blessed Trinity in the midst of that chaos.

They have to go out into the world, as it is, with all its sin, unbelief, violence, and persecution. It's in that context that they will have to be leaven in the dough and light in darkness; they will have to give spiritual life in the midst of that spiritual death. They will have to raise people spiritually from the dead. It's a very tall order! Jesus has spent so much time trying to build them up so that they would have the strength to do this. In this context we come to understand rather quickly the need for the branch to stay attached to the Vine, because if the branch doesn't stay attached to the vine, it will die rather quickly. We're going to have Judas dead before Jesus dies in less than 24 hours. So, while we were gently going through the text, this background of pain and suffering was there all the time. Without the power of God working actively in them, they were going to fail God completely.

And of course, we will see in the Passion that they do fail the Lord, all of them, but not completely. The only one who fails completely is Judas. Jesus wants to explain why this is going to happen and why the church will be persecuted throughout history. They need to understand why Jesus says that it is about him! It's not about us. This becomes clear in the Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 4, when Peter and John stand before the same Sanhedrin which condemned Jesus, and it wants to condemn them also. You hear this wonderful statement that they recognised the Apostles as followers of Jesus. They were very surprised that these men who had no education and no important social background, could speak up and that they were not afraid of the Sanhedrin anymore. In fact, they were not afraid of anyone. The speed with which the Apostles are transformed once the Holy Spirit comes is wonderful. We don't look at it enough. If we did, we would allow the same thing to happen to us.

By the time John wrote this Gospel towards the end of the first century the Church had witnessed Jesus being persecuted, tortured, and killed. As he said himself in 15:25, he had been hated for no reason. He was actually killed for who he was - that he was the Son of God. But by the time John wrote this Gospel, the early Christians had also been persecuted and imprisoned, and some of them killed, also some of the Apostles. So, they had come to realise that the whole mystery had been passed on to them, including the cross. The cross was never going to be absent because it would keep us purified. The cross would keep us totally dependent on the Lord; it was going to keep us on track. We were not going to go astray. The cross would keep us right. So, the world out there that John calls the Cosmos, the unbelieving world, didn't change just because God became man and because he spent three and a half years on the Earth. When Jesus died, everything went on, apparently, as normal. Everything in the temple appeared to go on as normal also. The world in the Roman Empire didn't know anything about the mysteries that were happening in Israel. So, everything continued as if nothing had occurred. The elite powers who rule the world don't want the little people to be free; they want to control them. The elite powers even after 21 centuries do not want to be reminded that God lives and that God's law is superior to theirs; that they should obey God. Because they resent that they persecute the Church. If any Christian - like Peter and John before the Sanhedrin - will confront the elite powers and say to them, "We must listen to God rather than men" you may be sure that the reaction will be persecution because they won't tolerate the little ones challenge, so, persecution will continue. Why does Jesus say in 15:21, "it will be on my account that they do all this"? It's because of the spiritual battle that is taking place behind all the power politics, persecution and terror that is happening in the world.

Behind that is the spiritual struggle between good and evil; between light and darkness; between life and death; between God and Satan. That is the war which will continue as long as there are souls to be saved or lost on the Earth. That struggle goes on in each one of us, and in the world itself. So, the Apostles are being given reality therapy at this point. This conflict of the Passion of Jesus - which they will witness just within 24 hours - will continue throughout the centuries because that is the struggle. Our choice as individuals is either to join Jesus and God's army or go to the opposition and join the army of darkness and Satan. The consequences are eternal. So, if you were to put this succinctly, what would you say? Each one of us must choose the love of power, manipulation and control, which is the world's position, or the power to love, which is Jesus' position. So, it's the power to control or the power to love, and it's the power to love that will transform the world.

John did warn us in Chapter 3:19-21, that some people would choose the darkness over the light because their deeds were evil. Their lifestyle was already in the camp of darkness and under the prince of this world, and they would come to choose it, which is a great mystery for us. Those who choose the darkness resent those who choose the light. So, you see that this conflict occurs in every family, townland, city, country, and in every culture, in every age. But we need to know what the battle actually is. In 15:22, Jesus says something terribly important. He said, "if I had not come in the Incarnation; if I had not spoken to them - in other words, if I had not revealed the Father, if I had not revealed God's Will, and had not given you the whole revelation in the Gospels, if I had not spoken to them - "they might have been blameless". In other words, it would still be the Old Testament time! "But as it is, they have no excuse for their sin".



Now, the blame starts with the Sanhedrin in the situation Jesus is in, because of all the people in Israel, they were the most responsible for the events of his Passion and Death. They represented God to the people. Then Pilate represented the world power in Israel. Then the people of Israel, all of whom had heard Jesus since he had done a blitz campaign for three and a half years. There couldn't have been anybody in Israel who hadn't heard him. Jesus himself told the Sanhedrin when he was put on trial: "Everyone has heard me"; "I've spoken openly to all". I have not said anything in secret". They all had heard. So, he says, "If they have heard, they have no excuse". That puts you and me in a position of having no excuse either! We have heard. The Word has been claimed at every Eucharist for 2000 years. We have the scriptures. No one stops us from reading and studying the scriptures, so, we too are without excuse. The decision we make for or against the Christ is an eternal one, and we need to understand that.

Then Jesus adds, "anyone who hates me, hates my Father", because he told us, "the Father and I are one". We have this wonderful Trinitarian reality which was explained to us; I've tried to put it into words for you also. Jesus had said to Philip, "Philip, to see me is to see the Father". So, the rejection of Jesus, the second Person of the most Holy Trinity, is the rejection of the most Holy Trinity. That's what is so scary about Judas. He rejected everything, yet he was an educated man! He understood. He had been a man of the temple before he joined Jesus. If you have made a decision that amounts to hating God, the Father, then when it comes to your own personal judgement, how could you possibly expect to enter Heaven when you hate the Person who lives there, when you have rejected the Person who makes Heaven, **the Person who is heaven for everyone**. God is heaven. It's the experience of God that we call Heaven. So, the eternal consequences are very clear.

Jesus repeats again in 15:24, "if I had not performed such works among them as no one else has ever done, they might have been blameless". So here Jesus goes back to his works. First of all, he said, "I have given them my Word, that is the revelation of God that they have rejected. He had said to Philip in Chapter 14, 'Look, Philip, if you can't, even at this stage realise that to see me is to see the Father, at least believe the works that I have done'. The works that I have done are God's own works. So, Jesus repeats this here again, that his works alone will prove that he comes from God. He continued, "as it is, they've seen all this, and they still hate both me and my Father". Now, what does **hate** mean? Don't forget that when you're reading the Bible, the words must be understood in the biblical context, not in a modern context. Because if you use it in a modern context, hate means very strong feelings of rejection, and all that goes with it. To hate in the Bible means to strongly repudiate.

So, if I strongly repudiate God and push him out of my life, how can I ever expect to reach Heaven? I can't. I've pushed Heaven out of my life, so, the eternal consequences are clear. "They've hated both me and my Father". So, 15:25 says, "but all this was only to fulfil what is already written in the law. They hated me for no reason". Jesus quotes Psalm 35:19, and Psalm 69:4. They hated Jesus for no reason. Now, what would be a reason for hating him? What would be a reason for rejecting him? If Jesus had committed sin; if he had broken God's law; if he had done something wrong; if he had been unjust, et cetera, all the worldly stuff, you might have a reason for hating him. But if the only thing that was coming

out of him was love, joy, peace, healing, health, holiness and giftedness to other people, why would you reject him?

When you look at it like that, it doesn't make any sense. "They hated me for no reason". In other words, there was nothing in Jesus that would produce this reaction. The reaction is coming from yourself, and from your decision to choose the darkness over the light, to choose death over life. To choose hate rather than love shows the condition of the one who rejects God. It shows them already in a condition of perdition if they don't change, for love is Heaven's reality whereas hate belongs to Hell.

In 15:26, Jesus comes back to remind them of what the Holy Spirit will do. "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from my Father, that Spirit of Truth that issues from the Father, He will be my witness, and you too will be my witnesses, because you have been with me from the outset". So, there you have the explanation as to why Israel rejected Jesus, and that he has been hated for absolutely no reason. But when the Holy Spirit comes, everything will be different for the disciples, and the Holy Spirit will witness for Jesus, and the Apostles are also going to witness for Jesus. So, in the mission of the Church, against all the opposition and the rejection of world, there will be two witnesses. In Jesus's lifetime, it was the Father witnessing through Jesus and Jesus witnessing for the Father. In the time of the Church, it is the Holy Spirit witnessing for Jesus, and the Church, through the Apostles and other witnesses, giving that witness for Christ. The two are parallel, therefore, they will be his effective witnesses, and they will bear fruit.

Thank you for listening. Goodbye. God bless you.