

# ANSWERING COMMON OBJECTIONS

## A Closer Look at Christ's Church

# THE POPE, HOLY FATHER

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**This program deals with one of the most misunderstood and often attacked aspects of the Church: the Pope. Dr. Scott Hahn shows from Scripture and tradition how the Pope is not an authoritarian overseer but rather a spiritual father appointed by Christ to care for the Family of God on earth.**

**This is the first in a series of five presentations that we are going to be giving on Answering Common Objections to the Catholic Faith. Now, this morning's presentation is going to be dealing with the Pope. I have subtitled it Holy Father because I hope that this week will give you a chance to integrate in your own heart a vision of the church that Christ has established as the Family of God. This is a theme that Vatican II really emphasized.**

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### Introduction

**Many people think that Vatican II's primary vision of the Church as a communion was summarized in the phrase, "The People of God," but the Old Testament roots for that phrase, "People of God," "am' Yahweh" actually has as its primary meaning, "Family of God." That term "people," am' literally denotes kinship, so it could be translated "kinsmen" or "Family of God," and that's how most Old Testament scholars translate it. So when we look at the Pope, as we will this**

morning, we are going to be looking at him, not as some tyrant, not as some authoritarian "know-it-all" and not as some magician who can just kind of concoct a new revelation to satisfy all parties, or anything like that. We are going to be looking at a father figure that Christ has established over the family that He has purchased with His own blood.

Now, there are many misconceptions that people have. They sometimes think that the teaching of the Church is that the Pope is infallible; therefore, he can't sin. That's nonsense, although the present Pontiff goes to confession, I understand, at least once a week. He's got to have something to confess for it to be a valid sacrament administered to him. Others think that he always says the best thing at the right time. No, the Church has never insisted upon the fact that the Pope will always say the best thing at the right time. Rather, the teaching of the Church would allow for the Pope perhaps to postpone out of cowardice, a right thing. Or when he says the truth, when he teaches the truth, he might do so in a way that includes an ambiguity.

So we are responsible as Catholics to understand, not only what the Church teaches, but what the Church doesn't teach to help clear up these misconceptions. The Church teaches in a simple summary that the Holy Father, the Pope, the Bishop of Rome, as the successor to Peter and the Vicar of Christ, when he speaks as the universal teacher from the Chair of Peter in defining faith and morals does so with an infallible charism or an infallible gift through the Holy Spirit so that we can give to him the full assent of our intellect and our will, and we can hear the voice of Christ coming to us through the voice of the Pope when he is speaking in this capacity.

Now we are going to flush off on the meanings of this as time goes on, but there are three basic issues or problems. First of all, can we prove Papal Primacy, that is, that the Pope is not just the first among equals but that he has a certain primacy, a unique supremacy in relation to all of the Bishops. We have to begin by showing that Jesus conferred this gift upon Peter. Then secondly, we have to establish the doctrine of Papal succession. If we can prove from the Bible that Peter was granted by Jesus a certain primacy, that doesn't go far enough. We then have to go on to establish Papal succession; that is, Peter had successors to whom would be entrusted the same gift or charism. Then thirdly, we have to establish evidence for Papal infallibility, that is that God grants a gift to the successors of Peter for them, not to give new revelations. The Church insists that no Popes have ever given new revelation. Revelation has been, once and for all deposited by Christ through His Apostles and with the death of the last Apostle came the close of all public revelation. The Popes, in a sense are given the task of preserving and of transmitting, explaining and enforcing that revelation, but not giving new revelation. So that third doctrine is the doctrine of Papal infallibility, that when they transmit, when they explain, when they enforce it, they are granted a charism or a special spiritual gift preserving them from error.

**Infallibility, in a sense, is a negative gift. It doesn't mean he always says the right thing, it's always the right time; but that when he speaks with the authority that Christ gives to him, we have this Divine guarantee, because Christ promises that "I will build my Church." The Church of Christ is not a human institution first and foremost. Jesus identifies it as His own. "My church" and the institution and edification and up-building of the Church Jesus claims for himself, "I will build my Church." So, whatever instruments that Jesus chooses to use, ultimately are going to be under His control and He is going to be using them with this ultimate intention in mind, of building His Church, of governing His family and thus bringing about the guarantee that He imparts in Matthew 16, as we will see, that the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church, and will not prevail against the Rock which is Peter and the Popes who are in the line of succession with Peter.**

**Now, I have just given to you a very quick, bird's-eye view of all that we have to do. Now I have to confess from the bottom of my heart and with total sincerity that we are not going to be able to do an adequate job this morning. This is just too much! If I talk as rapidly as I possibly could and try to get everything across and go through all the others and everything else, I still couldn't get through 20 percent of it. So I'm not going to talk your ears off. I'm not going to try to plow through all of this and take three or four hours. Instead I'm going to try to focus upon the mountain peaks, the real highlights, so that you can see from scripture and from history and from the Church, the key ideas that we need to use and present and share as evidence and support for our belief and our practice as Catholics.**

**We are going to first and primarily look at scripture. We are also going to look at the historical development of the Church's understanding and then, finally, we are going to focus on some of the Church's teachings relative to the Pope and his authority. Before I go on, having given you this qualification, I think I need to recommend some sources for your study over, above and beyond our time this morning.**

**First of all, I would like to recommend a book entitled, Catholicism and Fundamentalism and the Attack on Romanism by Bible Christians. It's written by Karl Keating, the founder and director of "Catholic Answers" in San Diego. You may also wish to write him for a catalog of other materials that Catholic Answers publishes, but this book is a very adequate treatment of all of the common objections against the Catholic faith, many of them we are not going to be able to cover this week, and how, from scripture and also Church history, we can answer these in a very convincing and persuasive way.**

**The second book that I recommend is by Dr. Alan Schreck. It's entitled, Catholic and Christian, an Explanation of Commonly Misunderstood Catholic Beliefs. This is a very positive and constructive, I'd say, pastoral presentation of the Biblical evidence and historical reasons for the Catholic beliefs. This is not directed as much against Fundamentalists as perhaps Evangelical Protestants and it really helps them a great deal.**

There are two other books written by one of the greatest philosophers of our century, Stanley Jaki. The first one is on my right, *And on This Rock, the Witness of One Land and Two Covenants*. He shows the geographical, historical and Biblical background for what Jesus intended to say when He renamed Simon, "Rock" or Peter. A very interesting book. Then, this other book of his, *The Keys of the Kingdom, a Tool's Witness to Truth* focuses upon, not the Rock so much, but the keys of the kingdom that Jesus entrusted to Peter and his successors. These two are full of some of the most valuable information, interesting data, that you will come across.

At a more popular level and something you can read in ten or fifteen minutes, Catholic Answers puts out two little brochures, two little tracts or pamphlets. One is entitled, *Papal Infallibility* and the other one is entitled, *Peter and the Papacy*, and you could write Catholic Answers for that. And lastly, if you will permit me, I'll recommend a tape that I made sitting at a desk about a year ago, up in my study in Joliet, Illinois, before we moved to Steubenville. It's entitled, "Peter and the Papacy" and in this tape I focus primarily on Matthew 16, verses 17 through 19. I focus upon three aspects that we are going to begin with this morning: the Rock, the keys and the guarantee of Jesus that the gates of hell will not prevail.

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### Papal Primacy and Succession

Now that's going to be our starting point and I'm going to take the liberty here, if you will permit me, of summarizing what I've said on that tape - not because I assume you have listened to the tape or you will, but because you can, if you are so interested. And I don't want to go into an hour's worth of detail just on one passage when there are other important passages to cover as well. But those three ideas are closely associated with the very important passage that we find in the first gospel, the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 16, verses 17 through 19.

Let me read that passage and then I will back up and consider those three aspects. Let's drop back to verse 13, "Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, 'Who do men say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'" Rather impressive testimony because these people constitute the Old Testament Hall of Fame of Saints, here. "He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?'" And as is characteristic throughout Matthew's gospel, Peter steps forward, or I should say, speaks up. Peter is the only one to walk on water. Peter is the one who often speaks up, representative of the twelve disciples. Verse 16, "Peter replied, 'You are the Christ,' -- the Christos, the Anointed One in Greek or the Messiah in Hebrew, 'the Son of the Living God. You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jonah for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven, and I tell you, you are Peter (Petra) and on this Rock (Petros), I will build my Church and the gates of

**Hades shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven.'" And then He strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that He was the Christ.**

**Now, let me just get a little personal here. Six or seven years ago, a couple years before I became a Catholic, I had been studying the doctrine of the Covenant. I came to an understanding of the Covenant as a family, and with this insight I began to discover all kinds of exciting truths, novel innovations, new discoveries that I thought were really undiscovered before. Then as I began to dig deeper into these libraries, I noticed that time and time again, Catholic scholars -- I mean not just recently but going all the way back to the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th Centuries, in the Middle Ages -- the saints and the Doctors of the Church were consistently coming up with all of my brand new discoveries and teaching them with a kind of ho-hum attitude like, "You all know such and such."**

**That really, at first it provoked me. Then it scared me and then it led me to dig deeper and deeper into Catholic sources to see how many of my discoveries they may have found in practically every one of them, except the ones that were false. The Pope, though, was a different matter. For me, the idea of a Pope who claims primacy and succession and infallibility was a presumption, an arrogant presumption that no man should make.**

**But then one day, as I was working through the Gospel of Matthew, because that stresses, that gospel builds on the Old Testament more than any other and especially the idea of David's kingdom. That really seems to be the central thrust of Matthew's gospel, that Jesus is the Son of David and He is establishing the Kingdom of David. That's how Matthew introduces Jesus. He is the only one of the four gospel writers who traces His genealogy right back to David, and he says, "Jesus, the Son of David" at the very start of Matthew. That's a common and prominent theme throughout the gospel.**

**So I wanted to dig deep and see what I found in this particular passage, and on the basis of that discovery, or I should say, on the basis of that study, I made some discoveries. First of all, I discovered that when you read in verse 17, "Jesus answered, 'And blessed are you Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church,' " I discovered that all the evidence points to the fact that Peter is the "rock."**

**Now you might say, "That's as plain as the nose on your face. What's the excitement of that discovery?" Well, non-Catholics frequently claim that it's Peter's faith that Jesus is speaking of, or Peter's confession that Jesus is speaking of when He says, "this rock." Or other Protestants object and say, "No, Jesus says, 'And you are petros.'" You are petros, you are rock, and on this petra, the Greek word for large rock, "I will build my Church." So some Protestants object to the Catholic view and**

say, "What Jesus is really saying is. 'You're a little pebble and on this rock, namely Christ, the Rock, (1 Corinthians, 10:4 and so on) I will build my Church.'"

Now the closer I studied the more I realized that those positions were untenable, simply untenable. And I'm going to share in a few minutes the fact that most conservative anti-Catholic Protestant scholars today will admit that readily and candidly. The more I dug, the more I found that the evidence pointed to the fact that Jesus was speaking of Peter. Peter is the Rock. Peter just said, "You are the Christos," so Jesus says, "You are the Petros." There is a little parallelism there. "You are the Son of the Living God" and "You are the son of Jonah, Simon Bar-Jonah; you are the Petros."

Now people could say, "Wait a second. There is a distinction in the Greek language between petros," Peter's name and petra. Petros can mean stone, whereas petra can often mean "big rock." The problem with that is two-fold. First of all, Jesus probably didn't speak Greek when He was with the disciples. I mean that is held by 99.9 percent of all scholars. It's overwhelmingly unlikely that Jesus in His normal conversations spoke Greek. What's almost certain is that He spoke Aramaic and in the Aramaic there is only one word that could possibly be used and Kouman and other scholars have pointed to the fact that if Jesus spoke Aramaic, He only could have said, "You are Cephus, and on this Cephus I build my Church." So given our knowledge of the Aramaic language, there is no possibility for Jesus to have made the distinction between "little stone" and "big rock." The Aramaic language doesn't allow it.

Well, somebody could say, "The Holy Spirit inspired Matthew to use two different words. Well, that's true, because "petra" is the word in Greek that is normally used for "large rock," but - I should say petra is the Greek word that means "large rock" but it's in the feminine form. In other words, the gender of this Greek word, petra, large rock, is feminine. You do not apply a feminine form of the word in order to name a male. You adopt it by giving the masculine form. In other words what Matthew was doing, guided by the Holy Spirit, is something that was rather obvious and practically necessary. That was to take the Greek from Jesus' saying and start by saying, "I will build my Church on this massive stone, this 'petra' in the feminine but then to show that Peter gets the name, "Rock" in its proper masculine form.

You wouldn't name him Josephine or Rockina or, you know, something like that. You give him the masculine form of the word. I should also add that there is absolutely no archeological evidence from antiquity for anybody having been named Peter before Simon. In other words, Jesus was taking a word that had never been used as far as all the many records we have are concerned, never was used to designate an individual person and Jesus gives that name, gives that word to Simon.

Again, I suggest the fact that Simon is the Rock. I should say a few things along these lines because I mentioned that I have these Protestant quotes. I have note cards that I actually put together when I was preparing a paper for a graduate

**seminar on the subject. I was still a Protestant minister, and I was taking a graduate seminar on the Gospel of Matthew and the professor was a Protestant. He was a Lutheran and he knew what I wanted to do for my project and so I presented this paper, "Peter and the Keys" and I worked at it because I knew that he might not be open to my conclusions, that I knew what my conclusions were going to be at the end of my research. They were rather Catholic, neither Presbyterian nor Lutheran.**

**So, I worked and worked and I put these note cards together and when I made the presentation -- I should add, this was a very interesting experience because all the other students who presented papers, the professor encouraged the rest of the students to interact with the presenter. And he seldom, if ever asked questions in interacting. He wanted the students to get involved. But when it came to presenting a 30-page paper presenting the evidence that Peter is the Rock and that the keys denote succession and that the Catholic position is right, not one student spoke up for the entire two and one-half hour seminar. He did all the talking and we even went over. I ended up leaving the classroom like forty-five minutes after the seminar was supposed to end. It was the most grueling cross- examination I'd ever undergone, and I might add, I had intestinal digestive problems for about a week afterwards because of how nerve- wracking it was.**

**But at the end of the whole ordeal he said, "I think your paper is flawless. The only fault that I found is that you have the middle initial on one person's name in one of your footnotes wrong!" He said, "I think your arguments are persuasive, too. I'm just grateful that I don't think that Matthew is historically reliable, so I don't have to follow the conclusions." I'm glad you said that, you know, and not me.**

**Protestants are often ready to admit the fact that Peter is the Rock and that the keys of succession are given to him to imply an office that will be filled by successors. For instance, one of the top evangelical New Testament scholars in the world, R.T. France says this in his commentary on Matthew, "Verses 17 through 19 are addressed to Peter and have been regarded by some as a late addition to support an early claim to the primacy of the Bishop of Rome. Whether or not they give any such support, there is no textual evidence for their addition to the gospel after its original composition, and the strongly Semitic or Jewish character of the language throughout these verses point to a relatively early origin in a Palestinian environment." What is France saying? Well, many scholars have suggested that Jesus could not have given this gift to Peter. Jesus could not have given this original saying. Why? Because many scholars don't believe that Jesus foresaw the building of the Church. They think that all of these sayings of Jesus concerning the Church were added later by the Church to support whatever had happened to the Church.**

**Dr. France says, "That's just not tenable." When you study this you realize that all of the evidence in the text shows that this is one of the original sayings of Jesus. He goes on to say, "Jesus' beatitude of Peter or His blessing is given to Peter alone. The other disciples may have shared his insight but Peter, characteristically expressed it. Matthew often illustrates Peter's place at the head of the disciples' group. He was**

the spokesman, the pioneer, the natural leader." He goes on to talk about how Peter is referenced to the Rock. France says, "It describes not so much Peter's character, that is the Rock. He did not prove to be rock-like in terms of stability or reliability but rather the name Rock or Peter points to his function as the foundation stone of Jesus' Church."

This is a non-Catholic. This is an Evangelical Protestant who has absolutely no interest in supporting the Church's claims but he says, "The term Peter, Rock, points to Simon and not his character because he could be very unstable, but rather his official function as the foundation stone of Jesus' Church. The word-play is unmistakable." He says, "It is only Protestant over-reaction to the Roman Catholic claim, of course, which has no foundation in the text, that what is here said of Peter applies also to the later Bishops of Rome." In other words France is saying, "We can't apply this to the Popes, the later Bishops of Rome." I'll overthrow that opinion in a few minutes, I think, but France is very candid in saying, "Look, it's only because we Protestants have over-reacted to the Catholic Church that we are not frank and sincere in admitting the fact that Peter is the Rock. He is the foundation stone upon which Jesus is going to build the Church."

One of the greatest Protestant Biblical scholars of the century supports this -- W. F. Albright, in his Anchor Bible Commentary on Matthew. I opened it up. I was surprised to see, "Peter as the Rock will be the foundation of the future community, the church. Jesus here uses Aramaic and so only the Aramaic word which would serve His purpose. In view of the background in verse 19, one must dismiss as confessional interpretation any attempt to see this rock as the faith or the confession of Peter." In other words, Professor Albright is admitting as a Protestant that there is a bias in Protestant anti-Catholic interpreters who try to make Jesus' reference to the rock point only to Peter's faith or confession. "To deny the pre-eminent position of Peter," Albright says, "among the disciples or in the early Christian community is a denial of the evidence. The interest in Peter's failures and vacillations does not detract from this pre-eminence, rather it emphasizes it. Had Peter been a lesser figure, his behavior would have been of far less consequence. Precisely because Peter is pre-eminent and is the foundation stone of the Church that his mistakes are in a sense so important, but his mistakes never correspond to his teachings as the Prince of the Apostles." We will see."

Albright goes on in his commentary to speak about the keys of the kingdom that Jesus entrusted to Peter. Here's what he says, "Isaiah 22, verse 15, undoubtedly lies behind this saying of Jesus. The keys are the symbol of authority and Father Roland DeVoe rightly sees here the same authority vested in the vicar, the master of the house, the chamberlain of the royal household in ancient Israel. In Isaiah 22 Eliakim is described as having the same authority."

Now let's just stop here and ask, "What is he talking about?" I think it's simple. Albright is saying that Jesus in giving to Peter not only a new name, Rock, but in entrusting to Simon the keys of the kingdom, He is borrowing a phrase from Isaiah



**22. He's quoting a verse in the Old Testament that was extremely well known. This, for me, was the breakthrough. This discovery was the most important discovery of all. Let's go back to Isaiah 22 and see what Jesus was doing when He entrusted to Peter the keys of the kingdom.**

**By the way, I do not find hardly any Catholic defenders of the faith these days with awareness of this particular point. This was the point above all points for me. It was the point that the defenders of the Catholic faith in the 16th and 17th Centuries were very aware of, but for some reason amnesia has set in upon many defenders and interpreters not aware of how crucial this particular passage is. In Isaiah 22 beginning back in verses 19 and 20, we have some very interesting background. This is where Jesus goes for a quotation to cite this passage.**

**What's happening here? Well, in verse 19 it says, "I will thrust you from your office and you will be cast down from your station and on that day I will call my servant Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah, and I will clothe him with your robe and will bind your girdle on him and will commit your authority to his hand, and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the House of Judah; and I will place on his shoulder the key of the House of David."**

**Now the House of David is like, you know, the House of Bourbon. It's a dynastic reference. The House of David is the Davidic kingdom, the Davidic dynasty. We know this because David has been dead for hundreds of years when this is happening in Isaiah 22, "I will give you the key of the House of David. He shall open and none shall shut, and he shall shut and none shall open. He will become a throne of honor to his father's house." Look at all of the symbols of dynastic authority that are being given to this individual. First of all, an office. Second, a robe. Third, a throne and fourth, keys, the key of the House of David, these royal keys.**

**Now, what is going on here? I'll just summarize it in rather simple terms. Hezekiah was at the time, the king over Israel. He was the son of David, hundreds of years after David had died. He was in the line of David and also he was ruler over the House of David. Now all kings in the ancient world had, as kings and queens have these days, cabinet officers, a cabinet of royal ministers. Like Margaret Thatcher is the Prime Minister, so there are other ministers under the Queen in Great Britain. Hezekiah, as King, had as his Prime Minister before Shebna who proved unworthy. So he was expelled, but when he was expelled, he left an office vacant. Not only did you have dynastic succession for the king, but you also have a dynastic office for the Prime Minister. When Shebna is expelled, there is an empty office that needs to be filled and that's why Eliakim is called to fill it.**

**Now, Eliakim is a minister in the cabinet, but now he is being granted the Prime Minister's position. How do we know? Because he is given what the other ministers do not have, the keys of the kingdom, the key to the House of David. That symbolized dynastic authority entrusted to the Prime Minister and dynastic succession. Why? Because it's the key of David; it's the House of David.**

Let me go back and try to simplify this even further. I'll read the quote. Albright says, "In commenting upon Matthew 16 and Jesus giving to Peter the keys of the kingdom, Isaiah 22:15 and following undoubtedly lies behind this saying." Albright, a Protestant, non-Catholic insists that it's undoubtable that Jesus is citing Isaiah 22, "The keys are the symbol of authority and DeVoe rightly sees here the same authority as that vested in the vicar, the master of the house, the chamberlain of the royal household of ancient Israel." In other words, the Prime Minister's office.

Other Protestant scholars admit it too, that when Jesus gives to Peter the keys of the kingdom, Peter is receiving the Prime Minister's office, which means dynastic authority from the Son of David, Jesus, the King of Israel, but also an office where there will be dynastic succession. When I discovered that, it was like the blinders fell off. Within a few weeks I had gotten together with the leading Protestant theologians in the world, one of the most reputable anti-Catholic Protestant theologians and spent ten hours with him and then in a Mercedes we drove two hours and I presented this case, and his only comment was, "That's clever." But he said, "You don't have to follow the Pope because of that." I said, "Why not?" And he said, "Well, I'm going to have to think about it." He said, "I've never heard that argument before." And I said, "It's one of the basic arguments that Cajeton used against the Protestants in the 16th Century and Cajeton was one of the most well-known defenders of the Catholic faith and you've never heard of him before?" I said, "I had never heard of it before until I discovered it on my own and then found it in all these other people." And he said, "That's clever." Clever, perhaps. True, definitely; enlightening, illuminating, very interesting.

He goes on to say some other things. "It is of considerable importance," Albright says, "that in other contexts, when the disciplinary affairs of the community are discussed, the symbol of the keys is absent, since the saying applies in these instances to a wider circle. The role of Peter as steward of the kingdom is further explained as being the exercise of administrative authority as was the case of the Old Testament chamberlain who held the keys."

Now, what he means there is that nowhere else, when other Apostles are exercising Church authority are the keys ever mentioned. In Matthew 18, the Apostles get the power to bind and loose, like Peter got in Matthew 16, but with absolutely no mention of the keys. That fits perfectly into this model because in the king's cabinet, all the ministers can bind and loose, but the Prime Minister who holds the keys can bind what they have loosed or loose what they have bound. He has, in a sense, the final say. He has, in himself, the authority of the court of final appeal and even Protestants can see this.

In fact, I found this quotation in Martin Luther from 1530, years after he had left the Church, "Why are you searching heavenward in search of my keys? Do you not understand, Jesus said, 'I gave them to Peter. They are indeed the keys of heaven, but they are not found in heaven for I left them on earth.'" This is Jesus talking, "'Peter's mouth is my mouth, his tongue is my key case, his keys are my keys. They

are an office." Luther even saw it, "They are a power, a command given by God through Christ to all of Christendom for the retaining and remitting of the sins of men." The only thing that Luther won't admit is that there was succession after Peter died, which is exactly what the keys denote, given their Old Testament background.

One of the greatest reformed Biblical scholars of this century, Herman Liederboss, a European scholar, in his Matthew commentary says, this is going back. I should have read this a few minutes ago. But he says, "The slight difference between these two words, *petra* and *petros*, has no special importance. The most likely explanation for the change from *petros*, Peter, masculine, to *petra* is that *petra* was the normal word for rock, because the feminine ending of this noun made it unsuitable as a man's name; however, Simon was not called *Petra* but *Petros*. There is no good reason to think that Jesus switched from *petros* to *petra* to show that He was not speaking of the man Peter but of his confession as the foundation of the Church. The words "on this rock," *petra*, indeed, refer to Peter. Because of the revelation he had received and the confession it had motivated in him, Peter was appointed by Jesus to lay the foundation of the future Church."

One of the top Evangelical, non-Catholic scholars in America, Professor Donald Carson of the Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in his book, *God With Us, Themes from Matthew* says, "Jesus was simply using a pun to say that Peter is the rock on which Jesus would build His Church." Now Dr. Carson is no Catholic Apologist. He would try to set up arguments against the Catholic faith, I'm sure; but he's sincere and, I think, also respectable as a scholar in insisting upon the obvious evidence in the conclusions.

This has led an Evangelical Protestant German scholar, Gerhardt Meier, who wrote a famous book that conservative Protestants frequently refer to, "The End of the Historical Critical Method". In his article, "The Church and the Gospel of Matthew," Gerhardt Meier says on pages 58 through 60, "Nowadays, a broad consensus has emerged which, in accordance with the words of the text applies the promise to Peter as a person." This is a Protestant speaking now. "On this point liberal and conservative theologians agree," and he names several Protestant theologians from the liberal to the conservative side. "Matthew 16:18 ought not to be interpreted as a local church. The church in Matthew 16:18 is the universal entity, namely the people of God. There is an increasing consensus now that this verse concerning the power of the keys is talking about the authority to teach and to discipline, including even to absolve sins." Professor Gerhardt Meier is a Protestant with no interest in supporting the Catholic claim but, as an honest scholar, admits that Peter is the one that Jesus is giving His power to. "Peter is the rock and the keys signify, not only disciplinary power to teach, but even to absolve sins. With all due respect to the Protestant Reformers, we must admit that the promise in Matthew 16-18 is directed to Peter and not to a Peter-like faith. As Evangelical theologians, especially, we ought to look at ourselves dispassionately and acknowledge that we often tend unjustifiably toward an individualistic conception

of faith. To recognize the authenticity of Matthew 16:17 and following demands that we develop a Biblically based ecclesiology or doctrine of the church."

Gerhardt Meier is showing, as an honest scholar, that the church which Jesus speaks of is a universal church, not just a local congregation, another favorite ploy of anti-Catholic apologists. He says, "No, the church He's talking about is the one, holy, Catholic Church, the universal church and the rock on which it will be built is Peter, not Peter's confession and the keys that Jesus gives to Peter are keys not only to teach but even to absolve sins." He's not saying, "We all should become Catholics, but what we should honestly do is to grant the Catholics the point. Because if we are honest in interpreting the Bible, we have to admit these conclusions."

Another Lutheran professor, a professor of scripture and theology at Concordia Seminary in Hong Kong, Torg Forberg wrote an article entitled, "Peter, High Priest of the New Covenant." Forberg insists that Jesus is the ultimate High Priest in the New Testament, but he says, "Peter is presented as some kind of successor to the High Priest in tradition used by the final redactor, Matthew 16:13-19. Peter stands out as a kind of chief Rabbi who binds and looses in the sense of declaring something to be forbidden or permitted. Peter is looked upon as a counterpart to the High Priest. He is the highest representative for the people of God." This is Protestant testimony.

Elsewhere I found in The Interpreter's Bible, "The keys of the kingdom would be permitted to the chief steward in the royal household and with them goes plenary authority, unlimited power, total. Post-apostolic Christianity is now beginning to ascribe to the Apostles the prerogatives of Jesus." The person who wrote this section in the Interpreter's Bible is saying, "I don't think personally that Jesus ever said these words. How could Jesus give to the Apostles prerogatives that are His own?" Well, the Church has always said that Jesus said this and what Jesus is giving is His own grace, His own power and His own authority to His Apostles.

Now Bultmann, one of the most notorious and well-known Protestant Biblical scholars of the century argues that it is impossible to regard Matthew 16 as an authentic saying of Jesus. He said, "How could He have envisioned the future development of an organized congregation of followers and appointed for them Peter as possessor of the power to teach and to discipline?" I have several other quotations here. I won't go through them all, but let me just summarize with a quotation from an English Protestant scholar, J.N.D. Kelly in his book, Oxford Dictionary of the Popes. He says, "The Papacy is the oldest of all Western institutions with an unbroken existence of almost 2000 years."

We are reaching a point these days in the scholarly dialogue that is exciting, where some of the most essential points are now being admitted and acknowledged by both sides. But I must say, as I listen to tapes that are made of debates that are held across the country through these last few years, there are still many Protestants, or I

should say non-Catholics, out there who are so vehemently opposed to the Catholic Church, they will still go back to the over-reaction of the Protestants, the anti-Catholic misinterpretations and use them.

A good friend of mine was in a recent debate with a Protestant minister who was using it right and left, even after the debates. My friend went up to him and said, "Do you think, even though you are arguing that Peter isn't the Rock because you were quoting this and that and the other thing, do you think that Peter is the Rock?" And the anti-Catholic debater said, "Of course I do!" Although he had argued against that position, he held it himself. He just wanted to undermine the Catholic teaching. There is a broad consensus emerging, and it's a strong and sure foundation that we can build on in discussions and dialogues. I don't want to overdo it, but I think it is a very, very important point.

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### Common Objections to Papal Infallibility

Now, what I would like to do at this point is to move beyond Matthew 16 and consider some other factors that play into this as well. First, let me just throw out some objections that may come into your mind. How could a human be infallible? Isn't infallibility a prerogative of God alone? Then as Catholics I think we should admit Mary who never sinned, although we never say that the infallible Popes never sin. They sin. They are not impeccable; they are infallible. As persons, they sin. As persons, they make mistakes. As persons, they might hold the wrong opinion inside their own minds; but Christ prevents them, through the Holy Spirit in His omnipotent love, from ever sitting down in the Chair of Peter and teaching the wrong opinions as Catholic beliefs.

It's ultimately the infallibility of Christ that is the foundation for whatever we ascribe to the Popes. Now somebody could say, "Infallible? Teaching nothing but truth? To err is human, to forgive divine. You know we don't need infallibility. We can't have it. It isn't human." Well, I would say this; two things. First of all, if I were to sit down and write a textbook in say Algebra, and we got a thousand proof readers from across the world and they all went through it with a fine tooth comb, and after years they didn't find a single mistake, would you have to conclude this was not written by a man but by God? There are no mistakes. No, of course not. I mean to err is human, but to be human is not to err only and always, continually. We can make mistakes, but we don't have to! And God can prevent us from doing so.

You hear Protestants says sometimes, like I always used to say, "You know this idea of infallibility just doesn't belong to humans. But then you think about it another minute. Non-Catholic Christians rarely admit that the Bible is infallible because the Biblical authors were given the gift of infallibility: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John,

**Peter, Paul, James, Jude -- all of them wrote infallible truth. In fact, the Bible Christians insist that the Bible alone is our authority because the Bible is infallible.**

**Well, ask them. If God was capable of using thousands of sinners to infallibly communicate infallible truth, then, so that the Church could see it as the truth, which is the Bread of Life, which is Christ himself and all the teachings, if God could do it then, with fallible sinners, like Peter and Paul and John and Matthew, couldn't He still do it? In other words, certainly God is capable; and if you look around at how the Church spreads throughout the world, and how the Church encounters all kinds of crazies down through the ages, do you suppose that Jesus would say, "Well, once I give the Church this infallible scripture, there really is no need anymore for infallible interpretations of scripture. The Church can hold together just with the infallible Bible."**

**Oh, really? In just 500 years, there are literally thousands and thousands of denominations that are becoming ever more numerous continuously because they only go with the Bible. It points to the fact that we need an infallible interpretation of this infallible book, don't we. I mean, can you imagine the fathers of our country putting together the U.S. Constitution and mailing it out to every citizen and saying, "Fend for yourselves. Go it alone; with the spirit of Washington you will be guided to your proper interpretation." What do you call that? Anarchy. We wouldn't have lasted a month as a nation. The Constitution established a governmental structure with a court of final appeal, the Supreme Court, that is final in all matters of constitutional interpretation.**

**Now that's in the human sphere. If the constitutional founders had sufficient wisdom to see the need for one little nation in 200 years to have a court of final appeal, how much more would Christ see the need to establish and constitute in the Church and putting in His constitution not only the truth but the official organs for interpreting and enforcing and explaining and preaching and proclaiming that truth. It's just common sense. It's not unprecedented either.**

**Somebody could say, "Well, this idea of Peter speaking ex-cathedra, that's bogus, that's novel, that's unheard of." I would say, "No, it's not." When the Church teaches about how, the Pope when he speaks from the Chair of Peter, Ex Cathedra, "from the seat or from the cathedra" (we get the word cathedral from the fact that's where the bishop's cathedra is) the Church isn't inventing something new. It's building, rather, on the teachings of Jesus.**

**Turn to Matthew 23, verses 1 and 2, "Then said Jesus to the crowds and to His disciples, 'The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat. So practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do, for they preach but they don't practice.'" They preach, but they don't practice what they preach. What's he saying? Jesus says, "The scribes and the Pharisees." Now, what does Jesus think of the scribes and the Pharisees? Well, read the rest of Matthew 23 and you will discover it. He goes on in this chapter to call the scribes and the Pharisees "fools,**

hypocrites, blind guides, vipers and whitewashed tombs." He doesn't think too highly of the scribes and the Pharisees, does He?

But what does He say here? "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat." Therefore, "you have to," it's in the imperative tense, "You have to practice and observe whatever they tell you." "Whatever they tell you," you have to practice and observe. Why? Because they sit on Moses' cathedras. The Greek word is "cathedra". The Church, when it speaks of Peter's authority and the Popes speaking ex-cathedra are simply borrowing from Jesus' teaching.

Now, I would challenge anybody to go back into the Old Testament and find some explicit text in the Old Testament where we find Moses establishing a chair, some endowed seat, that will always have successors. You don't find a text explicitly saying that. So why does Jesus refer to it. Because there is also oral tradition, even in the Old Testament, which was used by God to transmit certain essential terms that the covenant family of God requires and depends upon for its life. Jesus doesn't quote a text. He appeals to a well-known oral tradition that He assumes the scribes and the Pharisees know about as well as His listeners. He doesn't just assume they know it, He assumes they are going to submit to it, and that they have been submitting to it. It's just that they have been experiencing problems because Old Testament priests and bishops are sometimes just as troublesome as New Testament priests and bishops are. But why do we follow, because they have so much charm and charisma? No, because Jesus Christ has established in the Old Testament a seat of Moses which is replaced in the New Testament with the seat of Peter.

In the Old Testament we don't have the full disclosure of all final revelation, but in the New Testament Jesus tells us that He will guide us in all truth. We don't say that Moses and his successors were infallible; because the fullness of the truth had not yet been given. But once it is given to the Apostles and their successors, we can see why Jesus guarantees that the gates of Hades will not prevail against the Church. Why? Because of what Jesus has entrusted to this cathedra, this Petrine seat, the sea of Peter in Rome.

This is such assurance for us that whether John XI or John XII, two of the most sinful Popes in all of history or Alexander VI; I mean these guys were scoundrels. We have had scoundrels for Popes. Out of the hundreds of Popes, it's amazing to think that there were really only three or four scoundrels, but that should bother you. But should it cause you to overthrow your confidence in listening to the successor of Peter, the Vicar of Christ, the Pope? No, of course not. For one thing, you can be grateful that these scoundrels were too busy sinning to even attempt teaching from the seat of Peter. They didn't, and they brought great confusion upon the Church so it is a deplorable condition.

But let's consider one fact. Jesus chose twelve Apostles, didn't He? And what about those twelve Apostles? One of them was Judas. Did Jesus know it beforehand? You

bet He did. Why did He choose him? Maybe to get us ready for Judas priests in all generations.

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### Peter's Place in the Early Church

But what does the Church do after Jesus is ascended into heaven, after Judas has committed suicide? Turn to Acts 1 to see what the Church does in response to Judas' death and Jesus' departure. It's very interesting and important because Peter stands up with the eleven in the Upper Room, verse 15, and He speaks about Judas' death and He says, "It was known beforehand and had even been prophesied in the Old Testament" and so what should we do now?

Notice that Peter -- and by the way, notice that it is Peter who stands up. He's not just contributing an opinion. When Peter declares an opinion it is binding and immediately following, exactly what he advises. And what is it he advises? He quotes the Psalms, "Let his habitation become desolate and let there be no one to live in it." But then he doesn't say, "Hey, guys, we're from twelve down to eleven. We better hang together now or we might end up hanging separately. No we're just down to eleven and it's going to be us from now on." He doesn't say that.

He says, "His office, let another take." Or as the King James version says, "His bishopric, let other men take." The word there is *episcopae*, where we get the word *episcopacy* or *episcopal*. It's the word for bishop. In other words, there's an episcopal office that is now empty and vacant. Peter stands up and says, "Well obviously, automatically, in line with the Old Testament tradition, in line with this Old Testament practice of patriarchal succession at every level in God's family, not just at top with Moses and his seed and his successors, but even the seventy elders, when they died, they left empty offices that must be filled," Peter is just obviously appealing to this Old Testament precedent is saying, "Let another man his bishopric, his office, take."

And they draw lots and they choose Matthias. No debate, no novelty. The other ten don't say, "Huh, what are you talking about, Simon? This is weird." No, they understand, but even more, they submit. There's no debate, no discussion.

Notice also in Acts 2, Peter's responsibility, not just over the ten, but over all of Jerusalem. He is the one who preaches the first sermon, that Pentecost, verse 14. He is the spokesman for the Church to the world at Pentecost.

Then you go on in chapter 3, we see Peter's second sermon. We also see that Peter is the instrument by which the first real healing miracle occurs, the lame man in the temple in Jerusalem in the portico called Solomon, I should say.



Then in chapter 4, we see Peter's pre-eminence emerging even further as he exercises his teaching authority over the Jewish senate, the Sanhedrin. He's put on trial, so you think he's going to be defensive. He's going to come to His own defense saying, "Oh gosh, guys, you know, please don't do these things." But no. He puts the Sanhedrin on trial for crucifying the Lord. He exercises supreme authority over the Jewish senate. It left them flabbergasted! Who does this fisherman think he is? The vicar of Christ over the family of God. And so they're set free. They are astounded at his boldness.

Then in Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira, two wealthy members of the Church, sell some land and then lie about how much money they gave to the Church. Peter said to Ananias, "What are you doing?" Ananias says, "Well I gave you all the money." And Peter says, "You are lying to the Holy Spirit." Ananias said, "No, I'm just lying to you, Peter." But no. In lying to Peter, Ananias was lying to the Holy Spirit and to the Church. He's struck dead! A few hours later his wife Sapphira comes along. Peter says, "What happened?" "Oh, we sold the land for this amount, and we gave you all the money." And, "Hark, the footsteps of the men who just carried out your husband are coming for you." She drops dead! "And great fear came upon all those who heard of it," in verse 5.

No wonder. Petrine promise was rather apparent here. I mean Peter's pre-eminence was on display for the whole Church and the whole world and all the Jews to see and to behold. And it goes on and on and on. We see Peter, for instance, in Acts 11 and 12 -- even before that -- Acts 8, the first time non-Jewish half-breeds, Samaritans are brought into the Church. They are baptized. Word reaches Jerusalem that these non-Jewish half-breeds, the Samaritans are coming into the Church. Immediately, what do they do? Send Peter and John. They go down there and what do they do? Well, a Confirmation action, here. "They lay the hand," verse 14, "When the Apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. When they arrived, they prayed they might receive the Holy Spirit." They were baptized but they hadn't received this additional grace that we often associate with Confirmation. Then the laying on of hands; they received the Holy Spirit and then Simon Magus tried to buy the gift and Peter rebukes him.

"May your money," verse 20, "May your money perish with you because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money. You have no part to share in this ministry because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord and perhaps He will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart, for I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin." At this point Simon, who probably had heard of Ananias and Sapphira was trembling, you know. "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me." I mean, even if some don't see Peter's promise, at least Simon Magus, the first heretic in the Church did. He said, "Please pray for me that I won't become the next Ananias and Sapphira."

**Acts 11, now we're not talking about half-breeds; now we are talking about just plain outsiders, the Goene, the Gentiles, the swine, those that the Jews had often considered to be mere beasts. Cornelius, the first Gentile believer is going to be let into the Church? This is going to cause scandal. What's the Holy Spirit going to do? Have Peter be the first to authorize and admit the first Gentile Christian.**

**So Peter has this vision and in Acts 10 and 11, I should say, he has this vision: he's being commanded by God in this vision to kill and to eat these unclean animals that symbolize the Gentiles. He says, "I've never done it." Three times later he says, "Okay, okay, I'll do it." And then these people come and say, "We're being sent from Cornelius, the Gentile Centurion." In a dream, in a vision, the Lord had said to Cornelius, "Send for a guy named Peter." So Peter comes and what happens? Well, Peter goes up to his house and he perceives, verse 34, he says after he's baptizing Cornelius, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right."**

**So then he goes ahead, preaches the gospel, baptizes these Gentiles and admits the first non-Jewish believers into the Church. And I mean, this could have been the greatest crisis of all, but there isn't even a fizzle, practically. But look at chapter 11, verse 2, "When Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him and said, 'You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.'" And he explained exactly what happened and said, "Hey, God told me." It's Peter and they stopped.**

**But the crisis reaches an even higher point in chapter 15. We have the famous Council of Jerusalem where there's a huge debate tearing apart the Church. These Gentile believers, do we circumcise them or not? Well you might say, "How important is that?" Well, gentlemen, if you were in your twenties, thirties and forties and you were considering conversion and along with conversion, you had to get circumcised, you might end up considering conversion a lot longer than if all you needed was baptism, right? There was sort of a strategic purpose behind all of this. But notice, as the debate is raging, all of a sudden it stops. When? Verse 6 and 7, "The Apostles and elders met together. After much debate Peter stood up and addressed them," and he basically says the Holy Spirit purified their hearts through Baptism, circumcision isn't needed; end all debate! The only thing that follows is that James, the Bishop of Jerusalem, adds the kind of qualifying proviso so that the Jews are not needlessly scandalized in Gentile lands. But Peter's word was final and absolute. The debate ended. Peter had spoken.**

**Now you might say, "Well, this is just Peter." No, the keys symbolize succession, an office which is left vacant must be filled. This is something that the Church understood. This is something that was well-known to the early Church. I hardly have time to get into this, but I have all these note cards about the early Church, after the death of the last Apostles, recognizing that the Bishop of Rome had Peter's authority and that was final and absolute.**

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## **Early Church Fathers Recognized Papal Primacy and Succession**

**Clement of Rome, about 96, writing to Corinth about this disunity, "But if any disobey the word spoken by him, Peter, through us." Remember Linus, Cletus, Clement, Sixtus? Those were the first Popes.**

**Irenaeus, writing in the 2nd Century says, "Anyone who wished to discern the truth may see in every Church in the whole world, the Apostolic succession clear and manifest." We saw that in Acts 1. I mean, if Judas' office when left vacant is filled by a successor, then why should we be scandalized and lose our faith if a Pope is a scoundrel? You know, you may say, "The Pope shouldn't be a scoundrel." I'd say, "Yeah and amen." But Jesus knew that it wasn't going to be human strength and human authority that would put it all together for the Church. That's why He chose a Judas in the first place, to assure our hearts that no matter who was in the Apostolic seat, whether it's Peter or the other Apostles, his Bishops, it's Jesus' omnipotent love for His family that will see us through to the truth, no matter what may come.**

**Irenaeus goes on and says, "We can enumerate those who were appointed as bishops in the churches by the Apostles and their successors down to our own day, but as it would be very long in a book of this kind to enumerate the successors of all through the churches, I will point out the Apostolic tradition in faith announced to mankind." And it goes on. Speaking about the two most glorious Apostles, Peter and Paul at Rome -- I won't read the whole quote, it goes on, but there also we see Irenaeus in the 2nd Century underscoring the Bishops as the successors to the Apostles and the Bishop of Rome, in particular, as the successor to Peter.**

**Tertullian in the late 100's and the early 200's A.D. said, "Was anything withheld from Peter who was called the Rock on which the Church should be built, who also obtained the keys to the kingdom of heaven with the power of binding and loosing in heaven and earth?"**

**Origen, in the late 100's spoke of Peter first because, "He was more honored than the rest."**

**St. Cyprian spoke of the Roman Church founded on Peter who fixed his chair in Rome. He speaks of the Church in Rome as our Mother Church, "the root of universality and Catholicity."**

**Hilary in the 300's speaks of the foundation of the Church on the Rock from which the Church was built. In other words, the early Church Fathers recognized this. The Protestant historian, Goodspeed, in his history book says, "The claim of primacy among the bishops for its head began under Victor in the 2nd Century and progressed under Calistus who claimed the power of the keys and reached a peak**

**under Stephen in the 3rd Century, who professed to occupy the chair of St. Peter." Now even Cyprian, when he opposed Stephen as Pope, didn't oppose authority but opposed his opinions. Then finally, because Cyprian is St. Cyprian, he gave in to the Pope which is why he became a saint. St. Cyprian says, "A primacy is given to Peter and it is thus made clear that there is but one Church and one Chair."**

**I have about thirty quotes from a Syriac saint and Father, St. Ephraim. He is the one who just reaches to the clouds for words to describe the authority of Peter and his successors in the See of Rome. I don't have time to go through these all, but I recommend a three-volume work written by a Professor Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, and it goes through all the Fathers and the many, many things they said to show that they recognize this authority in the Pope. Augustine, for instance, "Even if some traitor crept into this order of Bishops which is drawn from Peter, himself, up to Anastasius who now occupies the same See, he would not prejudice the Church." He speaks of the cathedra Petri.**

**When you look at St. Augustine, a great saint and Father that the Protestants revere, Augustine had more things to say about the Popes as successors to Peter with all of his plenary authority than almost anybody else in the first seven centuries of the Church. It's astonishing. Augustine said, "Who is ignorant that the chief Apostolate is to be preferred to any Episcopate?" Of the dignity of Peter he says, "in whom the primacy of the Apostles shone forth with excelling grace."**

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### **Objection: Why Wasn't Papal Infallibility Defined Until the 1800's? The Bible Never Mentions Papal Infallibility.**

**Now, we could go on and on. Somebody could say, "Now, wait a second. Why wasn't Papal infallibility defined until the 1800s? The Bible never says Papal infallibility." No it doesn't. But the Bible never says Trinity, either. And all non-Catholic Christians affirm the Trinity. Why wasn't the word "Trinity" used? Well, because the word Trinity wasn't necessary until heresies arose that forced the Church to formulate and to defend the doctrine of God, one God in Three Persons adequately and sufficiently. At that point, they came up with a very helpful term, "Tri-unity" or Trinity to do so.**

**Likewise, in looking at Matthew 16 and the unconditional guarantee that Jesus gives to Peter, the recipient of the keys, the gates of Hades will not prevail against the Church which is built upon the Rock. The gates of Hades will not prevail against Peter and his successors. Well, the gates of Hades derive their power from error, from untruth, from falsehood, the father of lies. If one lie is allowed into the Church's pure, sacred teaching, that's like taking a window pane and putting one crack into it. I'll tell you what happens. I was driving down a highway in Milwaukee and a little pebble bounced up and just touched the windshield, a little crack. What happened? Over the next few months, my wife will tell you, that crack grew and grew, and we had to replace it because the whole thing could have been shattered.**

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## Conclusion

**If one should admit one falsehood, defined as truth, the gates of Hades have prevailed. Christ has given us an unconditional guarantee that they will not prevail because he will build His Church upon Peter and His successors, the Rock, the foundation stone. This gives us confidence because the family of God on earth is never left without a father figure to teach and to help us.**

**Now, if a Judas-type occupies the Chair, you better believe that God will graciously pour out an extra measure of the Holy Spirit to protect His children and see that that scoundrel is out, quick. And they were. And to show that these people were exposed -- every Catholic historian will admit that certain Popes, a very, very few, were scoundrels who were acting too scoundrelish to even bother teaching, thanks be to God. But this gives to us the kind of confidence we need as God's sons and daughters to listen to the Holy Father, John Paul II, and hear the voice of Christ because this awesome grace that is given to the Pope is one of the many graces that Christ died to give to us.**

**Let's treasure it. Let's cherish it and let's live it out with God's grace and power. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, we pray, Our Father, etc.**

# PURGATORY, HOLY FIRE

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**This program deals with the Catholic doctrine of purgatory and how it is necessary in understanding the application of Christ's redemptive work in salvation. Using Scripture, Scott explains the Hebrew concept of sheol or the netherworld. He also cites passages such as Sirach 7:33, "Withhold not your kindness, O Lord, from the dead," to show how the ancient Hebrew had an intimation that the mercy of God extended even to the dead.**

**This, our second installment in the series of Answering Common Objections, is going to focus upon the doctrine of purgatory. We're going to try to understand purgatory as Holy Fire, just like we tried to understand the Pope in terms of him being our Holy Father, the father figure who symbolizes the unity of the family of God here on earth under the ultimate fatherhood of Almighty God.**

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## **Introduction**

**Before I begin with the technical definitions and then the Biblical-historical defense and evidences and so on, I would like to just briefly just share my own personal experience. The Pope was a doctrine that was very difficult for me and so was Mary. Both of those were dealt with in terms of historical evidence and Biblical evidence and basically, I was done. Purgatory was different. I came to a conclusion that sufficient evidence exists for an intermediate state between heaven and hell on the basis of the Bible and ancient Jewish practices of praying for the dead and evidences in the early Christian Church that I will review this morning. But there was still a very big emotional block. Very big. It's hard to describe. I've tried and I've really failed every time to put it into words because - well, for two reasons.**

**On the one hand, as an Evangelical Protestant, I had firm convictions about the finished work of Jesus Christ; that He accomplished our redemption on the cross. Those convictions I still hold fast to. Every Christian, every Catholic must. The work of our redemption is accomplished. It is finished. But the application of that redemptive work of Christ by the Holy Spirit is another matter, one that I did not really come to grips with because it involves suffering which nobody wants to come to grips with - either suffering in this life or suffering afterwards to expiate or to repay or to provide restitution for the effects of sin.**

**But that distinction is going to be crucial from the beginning of our time today until the end -- that Christ has accomplished our redemption. It's over and done with. He has finished it. But then He sends the Holy Spirit to apply it, and the application of redemption is just as essential. We don't have a binary deity, the Father and the Son we have a trinitery deity, a family -- a Father, a Son and a Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "I come to baptize with fire and spirit." And so, when the Spirit comes at Pentecost, tongues of fire appear, and whenever the Holy Spirit appears, there is Holy Fire. When we are taken up into the Spirit, there we are consumed with a passionate, burning love, the furnace of Christ's heart, the reality of the Holy Spirit, the fiery love of God.**

**That is not because Christ's work is not enough. It's rather the application of the work of Jesus Christ. Now that block, that obstacle was one of the biggest. It was the biggest for me as far as the doctrine of purgatory was concerned, and I would suggest that for many non-Protestants, for many Catholics, it's an obstacle, too, because I find in discussions that many Catholics as well as Protestants share this misunderstanding.**

**So, I would say, the second problem that I had to deal with, and we are also going to deal with today, is misconceptions of purgatory. I've come across people in the Church who are firmly convinced that purgatory gives people a second chance. It doesn't! Now, you may think, that's just a non-Catholic misconception, but no, it's a common Catholic misconception -- that if you died and you were alienated from God, purgatory is your second chance. That's not the case. That totally distorts the Church's teaching.**

**Those people who in God's grace and mercy are allowed to enter into purgatory die in a state of grace, not just with supernatural faith and hope but with supernatural charity that was alive in their hearts and lives. That is the prerequisite for entering purgatory. You cannot die in the state of mortal sin; you cannot die estranged from God, in a way hostile to God, having committed yourself to valuing things of the world more than the creator of the world. You cannot do those things and enter purgatory, much less heaven. Purgatory is not a second chance. It's only for those whom God has from all eternity destined for heaven, and it's only for those who die in a state of grace.**

**Furthermore, we've got to clarify the fact that it is not to make up for Christ's unfinished work. I've already said that, but that, too, is a common misconception that continually needs clarification. There's nothing inadequate about the work of Christ. It's finished, but it needs to be applied.**

**Likewise, some historians suggest that purgatory is a Medieval invention, because the word purgatorio is not common. It's not frequently found in the early Church's writings. In fact, it's very infrequent and rare. Now, you'll see that the word is rare, but the teaching is not just common, but practically everywhere, going back to the earliest times.**

**Then, finally, some real cynics and some real anti-Catholics would suggest that purgatory is just simply and essentially a money-making scheme to sell indulgences and to make money for the stipends that the priest receives at Mass. Now, seeing that the stipends vary, but they're around five dollars per Mass, no one is going to be getting rich saying Mass. And as far as indulgences are concerned, we're going to have to deal with that at a later time, but that just reflects a total misunderstanding of what the Church, in fact, teaches about indulgences.**

**These are common misconceptions that we want to put aside. We want to understand what the Church teaches. We want to understand why the Church teaches it, and we want to go into the Bible and into Church history to confirm the teaching. But first of all, a definition. I take this now from the New Catholic Encyclopedia: "Purgatory is the state, place or condition in the next world which will continue until the Last Judgment, where the souls of those who die in a state of grace, but not yet free from all imperfection, make expiation, that is, restitution for unforgiven venial sins and mortal sins that have already been forgiven, and by doing so, are purified before they enter heaven."**

**Now, before I proceed, I'm going to have to deal with an elementary objection that's going to come up over and over again, and that is, what is this idea of mortal versus venial sin? I mean what kind of cost accounting is this? Now, not just anti-Catholics but non-Catholics have a question about this, and I'm going to make that distinction clear right now. There are millions of non-Catholics with whom we share many things in common, but there is something else out there and that is the anti-Catholic. The anti-Catholic might be Protestant, might be Orthodox, might be atheist, might be agnostic, might be just nothing. But they are people with a passionate desire to "do-in" the Catholic Church and the faith of Catholics. That is something altogether distinct from just being non-Catholic. We should hold hatred for neither. We should love them both, but we should keep clearly in mind that when you meet a non-Catholic, chances are, they love the Lord and they try to follow the Bible the best they can.**

**We need to give them the benefit of the doubt. We need to extend charity to them and, even if you discover that they have got a deep anti-Catholic streak that's almost venomous, we continue to do the same thing. But keep clear in your mind that there are non-Catholics, and then there are anti-Catholics. Both groups have questions about this distinction. I did, too. Then, all of a sudden, I came across, read and then pondered a passage in 1st John, chapter 5. It says this, "If anyone sees his brother committing what is not a mortal sin, he will ask and God will give him life for those whose sin is not mortal. There is sin which is mortal. I do not say that one is to pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin which is not mortal."**

**Now, John is talking about two kinds of sin. One is mortal, that is deadly. You cannot pray for somebody in mortal sin and sacrifice and have that prayer, intrinsically, be effective; whereas if somebody is in venial sin, you can actually, because you share a spiritual solidarity, you can actually sacrifice and pray on**



behalf of that person and in a sense restore them and strengthen them. Some sin kills. Other sin merely wounds. All sin is despicable. You might say, "Well, if it's only venial, why not?" That's not what the Church teaches or allows or implies. Somebody could say, "Well, look, if what I do doesn't kill me, then, why don't I go ahead and do it?"

You wouldn't do that in natural life with your physical body. You wouldn't say, "Well, I'm only going to be scarred for life. I'm only going to be maimed. I'm only going to be paralyzed; therefore, I can just go ahead and do these things. You know, third degree burns, but I can still breathe and metabolize." No, we treat our bodies with respect. We've got to learn to treat our souls the same way. Just because a venial sin does not kill, it still scars and wounds and weakens and inclines us to mortal sin. All sin is despicable to God and to those who are His children.

But there is a distinction which John assumes. He doesn't feel any need to argue it, but he takes it for granted. And I've got to tell you, when I first pondered this passage, it startled me because the conclusions are striking. Let's keep that in mind because the definition assumes that prior understanding of the distinction between mortal and venial sins.

Now, let's ask ourselves, "What is the evidence for this?" I want to share with you my own intellectual, spiritual pilgrimage on this particular point because, as I said, I didn't just have intellectual problems, I had emotional problems, psychological difficulties with this teaching. One thing I did, though, was to ask the Lord to open my mind. And I continued to pray that as I went through the evidence for and against this idea of purgatory.

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### Conclusions of Old Testament Non-Catholic Scholars and Hahn About Belief in Sheol

I have here a note card that goes back several years, long before I became a Catholic. I went through much of scripture, as much of it as possible pertaining to the subject, and then I poured through the writings of Protestants and Catholics to see what they could do to shed light on scripture. I have several articles summarized on this little note card. I can barely read it and I'm just four inches away from it, but I want to share with you some of the conclusions of these scholars who are not Catholic but open-minded scholars who are studying the Word came to in the Old Testament.

This focuses upon the belief in sheol. I'm going to suggest that what the Latin word, "purgatorio" signifies, that is the place where we are purged of disordered self-love, the Hebrew word, "sheol" can also signify or denote. Just like the Greek word "hades" can denote it. Three words, perhaps with the same reality, with proper distinctions made, if we had the time and the energy and the know-how and so on.

But I would suggest that "hades," the Greek word, is not normally associated with just simply "hell fire." "Gehenna" is the word that Jesus uses for hell fire, "where the worm dieth not" and there's this unquenchable fire. That's actually borrowed from the garbage dump outside of Jerusalem, "ge-hin-nom," the valley of hin-nom, which was where King Manasus sacrificed thousands of Israelite children to Molek, a demon god. After that nobody wanted to live in such defiled land, so it became the garbage dump, with fires continually burning. Nobody wanted to get near it because of defilement. It was a haunt of demons.

That was the image that Christ used for hell, as we normally associate it, but hades is a term that admits to a kind of double usage as we will see and as scholars have seen. For instance, Ellard Bailey in a book, "Death in the Literature of the Old Testament" speaks about how throughout the Old Testament, the belief is found that the good and the evil go down to sheol, it's the place where the righteous and the unrighteous go. In Brown, Driver and Briggs, one of the most authoritative reference works for understanding Hebrew words, you can look up sheol, and there you find that sheol is divided into two sections, one for the evil and one for the good.

You can actually find in the apocryphal work of 1st Enoch that it is divided up further into four sections: the evil section into two sections, those who are evil and those who are really evil; and also two sections for the good as well. R. L. Harris in another study speaks of sheol as the grave. He has been heavily criticized by scholars across the board for trying to reduce the word sheol down to being merely the grave. He especially ignored a major work in German that I came across by Afmar Kiel.

Now I know you're not just going to rush out to a seminary book store and purchase all of these works and read them by tomorrow morning, but you can get the tape or you can take notes on this and perhaps get some of these sources later on. Another scholar by the name of Hiedel spoke of sheol as existing in the Old Testament for the righteous. He also did a word study of the underworld, the nether world and saw it associated with the evil.

One of the key studies I came across, however, is by a man named Alexander, an Evangelical Protestant with decidedly non-Catholic leanings entitled, "The Old Testament View of Life After Death in Familias" in 1986, I believe. He rejects a lot of views that would basically make an Old Testament look like primitive garbage. He shows that sheol throughout the Old Testament represented the abode of the dead, the underworld for both the wicked and the righteous. For the wicked it was dark and silent and terrifying and a kind of imminent or ultimate preparation for final punishment. But for the good, there was hope, not pleasure, not comfort necessarily, but hope, great hope.

Now, working through these scholars and their studies of the Old Testament doctrine of sheol, I'd also done my own study. I came to the conclusion that they were right, that the Old Testament has a firm teaching that you could find in many

different strata or levels of Old Testament tradition and there you find this belief that the soul goes on living somehow in a shadowy world where the righteous and the unrighteous have a share, although it's distinct; and it is not a pleasant place. It is not a pleasant place at all.

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### Biblical Evidence for Belief in Sheol/Purgatory

Now, let's just take a look at a few passages to see this. We can see for instance in 2nd Samuel 22. If you have a Bible, turn with me to the book of 2nd Samuel. In chapter 22, verse 6, we have an important passage. This, in effect, is a psalm of praise written by David talking about how he has been delivered. He describes his earthly suffering in cataclysmic and apocalyptic imagery to show how his earthly deliverances by God are signifying the ultimate deliverance that he will undergo at the grave. He says in verse 5, "For the ways of death encompassed me, the torrents of perdition assailed me, the cords of sheol entangled me, the snares of death confronted me, and in my distress I called upon the Lord. To my God I called...." And it goes on describing how in verse 20, for instance, "He brought me forth into a broad place." It implies that sheol is a place of entanglement and perdition or at least, I should say, it's a place where those who die go down.

We see the same teaching in Psalm 18, verse 5, which is practically the same psalm as we read in 2nd Samuel 22, so we can skip over.

Let's take a look at Psalm 86, verse 13. We can only be selective because the limits of time but, rest assured, there are literally dozens and dozens of places where the term sheol is used. In my version, I'm using the Revised Standard Version, the term is simply left untranslated, because it's very difficult to translate the Hebrew sheol into any English word that we usually use. So, anyway, Psalm 86, verse 13. In Psalm 86, verse 13, we see, "Great is thy steadfast love toward me. Thou hast delivered my soul from the depths of sheol. Thou hast delivered my soul from the depths of sheol." Other passages you could look at include Psalm 116, verse 3. You can actually see the New Testament citing this passage in reference to Christ in Acts chapter 2:27-31.

You could almost summarize this perspective as you look at the Book of Sirach, chapter 7, verse 33, where we hear, "Withhold not your kindness, O Lord from the dead." So there's a continued perspective throughout Old Testament times that God's kindness extends down to the realm of the dead, the abode of the dead and that there is a distinction made between the righteous and the unrighteous as they await Messiah's coming.

Now, of course, you've been awaiting for the most important passage of all in the Old Testament, at least the Catholic Old Testament, 2nd Maccabees.

**Let's turn now to 2nd Maccabees, chapter 12 and look together at verses 39 through 45. This is the locus classicus. This is the place you always turn as a Catholic to show this belief. But I might suggest that you don't have to be a Catholic to find great insight in this passage. There's no question in the minds of non-Catholic scholars that the seven books in the Old Testament that the Catholics include but the Protestants exclude were quoted and cited or alluded to by New Testament writers. I have several non-Catholic scholars who vigorously assert and affirm that.**

**So, even if the Jews did not include this in their official collection or their official canon in Jesus' day, and that's a point to be disputed, but even if they didn't have 2nd Maccabees in their official Bible -- for instance, the Palestinian Jews may well not have, although the Diaspora Jews seem to have included it. Whether or not, it doesn't matter. The point is 2nd Maccabees was not rejected for teaching some outlandish novelty, some weird innovation. Rather prayers by the Jews in Temple and Synagogue on behalf of the dead are traceable back to the earliest times. We can't find the origin of it because, as far back as we go, it's a prevalent custom that is unquestioned.**

**So, in 2nd Maccabees we are going to see something that is startling not from what it argues, but for what it assumes. Verse 39, "On the following day, since the task had now become urgent, Judas and his men went to gather up the bodies of the slain and bury them with their kinsmen in their ancestral tombs. But under the tunic of each of the dead, they found amulets sacred to the idols of Jamnia which the law forbids the Jews to wear." It's forbidden but it would be something we would probably label venial sin. It's bad, don't get me wrong, it's not something to be lightly brushed aside or anything. "So it was clear to all that this was why these men had been slain. They all, therefore, praised the ways of the Lord, the just judge who brings to light the things that are hidden. Turning to supplication, they prayed that the sinful deed might be fully blotted out. The noble Judas warned the soldiers to keep themselves free from sin for they had seen with their own eyes what had happened because of the sin of those who had fallen. He then took up a collection among all the soldiers amounting to 2000 silver drachmas, which he sent to Jerusalem, to the Temple, to provide for expiatory sacrifice. In doing this he acted in a very excellent and noble way inasmuch as he had the resurrection of the dead in view. For if he were not expecting the fallen to rise again, it would have been useless and foolish to pray for them in death."**

**This belief in the resurrection is found in Job and Daniel and elsewhere. "But if he did this with a view to the splendid reward that awaits those who had gone to rest in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought." It's a holy, it's a wholesome thought to pray for the dead. "Thus he made atonement for the dead that they might be freed from this sin." Now, simple logic tells us that there is a third realm. If they're in hell, no expiatory sacrifice will help. If they're in heaven, no expiatory sacrifice is needed. They must be some place else.**

Now, what do you mean "some place else?" You're just fabricating that for the convenience of defending the doctrine. Not so. As we unpack the doctrinal teachings and the evidence from scripture, we can see this idea clearly stated, even in the New Testament. Turn with me now to 1st Peter, chapter 3, beginning in verse 17. In 1st Peter, chapter 3, verse 17, we read, "For it is better to suffer for doing right, if that should be God's will, than for doing wrong. For Christ also died for sins once for all. The righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God. Being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit in which He went and preached to the spirits in prison."

What's he talking about? Well, almost all commentators see this as in continuity with the Hebrew idea of sheol. "But made alive in the spirit in which He went and preached to the spirits in prison who formerly did not obey when God's patience waited in the days of Noah during the building of the ark in which only a few, that is, eight persons were saved through water." Now, somebody could say, "Well, these people are only being preached to, to secure their damnation and finalize it." Well that's certainly a gratuitous reading that's not suggested in the text. What is suggested in the text from the previous verse, is we're talking about Christ the righteous dying for the unrighteous that He might bring us to God.

So he goes on to talk about the unrighteous who are in prison, but who are in prison for unrighteousness that we might not consider mortal. It's unrighteousness, but it is not the kind of sin that is full-fledged and completely rationally chosen in rebellion, full scale rebellion against God. This is something perhaps quite different. At any rate, we have something that is neither hell nor heaven which Christ entered and then exited and, as the early Church firmly believed throughout the Church, Christ descended into hades. That's the term, we translate it hell, but we sometimes mislead people -- He descended into hades and then He ascended into heaven leading captivity captive, as Ephesians 4 says.

In other words leading those who had been captive in prison for ages, the righteous of the Old Testament, in a train of glory up to heaven. There's an apocryphal work that some tried to slip into the New Testament. It didn't really get far but it's called the Gospel of Nicodemus in which this teaching is just so obviously assumed, it reflects a common understanding of the early Church, even if it is not in a book that we would want to include in scripture.

So here we see in 1st Peter, chapter 3, clear teaching for this intermediate state, but even more, an intermediate place. Now, somebody could say, "Where else do you go?" Let's take a look at the Book of Revelation, chapter 20, verses 4-6 and 11 and following. In Revelation 20, John has a vision. In verse 4 it says, "Then I saw heavenly thrones and seated on them were those to whom judgment was committed. Also, I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus." Probably a reference to the prophets like John the Baptist who had been literally beheaded for his marturia, his testimony. The word is mar-tu-ria, where we get the word martyrs. "...testimony to Jesus and for the word of God and it would not

worship the beast or its image and had not received its mark on the forehead with their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years in heaven on these thrones." We'll return to this by the way when we look into the evidence from the New Testament for the cult of the saints, why we believe that some saints are actively interceding on our behalf with heavenly authority.

We go on, verse 5, "The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended." They were dead but they weren't in heaven. They didn't come to life. "This is the first resurrection," that is, those who die and immediately go to heaven and sit on thrones because they were martyrs. That's the first resurrection, those who have been martyred. "Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection. Over such, the second death has no power for they shall be priests of God, and they shall reign with him a thousand years."

St. Maximilian Kolbe's feast day is this day. He is one of those heavenly priests interceding for us because he was martyred on behalf of Christ's people in the war. It goes on now. We can take a look at verse 11, "Then I saw a great white throne and him who sat upon it. From his presence earth and sky fled away and no place was found for them and I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne and the books were opened. And another book was opened which was the book of life and the dead were judged by what was written in the books by what they had done and the sea gave up the dead in it. Death and hades gave up the dead in them and all were judged by what they had done. Then death and hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death and if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

Two classes of righteous, those who are martyred, they just went straight to heaven and sat on thrones and reigned with Christ. But there's a second group, isn't there? Those that did not participate in the first resurrection of the righteous martyrs, but they did have their names written in the book of life; so when the white throne, the great white throne of judgment occurs, they are delivered from hades. They participate in what you could call the second resurrection, not the second death and afterwards death and hades are swallowed up in the lake of fire, and then you've got pure hell and pure heaven and no more intermediate place or state at the end of time.

Now you might say, "Well, John is not arguing these things. He's not demonstrating the existence of this third place." That's right. I acknowledge that point, but he is assuming it. What's so remarkable is that he doesn't feel any need to argue it. He seems to think this can be assumed. They are not so righteous as to lay down their lives. They didn't embrace the cross so fully that they died as martyrs and persevered through all the pain and suffering.

Let's go back one second. I just remembered something. Let's go back to 1st Peter 3 and read on something more. In 1st Peter as he goes on talking about all of this, just a couple of verses down we come to Peter 4:1. There we read this, "Since therefore

**Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same thought for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin." God has called many of you to suffer in this town and in this life and it's hard. I can't even describe it. I'll bet you it's probably worse than I can imagine in some cases here. Why would He do it if He loves us and wants to bless us? In spite of that love? No, precisely because of that love. He loves us too much, He loves us just the way we are but He loves us far too much to let us stay that way. And how do you squeeze sin out of a sinner? - by giving him faith and hope and charity and suffering. That endurance brings hope and that hope does not disappoint us as Romans 4 says. It brings ultimately the finest fruit of charity which alone abides forever, in 1st Corinthians 13 we read about that.**

**It goes on, 1st Peter 4, verse 8, "Above all hold unfailing your love for one another since love covers a multitude of sins." In other words, it's not just Christ suffering. It's not just Christ's love that covers our sins. We are so truly united to Christ, His life is so truly filling us up that when we suffer, we cease from sin. It isn't just Christ suffering. It's Christ suffering lived out in us and through us for our sake and for those around us, but then as charity flowers and becomes complete and perfect in us, love covers a multitude of sins. Why? Because Christ's love wasn't enough, He didn't suffer long enough? No, because His suffering and His redemption having been finished and accomplished by the Holy Spirit, the third forgotten Person of the Trinity, applied in us who are mystical members of His mystical body.**

**The essence of Christianity is Christ reproducing His life, His suffering, His death and then His resurrection in glory in us. That is the essence of Christianity. Christ is our substitute for Adam who did us in, but He is not a substitute in the sense that He was righteous so that we could be unrighteous. He suffered so that we don't have to suffer. He took our stripes so that we only have healing and good times and easy street from here on. Sure, God does heal us sometimes, on earth, in time. But don't ever, ever swallow the line that you're not healed because you don't have faith and you're in a really bad state because you're still suffering from this disease or this illness and so on. Don't fall for that because sometimes God doesn't heal somebody on earth in time because He's got a much greater healing in mind. He's not satisfied with just giving us back a few more years of earthly life. Sometimes He loves us so much that He wants to give us the greatest gift of all and that is eternal glory and a resurrection body, which is the final and complete and ultimate healing that we really should be craving and praying for.**

**Verse 12, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you." Notice what kind of ordeal? Fiery! "The Holy Spirit led the people of Israel through the wilderness as a pillar of fire by night and smoke by day." Into what -- good times, comfort, ease and pleasure? No. Forty years of wandering in the wilderness sure ain't fun and all life is an exile, wilderness of spirit, the New Testament teaches us. We are pilgrims. We're in exodus. We're leaving this world, the Egypt of the New Testament. We're going to heaven, the Promised Land, but in the meantime, we're wandering. Led by the Holy Spirit, a pillar of fire. So He calls us to go through**

deserts. He calls us to encounter all kinds of trials. Why? Because He didn't want us to have too much fun? No. Because He doesn't want us to just settle down and pig out on earthly goods.

Earthly goods are good, but they are only hors d'oeuvres. They are only meant to whet our appetite for the heavenly banquet. If we pig out on the hors d'oeuvres, what's going to happen? We're going to lose any desire for heaven and the banquet of the lamb. So the Holy Spirit in love sends fire and ordeals which come upon us to prove us. To prove you as though something strange will happen to you, but rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings "...that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed."

I might say this strongly. The Catholic view of suffering is one of the most beautiful truths that the Church teaches, but perhaps one of the most weird and incomprehensible ideas to non-Catholics. It took me years to understand it and it probably will take me decades to try to emulate and live it out. It's incredible, but I'm going to tell you, our world is in need of it! This health and wealth gospel that says, "You name it, you claim it, you can get wealthy and you're healed," is bogus. Preach that to the Ethiopians, "Come on, kids, you don't have to starve. Have enough faith." That's perverse! We are called to share in Christ's suffering so that we could share in His glory. Some of us take short cuts, don't we? But God will not abandon us because He loves us immature children too much, just the way we are, but too much to let us stay that way.

He brings one fiery ordeal after another. If you are suffering a great deal. If you are going through a kind of purgatory on earth, you rejoice. Those who are fat and lazy and have it easy, they should beware. As Mother Teresa continues to say, "These are God's tender caresses, this suffering." The more suffering that you endure in faith and hope and charity, the more God's love is being revealed to you. No wonder the gospel will never sell in the world. There is no way to teach this so that Madison Avenue PR men and women can just go out and make this popular without perverting it and watering it down.

This is why purgatory is so hard for us to understand. We don't want to carry the cross. We want to make an optional clause in our contract with Christ. "If you want to be my disciple, you've got to carry the cross. You've got to die to self."

Let's turn to Romans 8 and see this doctrine taught further. Romans 8 is one of my favorite all-time passages and has been for years and years as a Protestant as well as a Catholic, but I must say I've slightly adjusted my understanding in the last few years. I always thought that Romans 8, which many considered to be -- I mean Romans is in a sense the central gem in a cluster of Pauline precious stones. Romans 8 is the central facet that glistens and gleams. It's beautiful. It's a promise that we will persevere through the Holy Spirit.



**Up until now the Holy Spirit has only been mentioned once in the first seven chapters of Romans, and in chapter 8 it's mentioned 18 times to give us assurance that God's Spirit, Christ's Spirit is at work in us. Why? Well, we're told, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus," verse 1, "for the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law weakened by the flesh could not do. Sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh," get this, " in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us."**

**Non-Catholics frequently fall in the trap of saying, Christ obeyed, so we don't need to. Paul said Christ obeyed to enable us to do what previously was humanly impossible. Finally now, heart obedient to a motive of faith, hope and love is made possible by Christ's obedience, not made unnecessary. It's made acceptable in Christ and it's made delightful to the Father because it's presented in union with Christ. He goes on, "who walked not according to the flesh but according to the spirit." Well what does that mean? It goes on to say, verse 9, "But you are not in the flesh, you are in the spirit if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you." Well how do you know whether or not the spirit of God dwells in you? Verse 10, "But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through the Spirit which dwells in you."**

**Okay, "if" -- how can we know that this is true and real for us? He says in 12, "So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh," but look at this, "we are debtors," we still have a debt to pay; not because Christ hasn't paid it but because Christ has paid it once and for all and through the Holy Spirit in His mystical body, He applies that. "We are debtors not to the flesh, who live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die. But if by the spirit you put to death the deeds of the body" -- if by the spirit, not by your own flesh, not by your own power. Human nature is weak and incapable of doing anything ultimately pleasing to God. We cannot earn the state of grace by our own works. It's got to be through the power of the Holy Spirit in union with Christ. "But, if by the spirit you put to death the deeds of the body," -- if you mortify it, is another translation? - "you will live."**

**That's what penance is all about. We must do penance, John the Baptist said. We must do penance, Jesus Christ said. We must do penance, St. Paul and St. Peter and on and on and on; they all say it. It is not just an attitude or an emotion. It's not just a decision or an experience. It's not just a choice at a stadium where we go for what the choir sings. We've got to mortify our bodies. We've got to do penance every day. Well I'm preaching to myself, too, this morning. I don't know what you're hearing, but I know what I'm hearing. Oh I tell you, for all who are led, for all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. "For you do not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship."**

Then he goes on talking about something that is very important to what we are saying. "When we cry Abba, Father, it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, and if children then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs of Christ." We will be fellow heirs of Christ. Oh, I'd just love it if Paul would stop right there, right there! Put a period and start a new chapter. He doesn't. "Fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him." All of a sudden, chills are going up and down my spine. Oh, oh, wait a second, God. I like it up until that point. "I will hold fast the courage, but suffering separates me from Christ." Paul goes on to argue in the rest of Romans 8, No, no, no! Suffering is not what separates you from Christ, suffering is what unites you ever more closely with the spirit of Christ."

It's the refusal to suffer that separates you from Christ. I used to use this passage to say, "Nothing can ever separate you from Christ in the sense that no matter what you do, once you're saved, always saved. You know, you've got it made in the shade. Not saved once saved always, that Christ decreed you to be saved always unto eternity. But that's God's business. For us, as Paul says in Philippians, we've got to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, with the assurance that God's grace is sufficient, but with the knowledge that we've got to cooperate morning, noon and night. So he goes on and he says, "provided we suffer."

Now instantly Paul recognizes the objection we all have, b-b-b-b- ut the suffering! I don't like to suffer. Well, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not even worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." Oh then it's a little cost benefit and analysis. It's a little cost, and this is what we'll gain. If anybody is getting gypped, it's God. "For the creation awaits with eager longing for the revelation of the sons of God.

For the creation itself was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but of the will, by the will of him who subjected him in hope." It goes on talking about how we groan inwardly, but not we ourselves have to know how the spirit groans inwardly in us.

Verse 26, "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness for we do not know how to pray as we ought." Ain't that the truth! We don't know how to pray as we ought. We need to pray. We can theologize. We can teach and we can listen to tapes and read books all that we want, but if we don't pray, we won't be able to suffer in the spirit. We won't be able to do anything profitable for heaven. We've got to pray. That's got to be the beginning and end of it all. "The spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words." He goes on and what does he say in this whole chapter? He's not saying once saved, always saved, which means in the spirit you've got it made in the shade. He is saying, "Once saved, you've got to suffer with Christ in order to enter into His glory." And if you think suffer and suffrage from Christ, you've got it backwards.

He goes on to say, "nothing will ever separate us from the love of Christ." You see that? "Nothing will ever separate us from the love of Christ." It says this in verse

35, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress, persecution or famine, nakedness or peril or sword? As it is written for thy sake, oh God, we are being killed all the day long, we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." Did you get that? Jesus ain't the only lamb of God. Now this might seem like kind of baa to our ears -- I shouldn't be so sheepish about my puns, but anyway, Jesus is not the only lamb of God. We are so like him, we are made like him, that we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.

"Now in all these things, we are more than conquerors for him who loved us." The idea that it's suffering that sanctifies us. Paul does not say, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall adultery, shall murder, shall theft? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors?" No, he doesn't say "affluence, leisure, luxury, filthy riches, sumptuous gluttony, all those things are just fine. They're not fine, but God will see us through all those evil sins." No, he didn't say it. He's talking about the fact that all kinds of suffering, none of them shall ever separate us from the love of Christ. The assumption is, we've got to suffer to be glorified. Because the essence of Christianity is Christ reproducing His life and His suffering, His death and His resurrection and His glory in us.

That's what it means to be united in him. That's what the whole significance of our baptism is. Paul says in Romans 6 that because we have been baptized, we have died to sin. When James and John brought their mother to kind of lobby for the right and the left seats in glory, he said, "Are you willing to be baptized with the baptism with which I have to be baptized?" So what did He associate baptism with? An ordeal of suffering. Christ said, "I come to baptize with fire." I've got to tell you, a lot of people are making salvation out to be heavenly welfare. No wonder it sells. I could fill a church in a matter of months, if I was preaching nothing but welfare from heaven for nothing we do. We don't have to suffer. We don't have to work. We don't have to obey. We should, but we don't have to. That's wrong, but it will sell in this century and in every age.

That's why purgatory is so incomprehensible. That's why it seems so wrong, because it feels so right to have a kind of welfare scheme. No. God is not some politician buying votes by promising all kinds of little goodies. I mean not that welfare is not essential in our society. Let's assume that it is needed. But ultimately God does not want to make us completely dependent in a sense of being helpless. God wants to father sons and daughters who will grow up and mature and be strong in faith, hope and charity, filled with wisdom, filled with spiritual strength to love others and to sacrifice themselves for others. This is all of what purgatory implies.

Let's take a look at perhaps another very crucial passage in this regard. First Corinthians, chapter 3. I must admit that theologically and psychologically 1st Corinthians 3 basically sealed it up. It was all sewn up for me when I worked through this, praying, studying, pondering. I think it's strong and clear. In 1st Corinthians 3, he's talking about how we are in Christ. We're temples with Christ. We're His body and yet we are also temples as well. We are God's field, His

building, and in verse 9, the kind of building we are. There's a temple and he goes on to describe how we have got to be careful then. If we are all God's temples, temples of the Holy Spirit, we better be very circumspect and prudent about the way we build.

"According to the grace of God given me," verse 10, "like a skilled master builder, I laid a foundation and another man is building upon it. Let each man take care how he builds upon it." The foundation work is Christ. Make no mistake about that. Our works are not our foundation unless our house is going to crumble. Then we and our works are not the foundation, but Christ is the foundation. "For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become manifest for the day will disclose it. Because it will be revealed with fire and the fire will test which sort of work each one has done. If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward." In addition to salvation, he will receive a reward: thrones, crowns, whatever you want to say.

"If any man's work is burned up," the wood, the hay and the straw, "if any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss." Notice that wood is not as flammable as hay is consumed. So there are degrees of good works, gold and silver and so on, and degrees of venial sins. Jesus even talked about somebody would receive fewer stripes than another person. He talks about how, I think in Matthew 5, you won't get out until you pay the last farthing or the last penny. So it depends on what we have done, what we will do because we have got to be purified in the Holy Spirit of God, which is fiery love. We have got to take up our cross. We are saved by Christ who is our foundation, but we have to build and what we build has to undergo the fiery judgment on the day.

Now the day might refer to the day of judgment, but from earliest times people have seen that Paul is also teaching that the day of judgment is anticipated actually and really and provisionally when each person dies. That's when Jesus comes for us. We speak of the "coming of the Lord." Well, a kind of secondary coming is when He comes for us, and the day of judgment is when we die and appear before him in that sense. "If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss," or change the emphasis. "...he will suffer, loss." Though he himself will be saved, he will have suffering to undergo but only as through fire. But you might say, "Well, it's only wood and stubble that's going to be burned up. It's not him. He is the temple. It isn't just these externals to him. His soul is the temple of the Holy Spirit. His soul is made of parts for the foundation is Christ, but there is some gold, perhaps some silver, but also some wood and stock in His soul. His soul is built up like a temple with all kinds of combustible elements. He will suffer loss. Though he himself will be saved but only as through fire."

Well, my first comeback was, "Well, yeah, but that's an instantaneous process." Then I'd argue with myself. Okay, but what is an instant? Is it a millisecond? Is it a

microsecond? Is it a second, two seconds, three seconds? I mean, let's face it. We're finite creatures. It might be a moment, but what happens when you undergo a moment of incredible pain versus, say, ten minutes of incredible pleasure? Do the ten minutes go by like a second? Yeah. And does that second go by like ten minutes? At least. We're finite creatures going through time. We don't do things outside of time. We are purified in time.

Now maybe for you it will be a second. But unless I really clean up my act more, it's going to be more than a second, I suspect, for me. I believe that God's grace is going to work through me and do all kinds of things. So, God forbid, we should never assume that we have to go through purgatory. He gives us the grace of vision, not only to avoid purgatory but to cooperate with that grace and to live a Christ-like life so we don't have to settle for purgatory and I, with God's grace, won't. But the fact is those who will go through this fiery ordeal will suffer in fire the spirit of judgment.

Malachi, chapter 3, verse 3 speaks about the day being like a refiner's fire which purifies the sons of Levi. The priests of God have got to go through this fiery process of purification.

"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" It's that same Spirit that dwells in us and will purify and judge us and finally purge us of all of this disordered self-love and sin. And we could call it purge-a-tory, if it's going to be less misleading because that's all that's happening. We are being purged. Christ's work is not being supplemented. Christ's work is being manifested and applied. The fiery, sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit does not undermine the finished work of Christ, it expresses it. It manifests it and it brings it to pass.

Nobody is going to say, "Christ has died on the cross; therefore, we don't need faith." Of course we need faith. Well, if we need faith, is it because Christ's work isn't finished? After all, He says, "It is finished." Why do we need faith? We're all saved. Nobody says that. Even non-Catholics say, "We have to have at least faith." Well, if we have to have anything besides the cross of Christ, if we have to have personal faith, and that doesn't undermine the work of Christ, then we have to ask, why? Well, it's because the Holy Spirit gives us faith and then hope and then charity and the capacity to sacrifice and suffer. And how crucial it is that we willingly cooperate with that grace.

"The day of judgment is coming, to burn like a furnace," Malachi 4, verse 1. chapter 3, verse 2, "the refiners for silver and gold." Hebrews 12, verse 29, tells us that our God is a consuming fire. That's the kind of love He has. It just burns out of control. Our God is madly in love with us. He's madly in love with us. It's sheer madness for the God who owes us nothing, to whom we owe everything but to whom we gave practically nothing. He turns around and gives us everything including himself by becoming one of us and allowing us to kill him. He's madly in love with us, and that mad love is burning out of control and filling this vast universe. It's just

that our physical eyes can't see it, but they will some day and our souls will undergo it. And those who have refined their love through self-sacrifice and mortification and penance and charity through the spirit of the foundation which is Christ, but those who have done so are going to enter into that fiery love of God and say, "Oooh, it feels so good! I'm home." And other people are going to look back where they have compromised and taken short cuts; they've done a lot of great things in love and faith and hope. They've even suffered some, but they have taken a lot of short cuts, They are going to enter that fire and say, "Ooh, ooh...," and purgatory is for them.

Now the saints in heaven would freeze in purgatory, and hell fire for the saints in heaven would be like ice, dry ice. Our God is a consuming fire. The periphery of the universe is hell fire. That isn't the hottest. The hottest is what you find when you get closest to God. Out of the nine choirs of angels, the highest are the Seraphim. In Hebrew it means the burning ones. They glow bright because they are consumed with this passionate, fiery love that God has for all eternity for us as His children.

We can't even imagine what it's like, but we have been granted the fiery Holy Spirit of love to enable us to do what would otherwise be humanly impossible in this life, to purge ourselves. That is why Paul says in Colossians 1:24 something that used to baffle me, Colossians 1:24, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake." Masochist? No. In a sense, he is the opportunist. He is the one who sees the ultimate rewards. "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of His body that is the Church."

Now does he mean that Christ died a little too quickly? He needed a few more hours? No. It means that Christ's suffering and death must be reproduced and filled up in the Church and if some are slacking off, that means others must become more like victim-souls, willing to bear a greater burden, willing to shoulder with love, as Galatians 5 speaks about the love, "Love bears one another's burdens." We do that just as 1st John 5 speaks about how we can pray for others and get them back on track after their venial sins have been committed. So likewise we can suffer on behalf of others. That's what fathers and mothers do all the time. And God calls us to do that in the supernatural family, as well, on behalf of our brothers and sisters and our spiritual children, as well. That's what Paul takes for granted when he makes such an outlandish statement. Outlandish only for those who do not recognize the essential need for suffering.

There are some other passages that I should call your attention to because they are classical proof texts. Let's turn to the gospel of Matthew. I've mentioned this already in passing. Let's turn to Matthew 5:26. There Jesus says, "Make friends quickly with your accuser," in verse 25, "while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hands you over to the judge and the judge to the guard and you be put in prison. Truly I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny." What is the presumption? Once you pay the last penny, you are going to get out.

**Where are you going to go then? To hell? No. You paid the last penny. You're going to enter into the blessing at that point but only after you've paid the fine.**

**Now what does this mean, that Christ has not paid for our sin? Of course not. It doesn't mean that. Christ has paid once and for all for our sin. His death is the ultimate satisfaction and price for our redemption, but His life and His death must be lived out in us. That's why we need to pick up our cross, and we need to imitate Christ. Did you catch that? We don't suffer because Christ's sufferings weren't enough. We suffer because Christ's life must be reproduced in us. It is finished. It is accomplished, but now it must be applied. The work of the third person of the Holy Spirit is New Testament history, is personal history.**

**Understand that this is restitution. This is not in a sense forgiveness. Only forgiven souls enter purgatory. This is restitution. It reminds me of a Peanuts comic strip. One time Linus was packing a snowball while Lucy was walking by, getting ready to pound her and all of a sudden she turns around and she says, "If you hit me with that snowball, so help me, you'll be sorry." She walks on. Sure enough, boom, smack in the back of her head. She comes back with both fists raised, ready to pound him into mincemeat and he says, "You are so right. I am so sorry." Now wait a second. I think it was William James or some Harvard philosopher who said, "I would sin like David, if only I could repent like David." Well you can't gauge your repentance in advance. That actually adds malice to whatever evil you do.**

**The fact is, if we are truly sorry, we will see the need and the propriety for restitution. Not just monetary, physical restitution for broken windows, but psychical, spiritual restitution for broken souls.**

**The people we've hurt, the people we've refused to bless, the people we've refused to give ourselves to and to give Christ to, the incredible opportunities that we've missed because we were lazy and slothful, proud and arrogant. Those memories will burn more than any physical fire when our souls encounter the fiery love of Christ in the Holy Spirit. All those missed opportunities we willfully refused. It's one thing to miss opportunities for imperfections and faults, another thing to sin deliberately by not giving ourselves. It might not be mortal sin, but we are not only wounding ourselves, but we are wounding the souls who depend upon us.**

**Now are we paying for our sins? No, they are paid for. And the only way we can make restitution is because the life of Christ through the Holy Spirit has been poured out in us so that through our sufferings Christ's glory can be reproduced in us. But there's no short cut. Hebrews says that Christ, though a Son, learned obedience through suffering. Why did He suffer? That His human nature could learn obedience and impart that human nature to us through the flesh and blood in the Eucharist, the body and blood of Christ. When we receive that human nature of the eternal Son of God and historical Son of Man, we are enabled to learn obedience through suffering. There's no other way to learn obedience.**

**If you suffer in the flesh, you have ceased from sin. If you don't suffer in the flesh, Hebrew 12 makes it perfectly clear, that, you are an illegitimate child. Only God's children does He inflict suffering on. He says the illegitimate children, He lets them go and have an easy time. We are disciplined because we are loved and if it hurts, if it burns, it's because that's because that's the way God's love is. It gives of itself. God's whole essence is self-donation and He calls us to be imitators of God, Paul says. We imitate God when we become self-donators, self-givers and you can't do that as finite creatures without self-sacrifice, and you can't sacrifice self without pain. You can't love without sacrifice.**

**We learn obedience through what we suffer, and if we suffer in the flesh we have ceased from sin. If we take short cuts, God in His mercy will give us summer school to make up for that one class we might have skipped or that one course we might have flunked. We'll move on to the next grade for sure, but we need a little bit of remedial education. Our opportunity to merit is only on earth because here we can choose to suffer. In purgatory we only accept it. There's no merit. Glory, sure, but no additional merit. In this earth the Church Militant acquires merits, not merits in addition to Christ, but Christ's merit bestowed in filling us up, bestowed upon us. When God crowns our works, He is only crowning His own achievements. When He rewards our works, He is only crowning His own work in us through the Holy Spirit, the life of Christ being lived out in us.**

**Take a look at Matthew 12, verse 32 talks about the unforgivable sin that moves on in verse 32, "Whoever says a word against the son of man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven either in this age or in the age to come." Now, for that statement to be meaningful, we won't get into what blaspheming the Holy Spirit means. We can perhaps raise that in the question/answer period, but one thing is clear: this is a sin which cannot be forgiven either in this age or in the age to come. "But the assumption behind the statement is that there are other sins which can be forgiven in this age and, look, or in the age to come.**

**What are we talking about? Well, some people might say, in the Messianic age, after Christ goes up to heaven. That's plausible, but from earliest times all the interpreters saw this also applying to the intermediate state, for those who die in a state of grace because there we encounter God in Revelation 1:14, "His eyes were like blazing fire." Revelation 21:27, "Nothing profane shall enter heaven. There Christ sits on a throne of fire," we're told and Daniel 7 and also Revelation. There we will also sit but only after we have been purged of all this disordered self-love and sin. "The Lord is coming with fire," Isaiah, 66, verse 15, "and His rebuke is with flames of fire." "Fire comes forth from the presence of the Lord" in Leviticus all the way until the end of the New Testament. "The Lord is a consuming fire. We are baptized with the Holy Spirit in fire," Matthew 3:11.**

**Over and over again we see these passages. I want to give you a quotation. Actually just a few to close this up because I have a few that really helped me out. One of the**



greatest scholars of the last 100 years was a man by the name of R.H. Charles. He wrote a humungus work entitled *A Critical History of the Doctrine of the Future Life in Israel in Judaism and in Christianity*. He comments upon the verse I just read in Matthew 12:32. He says, "Now such a statement would not only be meaningless, but also misleading in the highest degree if in the next life forgiveness were a thing impossible. Likewise the saying in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:26, which we read just a minute ago, "Thou shalt then by no means come out until thou hast paid the last farthing" admits of a like interpretation.

It may not be amiss likewise to find signs of this moral amelioration in the rich man in Hades who appeals to Abraham on behalf of his five brothers still on earth, in Luke 16. Remember the story of Lazarus and the rich man? The rich man is in fire, but he calls out, "Father Abraham," and Abraham responds, "My son, or my child." Well all that man had done was to feast sumptuously. He didn't go around beating Lazarus and other poor people. He just ate sumptuously. He neglected the poor. Not a mortal sin in and of itself, to be sure. And he says, "Father Abraham, just let Lazarus know. Have mercy on me." He didn't say, "This is unfair. I shouldn't be in hell." He says, "Have mercy on me. Just get Lazarus to dip his little finger tip in water and put it on the tip of my tongue. I don't deserve it, but it's mercy."

Is that a soul in hell filled with the hatred of God? St. Teresa says, "There is no love in hell." And yet, this man pleads, not on his own behalf, but he says, "Please send Lazarus back to my five brothers so that they will believe in time." Abraham says, "Even if a man came back from the dead, it wouldn't be enough. They've got Moses, the law and the prophets. That's enough." But ironically, who did Jesus raise from the dead? A man named Lazarus. And was it enough for the Jews to believe in Jesus then? No. They not only wanted to kill Jesus, they even sought to kill Lazarus because so many people were still believing in Jesus because of him.

But look at Luke 16 and realize that this man is there for neglecting the poor. He is in fire, recognizing Abraham as his father. Abraham recognizing him as my child. This man pleading for mercy in the form of a drop of water and then pleading on behalf of his brothers who were still on earth. Do souls intercede with God for mercy? Hardly. And yet look at what the story assumes. Look at what Jesus doesn't even feel it necessary to argue.

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## Conclusion

We have a rather skewed and emaciated Christianity in 20th Century America and throughout the West. No wonder we don't have many martyrs. The faith that we have is so truncated and so lifeless in some ways; it isn't worth dying for. Not until we realize how gloriously man-like Christ's call to His disciples is. We've got to grow

**up, not to be babies, but sons and daughters, men and women of God filled with the life of Christ, filled to overflowing.**

**I have quotations here from Protestant professors affirming this. I have quotations from Vatican II, Lumen Gentium, sections 50 and 51 reaffirming the doctrine of purgatory. Some Catholics believe you don't have to accept it any more. The head of Campus Ministry at the place I used to teach used to tell people, even in a newspaper interview, that she didn't believe in purgatory any more and Catholics don't. Bunk! Vatican II teaches it and appeals to previous Councils that ratified and defined it. That's to misread the Second Vatican Council. Then to clarify it in 1979, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in document letters on Certain Questions Concerning Eschatology says, "The Church excludes every way of thinking or speaking that would render meaningless or unintelligible her prayers, her funeral rites and the religious acts offered for the dead."**

**This is an integral and vital part of our Catholic faith. We've got to believe it. We've got to live it, and we've got to share it.**

**In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, we pray: Father in heaven, we need your help. We need your grace. We need a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Fill us Lord with this fiery love, so that we might sacrifice in ways that we have not, that we might imitate Christ with greater risk and abandon than ever before. Lord, these are awesome things that we ask for, far greater and more ambitious than we are capable on our own. Have mercy on us, here and now, on the Church Militant as we march out with our marching orders. Help us to fight the good fight. Help us to rejoice in the fiery ordeals that you send, knowing that these are the ways that you tailor us and streamline us. Oh God, you have made this world into a saint-making machine. The only tragedy, dear Lord, is for us not to have been made a saint. The world thinks that saints and martyrs are weird, but we know they are the ones who are most fully human. Humanize us with the flesh and the blood of the Eucharist, the Body and Blood of our risen Savior. Lord, help us to accept our time in this world so that we, too, might be made into saints, that we might accept a share in suffering, a share in Christ's suffering that you call us to accept and to do so with joy and thanksgiving. Help us, dear Lord, and hear us as we pray. Our Father, who art in heaven etc.**

# MARY, HOLY MOTHER

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**There is probably nothing more disturbing to Protestants than the profound devotion which Catholics have for the Blessed Virgin Mary. In this program Scott begins to explain the Marian doctrines by turning to the Bible. He spends a considerable amount of time looking at the Book of Genesis and the Prophet Isaiah to show how the role of Mary in salvation history was foreshadowed in the Old Testament. He then takes these Old Testament insights and shows how the writers of the New Testament see in Mary the Mother of Christ - the new Eve and the new Mother of humanity.**

**As you probably know, this is our third installment in a series of five sessions that we are spending together discussing how to answer common objections, questions regarding key tenets that are distinctive to the Catholic Church. We have focused upon the Pope and yesterday we looked at purgatory. This morning we want to focus on Mary and the Marian doctrines and devotions of the Catholic Church to see where in scripture do we see, not necessarily logical demonstrations that are brought forth from proof texts that kind of force the mind against the will to give in and to acquiesce in these beliefs, but where do we find in scripture the reflections and the illustrations and the assumptions and the conclusions that the Catholic Church affirms with regard to the Blessed Virgin Mary?**

**We are also going to be able to touch lightly and briefly upon some historical data, but our focus this morning will be primarily scriptural. Now non-Catholics also are concerned with historical evidences for Marian doctrines and devotions. But I would say the vast majority of non-Catholic questions and objections stem from scripture and the seeming silence from the holy writ. So that's what we are going to be focusing our attention, our energy and our time upon this morning.**

**Before I go on, I want to make the same admission that I do at every point and that is, we don't have time to cover everything. We don't have time to cover even half of what we need to cover. I'll do my best and you know how fast I can get going and you know how long I can go. I have to candidly concede the fact that you need to be reading scripture. You need to be asking our Lord for extra time to study, to ponder and to pray. Let me recommend some books to you, some secondary sources.**

**One of my favorites is by one of the top biblical scholars in France, Andre Foulmer. It's entitled Jesus and His Mother, the Role of the Virgin Mary in Salvation History and the Place of Women in the Church. This, I believe, is a masterpiece, and it's published by St. Bede, and it's only about two or three years old. The other book I want to recommend, and I am not sure is in print. In fact, I suspect it might be out of print, but you can find it in libraries, and I have found it in used book stores**

because that's my favorite haunting place, to travel to used book stores. But this is by Max Durien who is a reformed brother in the Taesec community over in Europe. It's entitled, *Mary, Mother of All Christians*.

What makes this distinctive is that when he wrote this, he was a Reformed Calvinist Christian. You don't find Christians much more non-Catholic than that! I know. I was one! Now, rumor has it, and I have only heard it from two or three persons, and I've not confirmed this, that Brother Max Durien has converted. He is considered to be one of the wisest Reformed Protestant theological sages of this century, not only for his theological depth and his scriptural understanding, but especially for his spirituality in guiding the Taesec community in worship and community and in ecumenical environment.

Another classic, Joseph Duer, a Jesuit by the name of Joseph Duer. I believe it was originally written in German. It's entitled, *The Glorious Assumption of the Mother of God*. This goes through the biblical and the historical, the patristic and the magisterial data and evidences for the doctrine, or the dogma, I guess we could say, of the bodily assumption of our Lady. Now this is an old copy, but I was just recently informed that the book is back in print. I'm not sure who publishes it, but my suspicion is Christian Classics.

Here's another book, and I'll tell you the story behind this a little later. Remind me; I might forget. It's entitled *The Assumption of Mary* by Father Killiam Healey, a Carmelite theologian up in New England, in Massachusetts. This is published by Michael Glazier. I'm not sure if you can get it from them, but if you want to try, you have to contact Liturgical Press, because Glazier and Liturgical Press just merged up in Collegeville, Minnesota, which is their new address. But this is superb. This is for popular consumption. This could be like a primer, a first reader in Marian Doctrine and Devotion. He is very fair and even handed. And I might add, he's a marvelous priest. I heard him preach, right after I joined the Church, but I'll tell that story later on. It was a delight in my own life.

The real magnum opus on the subject was written by one of Great Britain's top Biblical scholars, Father John McHugh entitled, *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament*, published by Doubleday, and it's in many public libraries that I have seen as well as college or high school or seminary libraries. I don't believe it's in print, but it is all around, so you could find it if you looked hard enough. This is just a copious study of all of the relevant passages in the New Testament, and McHugh looks at these from the perspective of the writers of scripture themselves, how the Fathers of the Church interpreted it, how Jewish and Rabbinic interpreters and commentators understood certain passages from the Old that were fulfilled by the New, all the way up until the present day. It's very thorough but readable, very readable. I think anybody named McHugh has something good to say. I'm buttering up my host and hostess here.

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## Scriptural View of Mary

Well, here we go. What I would like to do now is to begin to change our focus to scripture itself. Of course, the place we have to begin in order to see what the scripture says about the Blessed Virgin Mary is found all the way in the beginning of the Bible. Let's turn to Genesis, chapter 3. There we see the first Eve having been seduced and, I believe, brutally intimidated into a kind of disobedient submission. You can go back and listen to this tape that I think we made two or two-and-a-half days ago about how often we distort what really happened in the temptation narrative, because we don't know how to read Hebrew narrative. There is a literary artistry there at work that's very hard for the Western mind to grasp, understand and appreciate. But I believe, just to sum it up, that Adam was called to be a faithful covenant head in a marital covenant, and he was called to show forth, as the representative of the covenant, the love, the hessed, the loyalty of the covenant to the fullest degree. And, as our Lord says, "Greater love hath no man than to lay down his life for his beloved."

So, if he is truly going to love his covenant partner in marriage, he has to be willing to lay his life down. Now, how does God, the Father, test his son's loyalty and love? Well, that's what the serpent is there for. The serpent, nahash in Hebrew is, I believe, misunderstood to be a snake. Medieval art work, and this has been carried on into the modern tradition where you have Eve depicted as some dumb, perhaps blonde, but some dumb air-head who just basically is tricked by some little snake, hanging from a branch in a tree, to eat the apple. All right, and so all men just kind of sit back and say, "Yeah, it's still the same way." And they congratulate themselves on being so worldly wise that they wouldn't be so dumb as this air-head.

Total misreading, I believe. This is my own hypothesis. This is my own interpretation. You don't have to abide by it, but my view is that the nahash, the serpent is deliberately depicted as a kind of, I'd say mythical figure but I don't want to deny the historicity of this text. It's just that Hebrew historical narrative can often use mythical imagery to communicate historical truth. In Daniel 7, I mentioned four gentile kingdoms are described as being "four beasts." So, I believe, here we have the serpent as a kind of dragon. The word is used and used and used in Hebrew to connote or denotes a dragon figure like Leviathan or Banmuth or Rehab, the monster later than Isaiah and elsewhere in the Old Testament. In Revelation 12:9 in the New Testament confirms this translation of nahash, not as serpent/snake, but as serpent/dragon, because there Satan is described as the "ancient serpent" and then it goes on to describe a seven-headed dragon.

So she is being confronted and brutally intimidated by a dragon who is intent upon producing disobedience, come hell or high water. So in the cross-examination, in the interrogation that goes back and forth, Satan uses the truth in a clever, deceptive, but intimidating way to kind of force this woman to see, in effect, that if she doesn't eat that fruit, she will die, at least in the biological, physical sense because Satan will see to it.

**The question, then, as you read through this narrative is not based upon anything that is explicitly stated, but rather that which is so conspicuously unstated, and that is, where the heck is Adam in all this? By the end of the narrative you discover that he's right by the woman because she just turns and gives him the fruit to eat; but the question is, where was he all along? This loving covenant head, this loving covenant partner who is to show the great love that he's willing to lay down his life for his beloved? Well, he was probably rationalizing his silence by saying, "Well, if I oppose such a serpentine monster as this, I stand no chance."**

**So in Hebrews 2:14-16, the New Testament tells us that Christ had to take on our flesh and blood to free us from the devil, from Satan, who held us in life-long bondage because of the fear of death and suffering we all have. So it seems as though Adam's response, or lack of response, is due to his fear of suffering and death, which in turn subjects all of A-dam, humanity, to life-long bondage to he who holds the power of death, Satan, in this sense.**

**So the first Eve, then, is abandoned by her covenant partner and husband who was presumably to tell that dragon where to go, and then, in a sense, stand up for his convictions and possibly even suffer martyrdom and to lay down his life for his beloved and trust that God, his Creator, to whom he is loyal in love would raise him and vindicate him in proper covenant judgment. Which is exactly what the second Adam does on behalf of the second Eve, the Church, which is the whole dramatic encounter we read about in Revelations 12. I'm going to have to talk about that later on this day, so I'm not going to get into it too much this morning. You're all invited to that. It's at 1:30. We're going to be talking about Mary, Ark of the Covenant, focusing upon the woman of the Apocalypse who is clothed with the sun, a crown of 12 stars, and the world under her feet. I think it's the deliberate symbol of the second Eve for whom the second Adam lay down his life. Mary, the Church, Israel, and all New Testament believers in a sense.**

**But having sinned, Adam and Eve were now confronted by God. You can go all the way back, I believe, to verse 8, Genesis 3:8, "They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day and the man and his wife hid themselves." Now, this is, I think, perhaps somewhat of a mistranslation. We often have this kind of romantic, bucolic picture here of God kind of walking through the woods. You can hear the crushing of the leaves and the snapping of the twigs as he says, you know, "Adam, Eve, where are you?" Poor God, just doesn't really know what's going on!**

**But when you actually look at the Hebrew, what the people hear, verse 8, it says, "Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God." We're tempted to hear that as the crushing leaves and snapping twigs, this poor unwitting God is saying, "where... weren't we supposed to meet, you know. Isn't this the time? Isn't this the place?" But no. The word in Hebrew for sound is qol. Now, what kind of noise does the qol of the Lord make? Well you can find out by reading Psalm 29. Keep your finger on Genesis 3 and take a look at Psalm 29 because there we**

**discover an entire psalm devoted to describing what Adam and Eve must have heard when they heard the qol of the Lord, the sound of the Lord.**

**Verse 1 of Psalm 29, "Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings or sons of God. Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name and worship the Lord in holy array. The qol of the Lord is upon the waters. The God of glory thunders. The Lord upon many waters. The qol of the Lord is powerful. The qol of the Lord is full of majesty." Verse 5, "The qol of the Lord breaks the cedars. The Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon to skip like a calf in Sirion, like a young wild ox. The qol of the Lord flashes forth flames of fire. The qol of the Lord shakes the wilderness. The Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. The qol of the Lord makes the oak trees to whirl and strips the forest bare and all in his temple cry, 'glory!'"**

**What do you think they heard? It wasn't the snapping of little twigs and the crunching, you know, of leaves. They heard a thunder and shattering roar, and they hid themselves. Quite understandably. Goes on, "They heard the qol of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day." That word in Hebrew, cool, is ruah, normally translated spirit or wind, and that phrase could easily be translated as scholars have argued, "They heard the thundering, shattering roar of Yahweh Eloheim as he was coming into the garden as the spirit of the day!" What day? The day of judgment. We've got a primo parousia on our hands. The second coming in advance in a sense.**

**So they flee from the sound that they hear. They hide from the Lord God among the trees in the garden. "But the Lord God called to the man, 'Where are you?'" Now he doesn't talk about geographical location. The deity here, in order to meet the job description of the divinity is omniscient. He knows where they are. He's asking, "Where are you in terms of your covenant standing before me. Where are you?" He answered, ' I heard you in the garden, but I was afraid because I was naked and so I hid. Who told you that you were naked?" What does the man say? "The woman! Have you eaten of the fruit that I told you not to eat?" And what does he say? He immediately starts passing the buck. Verse 12, "The man said, 'The woman.'" But it gets worse, "The woman you gave me."**

**Not so subtle, huh? He's not just faulting her. Who's he really faulting? Some help, some assistant you gave me! He's not just blaming her. He's implicitly blaming God. And the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you've done?" The woman said, "The nahash deceived me and I ate." Now, if you go back, the serpent never actually told a lie, but what the serpent did was to use a kind of blunt, brutal intimidation to get her to submit to the evil. "So the Lord said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this cursed you above all the livestock, etc.'" But here we look at verse 15, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed. He will crush your head and you will strike his heel."**

Now some other translations render, "She will crush your head." And so we have statues of our Lady crushing the head of the serpent. That's an interesting but kind of tangential issue for us right now. At any rate, we see here the woman. "I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed." Now you don't have to be a scientist to wonder what they're talking about here. The serpent's seed, okay. But her seed? The Greek Old Testament translates this spermatos, that's the term for seed. Now so far, so good, but wait a second. What is it doing in connection with the woman? The woman's seed? Nowhere else in the Old Testament do you ever come across an expression like that. It's always the man's seed, the husband's seed, the father's seed. This is weird. The woman's seed? Yeah, God's going to elevate that woman and give to her in some unique sense perhaps a seed through which the serpent's head will be crushed. Keep that in the back of your mind because that is going to be crucial.

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### Isaiah 7:14

We're going to move on now to, of course, what is probably the second most famous Old Testament passage for understanding our Lady, Isaiah 7, verse 14. Isaiah 7, verse 14: here we have an interesting episode between Isaiah and King Ahas who is king of Judah, and he's worrying about the national stability of his people in his country of Judah, his kingdom, because he is surrounded by stronger neighbors and so he's toying with the idea of entering into all kinds of wrong-headed alliances. So, through Isaiah the Lord says to King Ahas who's always beginning to kind of stumble with doubts, he's beginning to wonder with fear who he should rely upon, Verse 3, "Then the Lord said to Isaiah, 'go out'" and it goes on in verses 3 through 10, where the Lord speaks to Ahas through Isaiah and says, "Ask of me and I will give you a sign."

In other words, let's admit it. Your faith is weak. You need to have it shored up and strengthened. That's what signs are for. Go ahead and ask me for a sign. Verse 12, with false modesty Ahas says, "Oh, I won't ask. I will not put the Lord to the test." Give me a break! Isaiah said, "Hear now, you House of David, is it not enough to try the patience of men. Will you try the patience of my God also?" He sees your need. He's got the gift that you need. Now don't play strong. You're weak, admit it and receive the gift that he's got in this sign." "Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and will call him Emmanuel."

That word, almah in Hebrew translated by the Greek Septuagint parthenos has been the subject of incredible debate. Is it young woman or is it virgin? You could stack up scholars who advocate either position, but I am persuaded, not only by the targums, that is the ancient Jewish interpretation of this was decidedly in favor of "virgin." They saw it as some kind of Messianic prophecy in the targums, these ancient Aramaic paraphrases of the Old Testament.



Now there are a lot of scholars who debate, "Well, are the targums before Christ or after Christ or whatever?" But I think there's a lot of evidence for them being before Christ, but even if they were a little bit after Christ, the fact remains that Jews from earliest times saw a Messianic reference with regard to parthenos, a virgin. A recent scholar whose article I just read by the name of Professor Wyatt argues that the Alexandrian Jews who rendered *almah* by *parthenos* were being entirely faithful to the Herogamic tradition. He goes on to talk about how Isaiah borrows all his pagan mythical imagery, only then historicizes it with reference to the coming Messiah, as the ritual technical term for an embodiment of a divine mother, who is both a fecund mother, a fruitful mother, as well as a perpetual virgin.

In other words, Isaiah in using this language is tapping into a well-known ancient outlook on what humanity needs for deliverance, that is, God is going to have to send an incredible figure, the likes of which humans have never seen, a creature, a human but in a sense possessed by God in an absolutely unique way. And this, by the way, is not unique to the Hebrew tradition. It's shared throughout. Now maybe it's because Genesis 3:15 was channeled out throughout the world as the human race spread, whatever you want to believe.

There are other ways to explain it, but the fact remains that this translation, this rendering of *almah* as virgin is strong and sure and is very reliable. At any rate, we know one thing for sure, the New Testament applies it to Mary and the virginal birth of Jesus. So in terms of the inspired narrative, what do we have? In Matthew, we have in a sense, the answer in the back of the book really, or at least we can treat it that way for this morning's time together.

What is going on here? The Davidic line is almost at an end and the only way out for King Ahas in his own mind is to begin to move away from Yahweh and to begin to trust in all of these pagan neighbors who want to form alliances with him. Only, in order to form those alliances he's going to have to submit as a kind of vassal. So Isaiah says, "Don't do it. If you are weakening in your faith, ask him for a sign. He has one ready." The problem is the Davidic line could be crushed. Well, the faithful were saying, "But God has sworn an oath: there will always be an heir on the Davidic throne."

But now what happens if the king is deposed and if the royal family is murdered? Well, God will take a virgin and produce a son of David. In other words, we're not dependent exclusively upon human resources, political power, economic wealth and all of the rest. So Isaiah 7:14 stands in line with Genesis 3:15 as in a sense the second key text with regards to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Now I might add that later on today at 1:30 in this talk on "Mary, Ark of the Covenant," we're going to be focusing upon another set of Old Testament passages related to the Ark of the Covenant, which was, in a sense, the most sacred object in all of ancient Israel on the one hand. It's what made the temple holy, it's what made the Holy of Holies the holiest thing around for that's what the Ark was, but it also, in a sense, was the most strategically powerful weapon that Israel possessed because whenever they went into battle, they had the Ark lead the way. When they encircled Jericho for six days and on the seventh day they blew this trumpet seven times, it was the Ark of the Covenant that led the priests and the soldiers.

So the Ark of the Covenant is very significant and most scholars say that what it is, is a kind of throne because many other cultures had temples with arks. The only thing weird about Israel's Ark is that it was empty. It was a throne with two cherubim over the top, but nobody sat on it. In fact, you can actually discover, and I'm going to unpack this a little bit more later on, that in the Ancient world, it was usually the throne for the Queen Mother. For instance, one of the greatest German scholars in his book, *Symbolism in the Biblical World*, speaks about the great popularity of cherubim thrones, box thrones with cherubim angels over top. It goes on, in Canaan and in Phoenicia during the late Bronze and early Iron Ages, excavators describe it "as a female figure sitting in a square armchair." Odd? Why would these ancient cultures have an ark on which sat this female figure on kind of a throne posture? And why did they also just like Israel often lead that ark out into battle ahead of the troops? Because it was a kind of Queen Mother figure perhaps.

I mean, let's face it, ladies and gentlemen, if your mother was out in the front lines, would you be tempted to fight a little bit harder? Yeah. So consistently, the Ark of the Covenant was what produced all of these miracle victories. Jericho, which was sort of like the Moscow of the ancient world -- it was the central stronghold of the Promised Land and it went down like a house of cards, with the Ark going around it seven times and the seven trumpets of the priests blowing.

So there is clear evidence that Protestant, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Anglican, as well as Catholic scholars acknowledge that the New Testament deliberately depicts Mary in terms related to the Ark of the Covenant. And we'll discover in Revelation after 580 years without an Ark, Jewish Christians look up and see a sign. It's the Ark of the Covenant in heaven which had not been seen in 580 years approximately. This is where "Raiders of the Lost Ark" comes from. It's been lost for that long. John sees it in Revelation up in heaven and the very next thing he sees is a woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars, a Queen Mother. The Ark is no longer an empty throne.

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## Mary as Queen Mother

So I just want to throw this out to tantalize and perhaps tease a little bit because we don't have the time to go through all the Ark of the Covenant passages, but there's a great deal of exciting and, I think, impressive evidence from the literary artistry of Hebrew narrative as it prepared the way for the Davidic kingdom being fulfilled with the Son of David, Jesus Christ, and his Queen Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary.

What do I mean by this Queen Mother stuff? Now we will take a look at a key passage. Let's turn now to 1st Kings, chapter 1. This, I believe, is the missing link. I really am convinced that this is the most important exegetical Biblical piece of evidence that we have to go on. It was one of the best-known institutions in ancient Israel's monarchy or after the Civil War ancient Judah's monarchy and in fact, the idea of the Queen Mother was ubiquitous. You don't find ancient monarchies in the Near East or the Middle East that don't have Queen Mothers. I'll refer you to a key article written by N.A. Andriessen in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* in 1983, pages 179 through 194. It's entitled, "The Role of the Queen Mother in Israelite Society." This note card, incidentally, comes from about six years ago because it was right after the article came out that I was beginning to do some Old Testament research and opening my mind up to some Catholic ideas. Even though I had been very anti-Catholic I had already begun to accumulate some evidence for this Queen Mother tradition, but it was all piece-meal and scattered.

When I read this article, it was like a thunderclap striking me. I knew I had to really pay close attention to the evidence. What evidence? Well, this is known as the *gebirah*. The *gebirah* is the Hebrew term for the Queen Mother. I found in another book, *The Graphic History of the Jewish Heritage*, that the *gebirah*, the Queen Mother "occupied a unique and powerful position" throughout the history of ancient Israel's monarchy. He gives as an example Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, who was enthroned, which we will look at in just a moment.

Also, another example, Maacah, in 1st Kings 15:13; Jezebel, who is the only Queen Mother in the rebellious northern kingdom of Israel. In fact, the northern kingdom of Israel is conspicuous because it lacked the Queen Mother. Father DeVoe, one of the greatest Old Testament scholars of the century said, "This was due to a lack of dynastic stability." They kept getting overthrown up north. They didn't have the Davidic covenant to anchor the claims of these potential kings. That's in 2nd Kings 10:13. And then Athaliah, the very cruel and wicked queen who ruled for six years, trying to suppress the cult of Yahweh in the Temple. Mephistah over Jehoahaz in Jeremiah 13:18. Another scholar in Scandinavia, Ostrum says, "The Queen Mother's position was essentially cultic in nature," that is she actually had a position or a role to play in worship. It wasn't priestly but it was important and it was cultic. It's still left undefined.

**In the ancient Near East it goes on talking about how, "The Queen Mother throughout all these ancient Near Eastern monarchies sat beside the king on a throne, survived the death without being deposed. If the king died, the Queen Mother continued to reign without being deposed. There was a cultic role for her in leading the songs and so on in worship but also she had an essential role in political, military and economic affairs of court. In fact there are records of where the Queen Mother could oppose the king on issues of state. This is found in the Eplah tablets and Uhr Hittite records, Egypt Marri tablets, Assyria and other Arabian documents, as well. And the Queen Mother usually began her reign, just as an interesting incidental detail, after menopause.**

**What's really interesting from Andreason's perspective is that even after the prophets are sent by God to purify the Jerusalem cult and the kingdom of all of these pagan encrustations, the institution of the gebirah continues with reforms by Hezekiah and Josiah. The fertility cults are suppressed and these ashora poles and so on are torn down, including sacred snakes, you know the nahushta and so on, but never the Queen Mother, that's allowed to remain. The central role for Andreason's research is that she was to be the king's wisdom counselor. Lady Wisdom in the Book of Proverbs is sort of like a personification of the Queen Mother, or visa versa.**

**It goes on listing several other examples. I won't bother you with all these examples but of the sixteen Queen Mothers named, seven explicitly seem to be Jerusalemites. It just runs throughout the whole gamut, the whole historical span of the monarchy and actually, the only chapter of the Bible that we know was written by a woman, Proverbs 31, was written by a Queen Mother as instruction for her son before he accedes to the throne and finds himself a wife, she says, "This is the kind you've got to find." Andreason concludes that "This is the theological paradigm for Mary's Queenship. Jesus is the Son of David and the genealogy in Matthew links Mary to the Davidic line. Being the Son of David makes her the Queen Mother." There are some other works too, The Nature of the Queenship of Mary, published in 1973, The Royal Son of God, published in 1979 and so on. But I can share these sources with you , if you are interested, afterwards.**

**Let's take a look at an example of the function and authority of the Queen Mother in 1st Kings. In chapter 1 there is an intense fraternal rivalry between Solomon or Jedidiah, whose throne name is Peace, Solomon, and his half-brother, Adonijah, who by the way is older and was born to one of David's wives whom he had married before Bathsheba. So Adonijah seemed to have a kind of prima facia claim to the throne before Solomon, except that Bathsheba had exacted from David an oath to the effect that her son would get the throne. You can get it in Psalm 110 especially. So, anyway, Adonijah approaches Bathsheba in order to approach Solomon. We're going to see how this goes. But first of all we see King David asking Bathsheba, verse 17, " What is it you want the king asked? She said to him, 'My Lord, you yourself swore to me your servant by the Lord your God, Solomon your son shall be king after me and he will sit on my throne. But now Adonijah has become king and you**

my Lord, the king, do not know about it.'" And it goes on talking about this palace coup attempt.

Then King David says over in verse 28 and 29 calling Bathsheba. "So she came into the king's presence and stood before him. The king then took an oath, 'as surely as the Lord lives,'" and he goes on promising and swearing that "Solomon, your son, shall be king after me and he will sit on my throne in my place," even though the majority of the people were going after Adonijah at the time, several key priests, as well. And so she rejoices.

Now turn over to 1st Kings 2. There's where David gives his royal charge to Solomon and Solomon asks for wisdom, but just browse and just go through that as quickly as you can and just see what is going on here because it is very unusual. Let's take a look in particular at verse 13. "Now Adonijah, the son of Haggith, went to Bathsheba, Solomon's mother. Bathsheba asked him, 'Do you come peacefully?' He answered, 'Yes, peacefully,' then he added, 'I have something to say to you.' 'You may say it, she replied.' 'As you know,' he said, 'the kingdom was mine. All Israel looked to me as their king. But then things changed and the kingdom has gone to my brother for it has come to him from the Lord. Now I have just one request to make of you. Do not refuse me.' 'You may make it she said. So he continued, 'Please ask King Solomon, he won't refuse you, to give me Abishag, the Shunamite as my wife.'" If you understood palace politics, you'd see what this was. "Very well," Bathsheba replied. "I will speak to the king for you."

Abishag happened to be David's last lover and wife. She was the one young woman who kept him warm in his old age, sleeping next to him at all times. To have David's last wife would be to have official claim to the throne. This is why Absalom publicly slept with David's concubines after he threw his father out of Jerusalem, because if I have the Queen Mothers, if I have the king's wives, who do you see as your king? Solomon is no fool. When Bathsheba went to King Solomon to speak to him for Adonijah, look what happens. The king of Israel, the son of David, the supreme head of God's covenant people in the whole world, according to Psalm 2 stood up to meet her, bowed down to her and sat down on his throne and he had a throne brought for the king's mother and she sat down at his right hand. "Sit at my right hand," Psalm 110. That's the position of authority. I have one small request to make of you. She goes on and makes the request. Solomon sees through it. Says no, of course, and executes Adonijah.

But look at the beginning of the institution of the gebirah. It's something that continues. When the Queen Mother walks in, the king, because he is her son, pays filial homage to her and establishes her at his right hand, upon a throne as Queen Mother. If I am the father of the family of this kingdom, if I am the shepherd of this flock, that makes you the mother. Not only my mother but the grandmother of us all. That institution persisted down through the ages of the Judaite monarchy. There is no evidence of it ever being suppressed by the prophets or criticized by

**Yahweh or ever falling into hard times and being replaced because it was seen as something that was meaningless.**

**So what? So the Jews who had been waiting and waiting and waiting for five hundred years for the Davidic line to be reestablished at the time of Christ's coming knew all this. They knew it like the back of their hand. We don't. Many Biblical scholars aren't even aware of it. But every Jew did. I mean Joe Six-pack or Joe Sixpackstein, they all knew it. They all knew that God had sworn an oath that there would always be a Davidic king and that the kingdom of David would be restored in its former glory, and in fact, greater glory.**

**But the last time we hear about the Davidic kingdom, it's fallen upon hard times. We won't go through all the passages in Chronicles and Kings but when the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem in 586 and even prior to that, they had captured the king. They had killed all of his sons before his eyes, they drilled out his eyes and they sent him into captivity in chains. From there on the fortunes of the Davidic dynasty only went down and for hundreds and hundreds of years, for decades at a time, the Jews wondered, "Is there even a Davidic descendent?" I mean sure the Hasmonians claim some Davidic dynastic relations and so on, but never was it sure and whenever any claimant to Davidic authority would rise up, what would happen? Like Jerubabaal in coming back from Babylonian captivity, he went straight to Jerusalem and the High Priest is there and all the people were saying, "At last the Davidic throne is going to be restored." Only what happens? He's recalled to Persia and we never hear from him again. The Davidic kingdom is not restored.**

**So for centuries and centuries the Jewish people keep reading Psalm 2, keep reading Psalm 89, keep reading Psalm 110, keep reading Psalm 132 and all these other Davidic Messianic psalms that promised an ongoing, unbroken line of Davidic succession and glorious, glorious power. It would be sort of like if all of us took a refresher course on the promise that Jesus gave to Peter about the rock and the keys and the gates of Hades not prevailing and we reminded ourselves and we reinforced our conviction that the papal line would always be unbroken. Then all of a sudden we hear that the Pope has been assassinated and all the Bishops have been rounded up and assassinated as well.**

**What would happen? I'll bet you some people's faith would be shaken. I'll bet you mine would be, and if yours isn't, I don't understand. I mean that's an oath that Jesus swore, in effect. It was an oath that God swore in effect. Is there a Davidic line? Has God forgotten? Has he fallen asleep at the wheel? What is going on? Turn with me now to Matthew 1.**

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## Matthew 1

Now all of a sudden, it gets really exciting, maybe not for us but for those Jews who were expecting the Messiah, the poor, the humble, the faithful who were no longer out for political power or economic prosperity. They were allowing themselves to be impoverished and oppressed because they knew the Messiah would come and establish justice not by force and violence but by an incredible act of self-sacrifice as both suffering servant and son of man. Then, all of a sudden, in Matthew 1 we read what for the Jews is the most exciting passage of the New Testament, perhaps and what for us is by far the most boring. Oh, no! The begats, the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the Jews gasped, "What? Can you prove that?" The son of Abraham, double gasp." Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob." I'm not going to read the whole thing, I promise you, okay?

But notice a few things. For instance, notice in verse 3, Tamar. Notice in verse 5, Rahab. Notice in verse 5, Ruth and notice in verse 6 "David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah. Four women are mentioned in this genealogy which is very unusual to have women mentioned at all. But what do all four women have in common? Tamar had sex with her father-in-law, Rahab was a harlot. Ruth was a foreigner, a Moabitist, and the wife of Uriah was just that, the wife of Uriah, before the wife of David, before he committed adultery and then committed murder to get rid of Uriah.

In other words Matthew is reminding the Jews of the legacy of David's line. Why? Because what was the scuttlebutt about this young 13-year-old Jewess named Mary getting pregnant before she was married? Messing around, right? Whenever you see in the New Testament, Jesus called "the son of Mary," that's derogatory. Why? It was an illegitimate birth in the eyes of the townspeople, probably. What's Matthew doing? What's new? The appearance of sexual immorality or even the reality of infidelity has never thwarted God's purposes. In the case of sex with the father-in-law, and in the case of a harlot, in the case of a foreign woman and in the case of an adulteress. I mean what more is left?

In other words if God's purposes had been fulfilled through the Davidic monarchy up until now and he didn't complain about David coming from such women and there was Solomon, then this seeming scandal should not throw you too far off. And it goes on, verse 11, "Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers at the time of the deportation of Babylon." And now all of a sudden some very good information that we never really had absolute certainty about anywhere in the Old Testament, "After the deportation of Babylon, Jechoniah, Shealtiel, Zerubbabel," well, we know him. We don't know what happened after him, Abiud, Azor, Zadok, Achim, Eliud, Eleazar, Natthan, Jacob, "Joseph, the husband of Mary of whom Jesus was born who is called the Christ." In other words, we have now the proof that they didn't lose the line. It didn't fizzle out. God didn't forget.

**But what was happening? I mean if you were in the Davidic line and you realize it, you stood up and said, "Hey, I'm Davidic!" What would happen? The Babylonians would go squash or the Persians would go squash or the Greeks or the Romans. Why? Because you are a pretender to the throne. Don't give us this Davidic promise, this Davidic authority stuff. Your line is over. So if you have royal blood, not just any old royal blood, but I mean divine right royal blood flowing through your veins, what had you better do? Zip up. Right? You better shut up.**

**What happens as soon as the word gets out that the Messiah is born? What does King Herod do? "Oh gosh, gee willickers, I've got to go worship." What a stinking liar. He ends up slaughtering dozens and maybe hundreds of infant males to do anything, no matter how diabolical, to put an end to the Davidic line. And Mary knew it all along. And you could actually see a Davidic line as far as she is concerned as you correlate the Mathian and the Lukan genealogies. Now we, I think, understand a little bit better how important and perhaps exciting this must have been to those faithful, humble, poor Jews who had been waiting and waiting and waiting for hundreds and hundreds of years, wondering if God had forgotten. He hasn't. Verse 18, "Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph before they came together, she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph being a just man not wanting to put her to shame resolved to divorce her quietly. But then the angel appears to him in a dream, 'Joseph, son of David,'" in other words, I want you to begin to figure things out here, Joe. Remember who you are? You're a son of David. Weird things happen to Davidic sons. Okay? "'Joseph, son of David, don't fear to take Mary for your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 'Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and his name shall be called, God with us, Emanuel.'"**

**Joseph probably knew this as well as he knew any verse in the Old Testament because this is one of those few key texts, those few key prophecies on which the anawim hung their hopes. "So he knew her not until she had born a son and he called his name Jesus." And here we go on and we discover that the Magi are sent by God. Now, three Wise Men, it doesn't say they were Wise Men. It calls them the Magi. What are Magi? They are Eastern Sorcerers, probably Persian. There's an old Rabbinic maxim, "If anybody learns anything from a Magi, one of the Magi, let him be accursed." Because they were the practitioners in the Black Arts and some of the tools of their trade, according to Brown and some other scholars, is that they use gold for all their magical pages on which the incantations were written. They used frankincense and they also used myrrh.**

**These were some of the basic tools of the trade as practitioners in the black art did it. And when they give the stuff up to our Lord in the manger, what are they doing? They are renouncing it. They have followed the light, they have found the truth. But what of the Jews? What about the most knowledgeable of the Jews? The most**



powerful Jews, the priests in Jerusalem who are in cahoots with Herod, giving him all that he needs to track down the Messiah? Now maybe they didn't know about Herod. Yeah. Maybe they didn't know about Herod. Sure, the guy who kills his mother, kills his brothers, his cousins, murdered 35 members of the Sanhedrin? You trust a jerk like him? Something's wrong.

The Magi and the shepherds, we discover of course, in Luke that the shepherds come to visit. Do you know that the shepherds were looked down upon as the lowest of the low in Hebrew society? Women and shepherds were not allowed to give testimony in a courtroom, but especially shepherds. They were dishonest and they were perverted according to Rabbinic sayings. It would be sort of like having a baby and then, all of a sudden your neighbors look out the window as they see the whores and the junkies and the pushers come to your front door. What's going on? You know, property values are decreasing! God has taken the humble and the sinners, those who are in most need of your mercy, and giving mercy and insight and wisdom and so much more. In a sense turning upside down the wisdom and the power of this age and this world.

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## Luke 1

It goes on, "And Mary is pondering all these things." I mean Magi from Persia, shepherds. God, what are you doing? Well we don't have to go very far to learn. Let's take a look at Luke, chapter 1. We could have lots of fun, by the way, going through the rest of Matthew. You know, chapter 2, we didn't even touch upon all that really - their flight down into Egypt and coming out of Egypt as well. But, let's turn now to Luke, chapter 1. I know we don't have that much time but let's just focus here for a moment.

Here we have Luke who is much less Jewish in his intentions than Matthew. Matthew is writing the gospel for the Jews and the Jewish Christians. Luke is the only Gentile author of a New Testament book. A trained physician, a rather skilled historian, scholars tell us. He is writing all about Jesus, the Son of Man, the son of Adam. Not so much like Matthew, the son of David. He's concerned in his genealogy to take Jesus all the way back to David? No. Abraham? No. Adam - to show that this man is the one who is to redeem the whole world, all nations! After all, Luke's not a Jew.

So it goes on talking about in verse 5, the birth of John the Baptist foretold. We have here the annunciation to Zechariah. And then we have, after the birth of John the Baptist is recorded, the birth of Jesus foretold in the annunciation in verse 26, "In the sixth month, the Angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Hail, full of grace.'" Now that Greek term is translated in various ways. Oh highly favored one,

but the grace of God in the New Testament develops and it becomes a kind of substance and not just an attitude; that when God gives favor, it isn't just a feeling. It isn't just a thought. It isn't just a subjective posture or attitude. It's God's own life. So that when God favors you, he didn't just stand back and say, "Eeh, I like ya." He gives himself to you.

So when she is full of God's favor, she is full of God's life and that's the term grace as it develops in the New Testament. So, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you," an absolutely unique address. Never before has an angel addressed somebody almost naming them full of grace. It doesn't say, "Hail, Mary, full of grace." It says, "Hail, full of grace," and it says it almost like a title. Scholars have torn this apart to show the distinctiveness and uniqueness of the address. "The Lord is with you." We could do so much with that, but we have to move on. "She was greatly troubled at this saying and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. 'Don't be afraid, Mary,' the angel said to her, 'for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.'" It goes on, "'He will be great and will be called the son of the Most High and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom there will be no end.'"

"Mary said to the angel, 'How shall this be since I have no husband?' And the angel said to her. 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you,'" or literally it goes on, "'the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.'" This is what we are going to develop in the 1:30 talk, but I'll mention it now. That word "overshadow" is a rare verb. It's used to describe what the Holy Spirit does over the top of the Ark of the Covenant. And so it doesn't take much scholarship to see the connection that is probably intended by Luke as he recounts this.

The Ark of the Covenant was so sacred because the tablets were in the Ark and the tablets were the decalogue, the word of God, the ten words of God. Now why is Mary the Ark? Because the word has been made flesh and is dwelling among us, but within her. She is the true Ark, the true Ark of the Covenant, the New Covenant. "Therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God." And then some more and she replies, "'Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done unto me according to your word.' And the angel departed from her." And she makes haste to go visit cousin Elizabeth. And as she walks into the house, John the Baptist, it says, "leaps for joy." And look at 43, "Why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"

People protest about the phrase theotokos "mother of God." They should see it's got a Biblical precedent in verse 43, "the mother of my Lord. For behold when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy and blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." And then, the song of Mary, the magnificent Magnificat! I want you to listen to this like you never heard it before. "My soul magnifies the Lord." All right it's built upon Hannah's song, but it goes far beyond that song in 1st Samuel. "My

soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. For he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For henceforth, behold all generations will call me Blessed."

Now just stop a second. If I stood up and said to you, "My soul magnifies the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God, my Savior. For he has regarded the low estate of his manservant and henceforth all generations shall call me blessed." Wouldn't you wretch? You'd say, "What's this guy come off. Who is this guy to stand up here and say, 'Henceforth all generations shall call me, not us, me - get that - blessed.'" Now we usually think of Mary as just being humble and poor and faithful and so on - and she is. Humility and modesty do not consist in making yourself into a doormat or disowning God's graces and privileges. It means, in fact, owning them as God's graces and privileges that are given to you to serve others and him.

But with false modesty you say, "Awe, gosh, shucks, gee willickers, I did nothing. I'm just a doormat. Walk on me, you know?" Not Mary. "Henceforth, all generations shall call me Blessed." Who do you think you are, woman? You really want to know? The Queen Mother of the Son of David, because I have been so humble and poor before the Lord. On my own I've got nothing, but the Lord has filled me with everything. I am full of grace, but it's grace that I'm full of. It's not personal power and Anthony Robbin's "Secrets to Success." It's God's grace. It's all a gift. It's icing. It's gravy, but it's now mine and so all generations shall call me blessed.

That's what we do in the rosary, isn't it? We just echo the angel, "Hail Mary," which means gift, "full of grace. The Lord is with you." And then we say, "You are blessed amongst all women and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. For behold henceforth all generations will call me blessed, for he who is mighty has done great things for me and holy is his name." Why? Because he has done great things for me. I am a humble, lowly handmaiden and we're thinking, "Yeah, if you don't say so yourself, you know? Tooting your own horn. Patting your own back. Come on, give other people a chance."

Well, that's what the Church has had for 2000 years, a chance to toot her horn and to pat her back. But she starts it off. "His mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts." Now you may be thinking that she is being proud in her imagination, but she is just being downright honest. "So he has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of low degree. He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent empty away." We could spend an hour on every phrase. It's just so packed! "He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy."

Take a look at chapter 2, verse 22, "And when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. As it is written in the law of the Lord, every male that opens the womb

shall be called holy to the Lord and offer sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons," which was the sacrifice for childbirth that was incumbent upon the poorest of the poor, for those who could not afford a real sacrifice. It suggests that Mary really was a handmaiden and so was Joseph humble and poor.

"Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel and the Holy Spirit was upon him." It goes on, "And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ, the Lord's Messiah." This shows than anybody full of the Spirit, meditating upon the Old Testament would be expectant, waiting for a Messiah. This is Messianism. "And inspired by the Spirit, he came into the temple. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, 'Lord, now letest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word for mine eyes have seen the salvation which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples. A light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to thy people Israel. And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him.' I love him. "And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, 'Behold this child is set for the fall and the rising of many in Israel.'"

It isn't just unmitigated blessings. If you go back to the prophecy about the 77s in Daniel 9, you realize that the temple will be reconsecrated. A strong covenant will be made. Sacrifices shall cease and the holy city will be completely destroyed and desolate. And so at the same time that Christ comes after 490 years to reconsecrate the temple, there is a doom pronounced upon those who have accumulated in Jerusalem all kinds of wealth and political power and have corrupted the temple, because whose temple is it? Is it Solomon's? No. Is it the second temple that Ezra and Nehemiah helped rebuild? No. It's Herod's temple. A half-Jew Edomite who was murdering half his family. The downfall of those who wanted power and prosperity and wealth more than faith and love and grace and justice. "A sign of contradiction and a sword will pierce through your own soul also that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed."

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## John 2 --Wedding Feast at Cana

Now we have other passages to look at. We won't spend any time on them. I'm just going to mention them to you and just draw conclusions briefly from them and then conclude. Of course, we should go to John 2. The first of the seven signs in the Book of Signs, the fourth gospel. The first of Jesus' miracles is to turn water into wine, just as the first miracle of Moses was to turn water into blood, so Jesus turns it into the blood of the grape as it is called in Genesis 49. Here we have, I believe, something that is fraught with all kinds of rich literary and theological symbolism. In John 1, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world," says

**John the Baptist. In John 2, the Lamb goes up to a wedding feast. Now does that sound familiar? A wedding feast where a lamb attends? That's how John is going to climax his book of Revelation, by inviting all of us to the wedding supper of the Lamb. And then along with the wedding banquet of the Lamb, we are also going to be introduced to a Virgin Mother Queen's city, the new Jerusalem, which is both virginally pure but maternally fruitful.**

**Theologians have suggested that John has deliberately just loaded the first few chapters of his gospel with the symbolism and the keys to interpreting his Apocalypse and the more you soak and meditate and ponder, I think the more you will find. So, she approaches him and says, "They've run out of wine. 'Woman, what is this between you and me?'" It's a very interesting phrase. I would recommend for your study a book by a top Biblical scholar in America, Manuel Miguens, who wrote a study on what does it mean, the Semitic idiom, what to me and to you, woman?" He actually shows that there is nothing caustic or irritated about Jesus' reply at all. It's basically, "You know, there's nothing between you and me."**

**So anyway, "Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what is it between you and me? My hour has not yet come.'" Jesus is thinking that the best wine will be given at the hour. What does Mary say? Mary is assuming another posture, now. She is going to have to distance herself from her son as her son. Now he's addressing her not as Mother, but as Woman. It sure connotes in my mind Genesis 3:15 and other key passages. Now all of a sudden, you are not just my mother anymore, what you are talking about in this miracle would initiate a whole new economy of salvation, woman, because that's what she is to be, a New Eve, a Mother to all of the renewed and redeemed humanity. "Woman, my hour has not yet come." What does she say, "Awe, come on, what are you going to do this for your mother, and now we're friends." No. She turns to the servants and says to them exactly what she says to us and all those who are truly devoted to our Lady, "Do whatever he tells you."**

**We should never allow ourselves to be so exclusively focused upon Mary that we don't hear her primary utterance. Do whatever he tells us! That's why Marian devotion does not take us away from Christ. It refocuses our eyes and our ears on whatever he tells us and that's what she is passionately concerned about now as then. "Do whatever he tells you." And it goes on and he tells the servants to take these six stone jugs full of water that were used for the Jewish Rite of Purification to wash feet. Can you imagine, if you were one of those servants? Well she said to do whatever he told me and you're taking these big, I mean, literally hundreds of gallons of dirty water and you take those jugs and you fill the cups with this dirty, smelly water used to wash feet and wash the dirt off these people and you hand---laughter -- these guys don't know what to do with this man. What are they going to do when they taste the foot water?**

**There's so much humor in this stuff that we miss, you know. And they're sitting back there saying, "We're going to get in trouble. No, no. She said, 'Do whatever he tells you.' We're just doing what the friend of the groom said, you know? We're just**

following orders, you know?" And all of a sudden they just kind of sit back there cracking up, waiting for all hell to break loose and all kinds of problems. And then all of a sudden, what does the host say when he tastes the water? The steward of the feast tasted the water now become wine and didn't know where it came from though the servants who had drawn the water knew. The steward of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, "Every man serves the good wine first, but when men have drunk freely and have become drunk, then the poor wine. But you have kept the best wine until now. This, the first of his signs Jesus did at Cana in Galilee."

Now who is this steward of the feast called the bridegroom? Well, if you go over to John 3, you discover that that is what John the Baptist thinks about himself. Look over at verse 27. John answered, "No one can receive anything except what is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness that I have said I am not the Christ but I have been sent before him. He who has the bride is the bridegroom, the friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice." Now John has deliberately joined together what the steward at the feast, the friend of the bridegroom has said about this great wine with John the Baptist, the last and the greatest of the Old Testament prophets who identifies himself as the friend of the bridegroom, the steward of the feast, as it were. This last and the greatest of the Old Testament prophets has said, "Hey, look, I'm baptizing you with water" and by the way the water in those six stone jugs goes back to Numbers 19. It was for the Jewish Rite of Purification in Numbers 19, the word is "baptizein." It was for Jewish baptism purification. John the Baptist says using that kind of water to purify the people and get them ready for the Messiah, that same kind of water is all of a sudden transformed into the best wine by the Lamb of God and John the Baptist is saying, "The New Covenant has come." And when you go into the Apocalypse, you see this thing just kind of thrown open to the whole universe in Technicolor. Because there the Lamb of God in Chapter 5 is enthroned and he leads all the people in worship and he invites all the universe to the wedding supper of the Lamb where he presents the blood, the wine, the best of the New Covenant at his banquet.

This is what our Lady triggered. Just a humble little Jewess who knows what grace is all about. "Do whatever he tells you," and you won't even begin to anticipate the glories that will be revealed to us. That's what she said. If we will do whatever he tells us, we will not have to calculate what we can produce with our own human resources. Why? Because if Mary tells us anything, she tells us that God can do the greatest with the least. If we are tempted to say, "I'm really not that smart. I'm not that eloquent. I'm not that powerful. I'm not that rich. I'm a nobody." I'd say, "Bingo. You're qualified. You have just proven yourself to be the most qualified of all because who does God love to use?" The lowest, the least, the poorest, the humblest, the ones who know they are nobodies, so that when God does something great through them, everybody would look and say, "It had to be God," and He gets all the glory. And that's what Mary wants to do, to give God all the glory.

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## **Conclusion: Why Give Glory to Mary?**

**So we say, "Well then, why give glory and honor and devotion to Mary?" Because we do whatever Jesus tells us. And we do whatever Jesus does because the fundamental axiom of Christian morality is the imitatio Christi, the imitation of Christ, and he is the best of the best when it comes to being a son. Not only a Son of his heavenly Father but a Son of his earthly mother. When he accepts the mission of his Father to become a man and to obey the law, he obeys it more perfectly than anybody could have ever imagined it being obeyed. And when he gets to that commandment, "Honor your father and your mother," that Hebrew word, kabodah, means bestow glory, comes from kabod weight, glory. So he honors his Father and obeys his command by bestowing unprecedented glory upon the one that he has chosen from all eternity to be his mother. The only time that the Creator created a human creature, created the one destined to be his mother. And he filled her with his own life and grace because he began honoring as soon as she was created his mother.**

**So what do we do? We honor Christ and we glorify him and we imitate him. If we really imitate him, we do what he does and we honor and bestow glory upon his mother. Not instead of him. It isn't undermining devotion to Christ. It's to express our devotion of Christ, our worship of Christ by imitating him. And if we do it we're going to be able to see in her face, the face of our mother, because Jesus has taken on her flesh and blood and given us his own Divine nature. Peter says, "We are partakers of Divine nature through Christ" so that his mother can become our mother, spiritually, supernaturally, but actually and really. And so in devotion to him, we can be devoted to her without any compromise, without any tug of war, without any diminution or decrease of our honor to Christ.**

**Love is not a finite substance. God is love. Love just keeps multiplying and reproducing itself, and the more we love, the more love we have to give. And the more we love Christ, well, we know if there were 90 percent that goes to Christ and 10 percent that goes to Mary, 100 percent of it goes to God and the God-man and therefore 100 percent of it and more is available for us to give to others and especially his Mother who has become our Mother. Isn't that what Jesus is trying to say at the Cross when he says to the beloved disciple. He didn't say "John," he said "to the disciple he loved, 'Behold your Mother.'"**

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## **We See Mary as our Own Mother**

**Now which disciple did Jesus love? John as opposed to Peter? Not James, Bartholomew? He loves all his disciples then. He loves all his disciples now. Who is the beloved disciple who should look upon Mary as his Mother? All of us who are beloved disciples. This is why in Revelation 12, "The woman who gives birth to the male child who is to rule the nations, the Messiah against whom the dragon makes**

war." At the end it says, after she has been delivered up into heaven, kind of assumed bodily, as it were, "The dragon makes war against the rest of her offspring, that is, those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus." They're the beloved disciples. We are the brothers and sisters of Christ, the firstborn among many brothers, and guess what that makes us? The children of the Queen Mother of the Son of David. That heavenly temple is our home. That new Jerusalem is our birthplace. The daughter Zion is our sister and she is our mother and she is our bride and she is our homeland.

Thank God that we don't have to undermine or take away anything from the glory of Christ. Rather we behold the ultimate masterpiece of Christ in Mary. And like any artist, you know if an artist takes you into his room with all the masterpieces hanging on the wall and you could stand there staring at him saying, "Oh my. You are such a great artist. You're fantastic." He'd say, "Hey, look at my work." He wouldn't feel offended if you went over to his greatest work and said, "This is awesome. Wow! Thank you!" He would say, "Hey, come on. Check out my pants and shirt. Look at my face." No. Christ wants us to fall head over heels in love with his Mother because that's his masterpiece. Exhibit A, that he can really accomplish salvation. She was saved from sin. That's why she is sinless. Because some people are saved from sin and other people are saved from sin and she was saved by Christ from sin from beginning to end. It's the work of Christ and we extol and praise our eldest brother, our Lord and Master and our Redeemer as we love and as we follow his Mother and do whatever he tells you.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit we pray: Father in heaven we thank you for our Mother in heaven. We thank you Lord, Jesus Christ, for filling her up with your grace, for giving to her spotless flesh and blood so that we, through her, might have a perfect gift to express our thanks and praise to you in giving you human nature that was unspotted to enable you to make the perfect sacrifice, uniting that spotless human nature to the glorious divine nature of the Second Person, the Eternal Son. Thank you for making us sons and daughters of the Most High. Thank you Lord Jesus for making the Blessed Trinity our family. Help us to renew our appreciation and devotion to our adopted status but help us see that it's more than just a legal standing. That you have filled us to overflowing with the same spirit that filled Mary. Through her intercession increase our devotion in all propriety but in all magnitude and help us with joy to spread that. We thank you for Mother Church, called to be a virgin, a bride and a mother. Help us, O Lord to see that we who are your Church are called to accept the fullness of grace that Mary has. You chose her through whom to give Jesus to the world and now still that pattern remains. You are continually giving the life of Christ through Mary. Help us to always remember that in our hearts and to store it up like she so that we might do whatever he tells us, that we might do whatever pleases you, Lord Jesus. That we might sacrifice ourselves in union with your Eucharistic sacrifice continued perpetually in heaven forever in praise, honor and thanksgiving to our Father and your Father. And hear us as we pray that family prayer you taught us: Our Father, who art in heaven, etc.



# MARY, ARK OF THE COVENANT

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The most prominent scriptural theme in the liturgical text of the Church when it comes to the feast of the Assumption, which we are celebrating happily today. You can see, if you had a missalette that the reading for the Vigil of the Assumption has some text that at first might seem to be rather odd and out of place. For instance, we had a reading from 1st Chronicles 15. It doesn't mention Mary. All it talks about is how David assembled all Israel and Jerusalem to bring the Ark of the Lord to the place which he had prepared for it. It talks about how the Levites then bore the Ark of God on their shoulders with poles as Moses had ordained and then how David commands all of this music and all of this rejoicing.

Then it describes, finally how the Ark is brought into the tabernacle which David had pitched for it and they offer all these sacrifices and peace offerings to God, and then David turns around and blesses the people in the name of the Lord. And you're thinking, "Why choose this text? There are literally thousands of texts to choose from, why a text about a box? And all of these guys jumping and singing and dancing around a box, and putting it in a tent and then singing and dancing and offering sacrifices and blessing people in the text?"

Kind of unusual. But then for the Responsorial Song in the Vigil Mass from Psalm 132, the responsorial is, "Lord, go up to the place of your rest, you and the Ark of your holiness." Now, this isn't Noah's ark, this is the Ark of the Covenant. We'll get a little bit more into the background in just a minute, but why the Ark of the Covenant, and this is an ancient liturgical tradition. These are texts that have been included in the liturgy of the Assumption as far back as we can trace it, and this is like 7th Century, 6th Century. We can't trace it back much farther than that, but all this historical evidence points to the fact that this has been celebrated from ancient times. So you can't just say, "Well it popped out of nowhere in the 6th and 7th Century," because back then Churches were liturgically hyper-conservative. I mean you didn't just innovate and then say, "Well, we've got a new feast." Then all of a sudden have it catch on in the Church all around the world.

But that's what you find in the feast of the bodily Assumption. The first records of it are in the 6th and 7th Centuries as being done everywhere, accepted by all without

**an argument. And the texts that are used are like this: Solomon, 1:32 that talks about, "Lord, go to the place of your rest, you and the Ark of your holiness. May your priests be clothed with justice. Let your faithful ones shout merrily for joy for the sake of David, your servant. For the Lord has chosen Zion. He prefers her for his dwelling. Zion is my resting place forever, and here will I dwell for I prefer her. Lord, go up to the place of your rest, you and the Ark of your holiness."**

**Now, calling Mary "Ark of the Covenant" is not only something that we find in these ancient liturgical texts. We also find it, where else? In the Litany of Loretto, the long litany to our Lady. Ark of the Covenant, ora pro nobis. Pray for us, right? Now, why is this the case? Well, as we read the texts for today's feast, the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we notice that the first reading is taken from the Book of Revelation. That is going to be our primary focus.**

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### **The Book of Revelation as Primary Focus**

**Turn with me now to Revelation, chapter 11. Revelation, chapter 11, we're going to begin with verse 19. We're going to begin reading with verse 19, but let me in fairness back up so you get a little context. At the beginning of chapter 11, we're told about this holy city which will be trampled under for 42 months. Most scholars think that it's a reference to Jerusalem. Why? Well, because in 11:8, we're told about that great city which spiritually has become like Sodom in Egypt, where the Lord was crucified. Well, that gives it away. Where was the Lord crucified? Jerusalem. But this city has become like Sodom in Egypt? Yes, even our Lord said, "Fill up the measure of your fathers," and talked about how all the righteous blood shed on earth from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, was shed, who was slain between the altar. All this blood will come upon Jerusalem. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, stoning the prophets and killing those who were sent to you. How often I would have gathered you to myself as a hen gathers her brood, but you would not let me."**

**Jerusalem would not let the Lord gather his children to himself. And it heaped up blood upon itself, so much so that the really righteous Jews, the anawim, the holy, even the pious, educated folks had to leave Jerusalem more often than not. You know about the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Qumran community, all these people who were even respected by the people they didn't respect, because they were holy and pious and for that reason they felt that they had to scam from Jerusalem. The place was really getting foul. Even Josephus, in his description of the downfall and the destruction and ruin of Jerusalem and the temple, says that never was there a generation of my people so ripe and worthy for such destruction.**

**So the city is being compared to Sodom in Egypt, the city where the Lord was crucified. 11:1, the seer it told to go measure the temple of God and the altar but not the altar court and then the Holy City is to be trampled for forty-two months, and**

historically, almost works out exactly because the Roman siege of Jerusalem lasted about three-and-a-half years, leading up to the destruction in 70 A.D. The Jewish revolt began about 66 A.D.

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### Background (Rev. 11: 1-13)

Then, all of a sudden in 11:13, there's an earthquake and a collapse and it all revolves around the seven trumpets. Now we can really get caught up in all the sevens of Revelation: there are seven seals and seven everything, but this all occurs as a result of the seventh trumpet. Now you're religious educators. I could probably get away with playing games, but I won't because after lunch, we're a little bit tired. But where, rhetorically I'll ask, where in the Old Testament do you remember the seventh trumpet being blown and like loud noise and earthquake and destruction and a city crumbling and collapsing? Jericho! All right! Good, so it's Jericho and the priests were commanded by none other than Joshua, who was under the command of the archangel, the angel of the Lord. According to Joshua, in Joshua 5, seven priests were carrying trumpets and on the seventh day they marched around the city seven times, blaring those trumpets. And on the seventh time with the seventh blow, that city fell, and it was the greatest and most intimidating political and military force in the entire promised land, some scholars suggest.

In other words, tackling Jericho first was like the hardest task of all, and they did it without raising a spear. But those priests who went around seven times blowing the trumpets the seventh time did it behind the Ark of the Covenant. The specific stipulation required is that you do it behind the Ark of the Covenant. You carry it with you. Now I'm saying all this because I think that John is not just inspired by the Spirit, but the guy knows his Hebrew bible like the back of his hand, really, really well.

So he's hoping that some readers are going to get all this surplus meaning, all this surplus value; because if you know traditions, then another person who knows the same traditions can just kind of say one word or one phrase and all of a sudden a spark will evoke your recollection. I sometimes illustrate this with my college students. I'll say to a cute girl student in the front of the class, "Come out, Virginia, don't make me wait. You Catholic girls start much too late!"

Now, maybe this is before or after Perry Como and Henry Mancini, so you might not -- no, I'm joking. You all know who I'm talking about. How many of you will recognize that song? Billy Joel, right? One of his all-time quadrillion sellers, "Only the Good Die Young." Virginia is kind of a little catch phrase for virgin. He's a Brooklyn Jew and he's talking about all of these Catholic girls "who don't count on me. You were counting on your rosary. Woe, woe," and all that stuff. And as soon as I say, "Come on Virginia, can't make me wait. You Catholic girls start much too late," Sally or Suzie up front in that row turn beet red because she knows the song.

And as soon as she hears the line, she knows that Billy is trying to seduce that girl in the song and it evokes the whole meaning of the whole message.

That's the power of tradition. That's the power of liturgical texts in a community that is in touch with its roots. And that is why Mary is so misunderstood or disbelieved or just simply uncomprehended by people today. Because we know American culture and the liturgical texts that we read from the New Testament often were written by people for people who knew the Hebrew bible like we know prime time TV or the top 40.

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### Revelation 11:19

So we've got to get a little bit into the background in order just to get started in 11:19. But enough of this. Sometimes I'm like the pole vaulter who backed up so far, he was exhausted by the time he got to the vault. Okay, 11:19, we shouldn't be surprised then when we read, "God's temple in heaven was opened and within his temple was seen the Ark of the Covenant." Now, on the one hand we shouldn't be too surprised, but on the other hand we would be incredibly surprised as Jewish Christians who know the tradition by that one verse.

Well, first of all, "God's temple in heaven." Where do we get the idea that there isn't just a temple in Jerusalem on earth, but there's also a temple in heaven? Well, when God gave instructions to David and Solomon on how to build the temple, it was all according to a pattern that had been prophetically revealed to David, just like the tabernacle had been revealed to Moses when he was on top of Mount Sinai, and this glory cloud descended in all this fire and smoke. He was in some way transported to heaven where he saw this pattern that became the blueprint for the portable temple known as the tabernacle and then later the stationary one that Solomon built.

Both of these correspond to the heavenly temple, the original, "the real thing," as Madison Avenue would say. God's temple in heaven was opened and all of a sudden, John, "Wow, that's the real temple." As the Jerusalem temple is getting ready to be destroyed and the holy city is getting ready to be trampled, John will not despair because he realizes that the true temple, the permanent, eternal temple is safe and standing strong.

He looks and he doesn't just see the temple, he sees it open. He doesn't just see inside, he sees all the way into the holy of holies. How do we know? Because what does he see? The Ark of the Covenant, which is exactly that which made the holy of holies the holiest place in the temple. It's precisely because if that was there with the cherubim and the mercy seat, that was called the holy of holies. So he's seeing right into it, but he is seeing something which has not been seen for over five centuries by any Jew. Because right before Nebuchadnezzar came in 586 to destroy Jerusalem,

according to Jewish tradition, Jeremiah swiped the Ark and took it off and hid it, some say in Mount Nebo, but they never found it.

But when the second temple was built, no Ark of the Covenant, no mercy seat, no cherubim and also no shekina. What's a shekina? That is the dwelling presence of God, the glory cloud which at once is luminous and yet dark. It's that within which you saw all the thunder and the lightning. It's that which Moses entered, the shekina. It's what made the tabernacle so holy. In fact when this glorious cloud descended from heaven down to the tabernacle that had been built, Moses himself couldn't even enter the tabernacle, much less the other priests, to do service because the glorious, smoky cloud of God's presence filled it, once the Ark had been consecrated.

When Solomon built the temple, after seven years he had this great feast of dedication and at the end of it he had pronounced this long prayer and he offered up sacrifices, and then all of a sudden fire came down from heaven and consumed all the sacrifices on the altar. Everybody falls flat on their faces and they just cry, "Glory!" The shekina is there to stay until Ezekiel sees it depart. In fact, he was to name one of his kids Ichobod because the glory is departed. Ichobod, the glory is departed, Ichobod Crane and all that stuff, right? Same thing.

The glory departs right before the Babylonians come in. Seventy years later or so, when they begin rebuilding the temple, the Ark is not found. It's not returned. No mercy seat, cherubim and thus no shekina. No glorious cloud signifying the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the Wailing Wall to this day. The prime purpose of the Wailing Wall is to bewail the loss of the shekina, the glorious cloud, presence of God dwelling in the midst of Israel.

So this is the sight of sights to behold. He looks up and he sees what no one has seen for like six centuries, the Ark of the Covenant right where it belongs, in the only place in the cosmos where it would be safe, God's temple in heaven. Now remember that when John wrote this, there were no chapter and verse divisions. Right? Those were added in the Middle Ages. And so we move from 11:19 right into 12:1, but of course, without any chapter division.

Psychologically, that really undoes us, because there is no real text division. "Then God's temple in heaven was opened and within his temple was seen the Ark of the Covenant and there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and earthquake and great hailstorm and a great and wondrous sign appeared. Above her is only the God-man.

The highest human person in human history is a woman and a mother, and our culture doesn't like maternity sometimes, and a virgin, and our culture doesn't like a virgin sometimes. We have a message of the greatest liberation of all. Whatever we are, we are always God's children. We are God's siblings, and we can even be God's spouse. And Mary leads the way, and it's all the work of Christ. He doesn't

**transform her into a man or make her neuter or make her some desexed angel. She is glorified as woman, as mother and virgin over all humans. But not in a way that just leaves us just choking in the dust, but rather in a way in which she just kind of carries us all along up with her in the train of glory.**

**Let's stop and pray and ask her Son to help us to see and to live it, and then ask her to bless us. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Lord Jesus Christ, hallelujah, we thank you for taking a woman and making her your daughter and your mother and your bride. She is one of us. She's like us. She is not a person in the Trinity. She is a human person, Lord, and we have confidence now like never before that your plan of salvation can never fail but will only succeed ever more gloriously. In your grace and your spirit come to us through her and inspire us to imitate her as she obeys and follows you. Help us to obey her as she tells us to do whatever you tell us to do and help us to enter with all propriety and with all truth and with all balance into the deepest devotion to her that will please you the most, for Lord, we only wish to imitate you as you bestow honor and glory upon your mother in obedience to your Father's law.**

**Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed are thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen. Our Lady, Ark of the Covenant, pray for us. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Thank you very much.**

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#### **Added Notes**

**One slight correction: I mentioned mistakenly that epischiaze is used only five times and always with reference to the Ark. It's not. It's used more than five times, not always with reference to the Ark. I was thinking of the work anaphenatzen, which is used only in connection with those Old Testament liturgical ceremonies that are associated with the Ark and there are five specific passages that Laurentin studied with regard to that word for Elizabeth's greeting, where she shouts with joy. So I just want to make that correction because sometimes little mistakes like that can mislead people. I also want to make mention of a key work that I don't have with me but I have at home. It's a doctoral dissertation done at a Pontifical Institute in Rome by Father Bernard LeFoix entitled, *The Woman Clothed with the Sun*. This dissertation has been published and distributed widely. It's out of print now, but it's in probably thousands of college and seminary libraries and perhaps other places that you might find. It's very readable, surprisingly so for a doctoral dissertation, much more readable than my dissertation will probably end up being. So, if you are interested in pursuing this further, Bernard LeFoix', Ph.D's dissertation is entitled, *The Woman Clothed with the Sun*.**

Now, I also wanted to ask, actually I should say, address a question that was asked of me about two minutes after the break began and that is, "Where do we find specific examples of Mary as Ark of the Covenant in the early Church?" I have this little pamphlet from the Marian library studies by Dom Capelli entitled, *Marian Typology in the Proverbs and in the Liturgy*. I'm going to go ahead and spend the next 65 minutes reading the entire thing to you. No, I won't, but read to you like three paragraphs that are short.

It talks about the Feast of the Assumption where Mary is often greeted with the title Ark of the Covenant, a very clear allusion to the Ark of the Covenant in the ancient temple. It goes on, "Ark of imperishable wood containing the manna, is a phrase that is taken from an ancient liturgy for the feast of the Assumption. This application of the Ark of the Covenant to the Blessed Virgin is very ancient. We find that already at the beginning of the 3rd Century in the writings of Hippolytus of Rome."

"The Lord was all sinless, for as man being the work of the Holy Spirit and of the Blessed Virgin, he was made of incorruptible wood, both within and without."

"The Marian interpretation of the Ark of the Covenant was, as one can see, well thought out. It will continue to be used from then on. We find it in Antioch by the 5th Century in the writings of the Patriarch Severus who fits it into its entire context. He sees the Blessed Virgin signified by the Holy of Holies precisely because she contains the Ark of the Covenant made of incorruptible wood, etc."

"The image will take on new vitality in Christian literature by reason of its correspondence with the Psalm verse from Psalm 132, 'Arise, O Lord, to the place of your rest, you and the ark of your holiness.'" Then it goes on citing some other references, "During the same era Chrysostom of Jerusalem likewise commented on the versicle according to the same sense, 'Mary is the Ark, not of Noah nor yet the one that contained the tables of stone, but that which bore him whom nothing can contain. In her womb he found the repose of which the psalm verse speaks, 'And when he shall rise, the ark of his majesty will rise with him.'"

It goes on talking about some other examples, too, but I'll leave this up here if anybody is interested, and it cites several instances of where that material is found. I don't just want to say I'll give you something and then not give it and so I appreciated the question. There's one other question and that is, "Does this interpretation allow for the common view that the 'woman clothed with the sun' is either Old Testament Israel or the New Testament Church?" And yes, it allows for the view. In fact there's a polyvalence, a multiple fulfillment of images in the Book of Revelation that allows for this kind of multiple application. So, for instance, we know that the woman who flees into the wilderness does not directly correspond to any biographical details of Mary in the gospels and the birth pangs seem to be figurative as well.

**It seems as though John with a spiritual vision sees in our Lady at once the perfection of Old Testament Israel realized and an anticipation of the New Covenant Church in its anticipated glory. And so with a kind of spiritual freedom, he is able to apply things to that woman much like he does to Satan. I mean Satan, a dragon with seven heads? Well, that's probably a figure of speech. It's probably not what he actually looks like if you brought your Kodak down to hell and could see the snapshot. All right. So these kinds of figures are in a very enlightening way without some 20th Century flat literary correspondence, one for one. It's more artistry than science. So, he does allow for a variety of interpretations in terms of Old Testament Israel, Jerusalem and the New Covenant Church. And I want to encourage you to take up any of those if you want to explore those interpretive meanings as well.**



# SAINTS HOLY SIBLINGS

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To approach the veneration of the Saints from a Biblical perspective, Scott begins with the Book of Hebrews and the "Old Testament Hall of Fame". In this program he explains how the Saints are members of God's family in heaven, the "older siblings" of God's sons and daughters on earth. He shows how the Saints constitute a "cloud of witnesses" which hovers over the world giving glory to God and "cheering on" the Christian family on earth.

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## The Veneration of Saints from a Biblical Perspective.

In order to approach the veneration of saints from a Biblical perspective, I would like to begin our time in the New Testament Book of Hebrews. We can just keep a finger on Hebrews 11 and see what we really need there because we go through the Old Testament Hall of Fame rapidly. Hebrews 11, verse 1 begins, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen, for by it the men of old received Divine approval, and by faith we understand that the world is created by the Word of God so that what is seen was made out of things that do not appear."

Then he begins to pick off this list of great saints of the Old Testament family of God beginning with the first martyr, Abel, who offered an acceptable sacrifice. And then Enoch and then Noah and then Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Sarah. And then it goes on to talk about Abraham some more and Isaac and Jacob and all the sufferings they endured because their hope was ultimately not in the earthly Jerusalem but in the heavenly Jerusalem, not in the earthly Promised Land but in the heavenly Promised Land.

Then in verse 23 it speaks about Moses and all that he gave up in order to gain this glorious inheritance in heaven, and likewise, Israel. And then Rahab, the harlot in Jericho: even her faith is extolled. Then Gideon, Barak, Sampson, Jethrop, the Judges, David the king, Samuel and the prophets who through faith conquered kingdoms and forced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions and quenched raging fires, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. All other great deeds are being

recounted not just to go through history but principally, as you will see, to inspire greater faith, hope and love within us.

Verse 36, "Others suffered mocking and scourging, even chains and imprisonment." And the readers of this epistle, the initial readers, could relate to all that. They were stoned. They were sawed in two like Isaiah was supposed to have died. They were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated, of whom the world, this world, that is, was not worthy. Wandering over deserts and mountains and in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, the well-attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God has foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect."

So, in a sense, the coming of Christ and the New Covenant economy brought great blessing and glory for these Old Testament saints, greater glory than they received just simply when they died. Something new was inaugurated when Christ was raised, when he was ascended and when he was enthroned. He opened up a new vista, a new door, the front door of heaven, for his younger brethren to come home. And we will see in the next few minutes how this glorious family kingdom in heaven has placed within it thrones and on them sit these great saints, as well as the New Covenant saints. And they are priests and they are giving judgment to serve Christ and to pray on our behalf.

But notice that the writer of Hebrews is recounting all of this to inspire us to emulate their example. This is going to be one fundamental consideration as we understand the Biblical rationale for the veneration of the saints. Heroic examples inspire heroic virtue. But let's take a look now at Hebrews 12, "Therefore," in one of the most basic interpretive principles of Biblical studies that whenever you see that word, "therefore," you ask yourself what it's there for because it basically sums up everything before it and draws a very practical conclusion, especially so in the Book of Hebrews. "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every way and sin which clings so closely and let us run with perseverance, the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin, you haven't resisted yet to the point of shedding your blood. Have you forgotten the exhortation which addresses you as sons?"

And it goes on to talk about the discipline of the Lord and the chastening and the suffering which is proper for children of God to mature and grow up. Then in verse 12, "Therefore, lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees and make straight paths for your feet so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed."

The whole picture in Hebrews 12 is the big race and who's in the crowd? All of the saints. And what do they form? Verse 1, "a cloud of witnesses." What do you mean a cloud? Well, if you do a little bit of Biblical background study, that cloud is the same cloud that you can trace all the way back in the Old Testament. It's the shechena glory cloud that Moses ascended up into on Mount Sinai. It's the same cloud that came down when Jesus ascended before the eyes of the disciples. This cloud in a sense is a portable manifestation of what it is like to be "in the Spirit" like John was in the Book of Revelation: "I was in the Spirit of the Lord's day," and that glory cloud, the shechena, is full now of our older brothers and sisters. And they constitute a cloud of witnesses and it's not just a cloud that comes and goes depending upon the way the wind blows. It's a cloud that's a crowd for the purpose of cheering us on.

You know, why is it that the Pittsburgh Pirates have a much better home record than with away games? Or, I probably suspect it's true for your beloved Mets, unfortunately, although we're a half game in front. Why is that? Why consistently even do last place teams do better at home games than away games? Because their people are there. I mean you could say, "They know the stadium better." Yeah, perhaps so. But there's always an incredible psychological edge especially in the championship games.

You know basketball teams and football teams know, even Jimmy the Greek will tell you that if it's a home game add six points for the home team. And here we have a home game and there's a huge cloud of witnesses, all our older family members are cheering us on. It isn't like, you know, we've got family members who have never run the race before, saying, "Go for it. Go for it," although they've never gone for it. I mean these people raising up their hands, cheering and looking and you can see the scars on their hands and their feet and their faces and on their backs. You know that they've run the race and they are calling you to do the same.

And the greatest and loudest cheerleader of them all is Jesus himself, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, the firstborn among many brothers and sisters, Romans 8 tells us. I mean the whole stadium is full of our family. And it inspires ardor and courage, vigor and sacrifice. And you know what? The writer of Hebrews never considers it important for a second to argue that this is so. He takes it for granted and he thinks you should take it for granted, but that you should ponder it and then draw inspiration from it.

But not so. If the saints don't know what we're doing, and we have no idea what they're doing. In other words if we have no contact, no communication, this kind of description is just simply a weak and quaint metaphor. But that's not what it is. This is the spiritual reality perceived by the eyes of faith, the eyes that are open to the spiritual truths of this great Credo statement, "I believe in the Communion of Saints."

Now it isn't just because we all believe the same thing that we have this real nice but eerie feeling that we are all united by this bond of doctrinal confession and liturgical worship. It's much more than that. It's more than just being a fellowship of the like-minded. We say, "I believe in the Holy Spirit," and that's why we believe in the holy Catholic Church because apart from the Holy Spirit, we would only be another human organization. But the Holy Spirit, the Church teaches *de fide*, is the soul of the Church. The Mystical Body of Christ is animated and draws its supernatural life from the Holy Spirit. So we say, "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church -- what? -- the communion of saints."

Now how can you have communion with people that you have no communication with? How can you possibly be in communion with people that really share nothing in common together in terms of everyday experience? I'm not saying that the Lord has told us to have daily conversations. All right, some people are gifted with those mystical revelations. But whenever somebody says, "Well, you're communicating with the dead and that is wicked sin judged by Old Testament and New Testament standards because that's divination, that's sorcery or whatever." You say, "They're not dead. They're more alive than we are. Blessed are those who die in the Lord, henceforth." Why? Because their works follow them into heaven. The Old Testament saints had to wait for the Messiah, but the waiting is gone. Those martyred saints are with the Lord and a crowd, and they are cheering us on. We need not just eyes but ears with faith, to hear and so it goes.

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### Veneration of Saints does not Violate the Sole Mediatorship of Jesus

Now I want to move on from that, though. I want to say one thing and that is, before I move on I want you to know that the saints are not an alternate route to God, as opposed to Christ. If you think that, then stop praying to the saints until you get your spiritual life readjusted back on course. Because you're not a good Catholic. The fact is there is one sole mediator between God and man and that's the man, Jesus Christ. Paul couldn't make that any clearer than he does to Timothy. He says, "There is one mediator -- one and only one mediator -- between God and man."

Let's turn to 1st Timothy, chapter 2, to see what he is saying. 1st Timothy, chapter 2 verse 5 says, "There is one God and there is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus who gave Himself as a ransom for all." Now what conclusions can we draw from that? Can we draw from that the false conclusion that because we've got one mediator, therefore it's undermining the work of Christ to go through the saints and ask them to intercede on our behalf? No, of course not. Forget the fact that saints are the Christians in heaven, we're also aware of the fact that Christians on earth are continually addressed in the New Testament as saints. That's who we are. That's who we must become, and if we continue on and hold fast to the faith, that's what we will be for eternity. But we are saints if we are in Christ right now.

Now saints, Catholic and non-Catholic, if somebody asks you to pray for them, to intercede for them to God on their behalf, do you go around and say, "How dare you undermine the sole mediation of Jesus Christ, the only High Priest?" Of course not. Why? Because what does Paul say in the first four verses before 1st Timothy, 2:1, "First of all then, I urge the supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for all men." By Jesus alone? Of course not. By us, "for kings and all who are in high positions in order that we might lead a quiet and peaceful life, godly and respectful in every way. This is good and is acceptable by God our Savior who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and there is one mediator between God and man."

How often did I used to pull that text out of context and use that to undermine the proper veneration of the saints which is rooted in two things, asking them for intercession and supplication and being inspired to follow their example. We could add a third and we are going to; that is, we honor them. We glorify them when we venerate them. But why? Because we're just a little bit bored after ten or fifteen hours of honoring Christ? No. It's precisely because we honor Christ. It's precisely because we imitate Christ. We imitate Christ, and so if we see Him honoring those who have died for the truth, those who have confessed to the faith with much pain, we do what Christ does and we honor those whom He honors. Those whom He blesses, we bless.

It's rather simple. It's only when we unconsciously reduce the Christian faith to an individualistic, me and Jesus relationship that it becomes a typically American self-centered thing. I mean, let's face it, the American family is not a great example of strong communion bonds these days. And it hasn't been for centuries. Do you know that Daniel Boone was one of the worst fathers? Do you know that I believe it was his brother or one of his neighbors who fathered a child through his wife? Davey Crockett, the same way. Great American heroes, rugged individualists, not great family men. You should hear what John Adams' wife had to say -- a radical feminist who was just a died-in-the-wood individualist. She wasn't more concerned about the marriage and about the family and the home and America. She was concerned about individual rights that she could exert and that others could exert and if they couldn't, they could get it by force. That's the American way.

As they used to say in the 18th Century, "We serve no sovereign." No kings, and kings were always father figures. I'm not arguing for political monarchy and natural politics because human sin is what it is. But we've got a supernatural monarchy, a heavenly kingdom, a father figure apart from sin who bestows his pure life and grace upon our older brothers and sisters, his children. And that kingdom is the Kingdom of Heaven. And that inspires us in a much greater way to serve our Sovereign and to serve his cabinet ministers and the princes and the princesses that he appoints over us.

Do you realize how difficult it is for Americans to think and to behave in that way? When everything in our culture goes in the opposite direction? To whom do we bow

**in our society? Nobody. And when we even say, "Your Honor" to a judge or "Your Excellency" for an Archbishop, it feels kind of unnatural, and we bristle, don't we? It's un-American. Who do you think you are? But the fact is in a family, it isn't the person as much as it's the office that we venerate and honor. And that's what we're doing when we venerate the saints. We're imitating Christ who honors them. We, in turn, want to imitate the saints as they serve Christ.**

**Now when you put it this way, I'm tempted to respond now, I've been in here for about five years, it seems as plain as the nose on my face. But only when you make a very slight but profound adjustment in your thinking. "We Are Family," as Sister Sledge sang so many years ago. We are the family of God. So no father is going to feel gyped or ignored or neglected as the brothers and sisters fall in love with each other and inspire each other to the courageous sacrifice and service for the family's name. It's even silly once you put it into those terms, but what other terms suffice for what the Blessed Trinity, the Divine Family, has been doing in all of history? It's the only one that makes sense. It's the only one that pulls the entire Bible together. It's the only reason why Paul in 1st Timothy 2:5 considers one mediator and still says, what he says in 1st Timothy 2:1-4, "Therefore, because there's one mediator, with greater confidence we can pray and make supplication and intercession for everybody," even for the kings and the wealthy and the rich and the corrupt. Why? Because there's one mediator, the God-man, Jesus Christ.**

**We could go nuts praying like we never could before. Why? Because there's one mediator. Does that mean no other intercessors, no others to make supplication? No! That's just not right. There's one mediator and because our mediator is the most awesome mediator we could possibly imagine, we have now the capacity to intercede as priests in the Priest, as sons in the Son, as pastors and shepherds in the one Pastor and Shepherd. We draw our life from him. "No longer I, but Christ who lives in me. Apart from Christ, I can do nothing." But with me, Jesus says, you can do anything. "With God, all things are possible."**

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### **Scriptural Support for the Fact that God Hears the Cries of the Saints**

**We need to adjust our thinking. This isn't new. All the way back in Genesis, there's a kind of cryptic allusion to the fact that God is in touch with the needs of the martyrs. In Genesis 4, verse 10, God says to Cain, "Listen, your brother's blood cries out to me from the soil." Now do you think if you got out in the field and found the place where all that blood had spilled, put your ear down to it, you would have heard a voice? No, I don't think so. No, this is a literary device, the part for the whole. Abel's blood is Abel's soul which has died. It wouldn't be crying out for anything unless Abel had been vindicated by God in some manner. In some manner we know not, it might be Abraham's bosom, like we see in Luke 16.**

**At any rate God hears the cry of those martyred saints from the very beginning. The blood is the life, the life is the soul and the soul cries out for vindication and God responds. That's why Hebrews 12, verse 24 alludes to that in comparing Abel's blood crying for vengeance to Jesus' sprinkled blood which speaks more eloquently than that of Abel. Now, would Jesus' blood speak to us? Well, in a sense, no. It's not the blood, but it's the life of the soul which the blood signifies that is speaking, "mercy, mercy, mercy" on our behalf. Not vengeance but forgiveness because Christ wasn't slain by a brother out in the field contrary to his will. Christ laid down His own life as a ransom for all. And so His blood speaks like Abel's blood speaks, but it speaks in a greater and more eloquent way.**

**Now I would suggest that the kind of teaching we find in Luke 16 would not have come from the lips of Jesus; were not this outlook commonplace. Let's turn now to Luke 16, verses 19 through 31. There, of course, we find the famous story of Lazarus and the rich man. We're told that Lazarus who was very poor and the dogs licked his sores when he sat outside the rich man's gate; at death Lazarus is carried to rest in Abraham's bosom. The other man, the rich man, Deus or Dives as he is sometimes called, is carried off into torment in the abode of the dead. He cries, "Father Abraham," he cries. He still sees himself, I would suggest, in some way as God's child. That is the child of Father Abraham. He cries out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me." Not exactly the cry of the demonized, despicable reprobate's soul whose evil and sin are only perfected. "Have mercy on me, Father." He knows that he belongs there, but he's asking now not for justice, but for mercy. And he's not saying, "Get me out of here. I don't belong. Get me out of here. I've got to go back. I deserve a second chance."**

**He says, "Send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue for I am in anguish in this flame." That's why I would suggest this may well refer, not to hell fire and eternal torment, but purgatorial fire belonging to a soul who through neglect of the corporal works of mercy ends up going to summer school for a long time. He cries, "Father Abraham, have pity on me." And then Abraham replies, "My child." Not you accursed reprobate, you son of Satan, you despicable worm, you viper. No, "my child," Abraham replies. "Remember that you in your lifetime received your good things." And the man doesn't say, "What do you mean, 'remember?'" Once the soul dies, he doesn't remember anything. He doesn't remember anybody. He remembers what Abraham had said; he remembers. But how often have I run into Christians who assume that we don't remember or we have only a vague remembrance and they don't really mean anything, those memories.**

**But no, read further. It goes on, "Then I beg you, father," verse 27, "send him to my father's house." He remembers his father's house. "...for I have five brothers." He not only remembers his five brothers, he is very concerned for those five brothers. He's interceding on behalf of those five brothers. "So that Lazarus may warn them, lest they also come to this place of torment." He doesn't say, "Abraham, can you give my five brothers a glimpse of my torturous fate down in the flames?" He says,**

**"Will you resurrect Lazarus. Will you send him back from the dead?" What a small favor to ask on Lazarus' behalf. Certainly going to be a vindication for the poor man, isn't it?**

**But Abraham said, "They have Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them. And he said, 'No, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they would repent.' He said to him, 'If they don't hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'" End of story. Now you might say, "So, there. They may pray in purgatory, but they are not answered." But notice one thing. Jesus raised a man named Lazarus after four days. This might be a parable, but Jesus didn't say, "Let me tell you a parable." There is no evidence that this is a parable. You may not want to believe it but nowhere, in any parable of Jesus does he name the characters.**

**Here He names the man and He happens to give him the name of one of His very best friends, His only best friend that he raised from the dead. A man who had been afflicted long and sore, what a coincidence. Maybe, maybe not. But I would suggest this, that if a man in torment can communicate according to his own felt needs, how much more can Lazarus help? In other words, here we have a situation where the man can communicate and intercede on behalf of those that he wants to help.**

**Now if a man in the flames can do that, how much more can we assume that Lazarus would have a clear recollection of his beloved family on earth and he would probably have a clearer perception of their needs. And with a perfected love, he would have a greater capacity to intercede for those needs. Maybe you deny that, but what scriptures do you show to deny it? I couldn't find any when I was thinking along these lines. At that point, you might say, I was on a train rolling without brakes; but the train was a scriptural train.**

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### **Catholics Need to Have a Balanced Perception of What the Veneration of Saints is**

**Let's go on. Before I look at some other scriptures, let me just ask you, and think of this when you are talking to non-Catholics because, I've got to confess and apologize all the time to my non-Catholic brothers and sisters in Christ, albeit separate, but brothers and sisters through baptism. I've got to apologize because they learn of the many Catholics who do weird things, like one ex-Catholic whose Mom has a life-size statue of Mary that she dresses and undresses every day. She's got no real prayer life. She never reads the Bible, but she continually dresses and undresses her little statue; it's not so little.**

**Now I'm not going to make any final judgments on such behavior, but I will say that if that's all you've got, it's warped. And often Catholics not only don't have a balanced perception of what the veneration of saints is in relationship to Christ but**



**they've got little capacity to articulate what they are really doing if it is balanced. Why are they really doing it?**

**Say to a non-Catholic, "Do you have a family? Do you love them? Do you ever carry their photos in your wallet? Now, are those images idols?" "Well," they might say, "they're not statues. They're not paintings. I don't kiss them." Well, yeah, photography is modern technology that makes it much more easy and mobile, you know, so that in a wallet you can have the images of a family, but my point is nobody worships the photo. Explain it that way. You don't worship the photo. You don't even honor it. You get that? We don't honor statues. We don't venerate pictures or icons. We honor and venerate the real people that are signified by the statues and the pictures and the icons.**

**Well, they're dead! No, they're dead in Christ and so they are alive and blessed. Revelation 14 tells us that they are blessed if they die in Christ. Jesus promised Peter the keys of the Kingdom which had the power over the gates of Hades. So the Church can exercise this jurisdiction not only in releasing the souls through the merits that Christ pours into his Mystical Body but also in recognizing and pronouncing officially the fact that these souls have died in Christ and can be venerated and that they are beatified because they are blessed by Christ.**

**Catholics don't worship statues and paintings and icons. The statue is just a hunk of plaster or marble, if it's really good. They're just artistic devices, useful to recall to our minds the person, the event, the occasion depicted; to link us in communion but to inspire us by their example.**

**So does scripture teach that there is no communion between the saints who are in Christ in heaven and the saints who are in Christ down here? Or rather is the mystic sweet communion that we have with those whose rest is won, a real communion? Of course it is. Does scripture teach that after death saints lose all memory of earthly life earthly relations and needs, that they lose all interest and concern. That they're so single-minded in rapture and focused upon Christ that they don't even see each other? Scripture doesn't teach that. Scripture doesn't teach that they lose all ability to pray, intercede and supplicate on our behalf.**

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### **Archeologists Have Evidence of First Century Veneration of the Saints**

**Does scripture show us rather that saints recall their lives here and pray for those with whom they lived? Saints surround us like family members in a crowd as we have seen in Hebrews 12. Let's take a look now and see where all of this is, in fact, taught. Let's turn to the Book of Revelation. While we're turning to the Book of Revelation, I'm just going to mention the fact that 1st Century catacomb inscriptions found that archeologists in this century, dating all the way back to the first, second and third generations after Christ and the apostles give clear witness**

and testimony to this ancient custom of venerating and asking the saints for intercession. One inscription, "Peter and Paul, pray for Victor." Another one, "Peter and Paul, remember Zozamon." There are many other inscriptions just like this. They're not odd. They're not quirky. They're typical.

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### **Scripture Shows that Saints Recall Their Lives on Earth and Pray for Those with Whom They Lived**

In the Book of Revelation notice that there are three classes of saints that are highlighted as having a special role in the heavenly worship service. First of all, I'm going to come back to this in a minute, the martyrs, the white-robed martyrs. Second of all, the virgins and third of all, the confessors. For instance in Revelation 6:11. Let's turn there. Let's go back to verse 9, "When he opened the fifth seal I saw under the altar, that is the heavenly altar in the heavenly temple, the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne - they're martyrs. They cried out with a loud voice, 'O sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?' " They're asking for vindication. They have communication with God. They are pleading the cause of Christ's Mystical Body.

"Then they were each given a white robe and they were told to rest a little longer until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren should be complete." In other words they were told about what was going on, on earth. Not only about what was going on at the time, but what would go on in the future. That is, you'll be vindicated in a short while but more martyrdoms must first take place. At least they have some general awareness that there is a short time in which more martyrs will be gathered and then at the end of that short time, vindication will come. They have knowledge. They have concern. They've got a capacity to intercede and they also have a greater knowledge than people down on earth and it comes from God. Why? Because they're blessed. Revelation 22, verse 14 tells us this.

At the end of Revelation this beatitude is pronounced upon those - it says, "Blessed are they that have washed their robes." What do you mean "washed their robes?" You know, in other words, they had time to go down to the Laundromat right before God called them home? Of course not. "Blessed are they that have washed their robes," refers back to Revelation 7:14. I know we're flipping around rather fast but we have to catch up. I mean these non-Catholic Bible Christians really know their Bibles. We've got to learn how to flip back and forth. I mean six-year-old Bible Christians have sword drills. "This is the sword of the spirit," they're told. So they have sword drills. Malachi 2:14, first one there gets a star. Get ten stars, you get some candy or you get something else, you know? We ought to have sword drills.

Revelation 7:14 (Beat 'ya. Young kids love to compete. It ought to be a good thing to try.) "Then one of the elders addressed me saying, 'Who are these clothed in white

robes and whence have they come?' I said to him, 'Sir, you know.' He said to me, 'These are they who have come out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. These are the great multitude from every nation who stand before the throne of the Lamb.' We know that from reading the larger context and we're told in 7:15, "They serve him night and day in the temple," the heavenly temple. There is a liturgical service going on in the heavenly temple. Ours is only a pale reflection that dimly compares with the glorious worship that's going on there and these folks all serve day and night in the heavenly temple.

But they are not allowed to pray for us, right? Give me a break! Would God get mad? Would he take offense? Of course they pray for us! How is it that they serve? Look over at chapter 8, verse 3, "And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer." So there is censorship in heaven. No, no, I'm sorry, I misspoke! "Stood at the altar with a golden censer and he was given much incense to mingle with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar before the throne."

The saints that are spoken of should be interpreted contextually as the saints who have been martyred who now serve in heaven. Now we can have a secondary application which would include, of course, the earthly saints as well; but contextually it's the heavenly saints that are spoken of. And what are they doing? Praying. And that prayer is raised with incense by the angel at the altar to God upon the golden altar before the throne," which was right in front of the Holy of Holies in the earthly temple just as it is in the heavenly temple. "And the smoke of the incense rose with the prayers of the saints from the hand of the angel before God."

And what happens? God in response to the prayers of the saints plays a number. He calls up the heavenly priests to take their seven trumpets and to blow. It triggers the seven trumpets which trigger in turn all kinds of earthly activity that vindicate the saints and avenges their blood and takes down those who have been proud and haughty before God. Do you realize the power of liturgical worship? People say, "Well, you ought to get involved." I say, "That's right. We ought to get involved. We ought to really do the things that would change the injustices of earth beginning with good liturgical worship." Because if you read Revelation and you understand the message, you've got to realize that there's one thing above all others that changes things, bad things. And that is worshipping God with your whole heart, mind, soul and strength.

It unleashes all of the things that the people on earth need from God in response to the prayers of the saints. It isn't argued. It isn't debated. It isn't logically demonstrated. It's assumed and graphically described. And what do we pray? "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Our liturgical worship is an imitation of the heavenly worship. Our intercession is an imitation of their intercession. But how can we do it if we don't have any idea of what they are doing and they have no idea what we're doing? That's not communion and that's not what Revelation describes either.

**You can go back a little bit. You can see this even earlier in Revelation, Chapter 5, verse 8. I love this section. "The twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and with golden bowls full of incense which are the prayers of the saints, they sang a new song." They not only play the instruments, but they sing the songs and they praise the Lamb. But then they pray for the people who are in need. And what has Christ done after they pray? Does He say, "Come on, guys. Isn't my prayer enough? Is not the fact that I am High Priest sufficient for all of the needs of my people in heaven and on earth? Just hush up and take it easy?"**

**No, he didn't say that. What does he do? Verse 10, "He makes them a kingdom and priests who are God's sons and they shall reign on earth." In heaven their reign extends to earth. Christ has made them a kingdom of priests. In other words, what God offered on Mount Sinai, Exodus 19:6, which they refused and then God continually offers through David and Solomon, then they refuse; God offers through Jesus and the apostles and Jesus accepts and establishes, therefore, a new covenant on the basis of his acceptance. And through his power, he does what Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and David put together times a hundred, could never do - makes us all a kingdom of priests, if only we will receive by faith and cooperate with that grace.**

**We are a kingdom of priests. Does that undermine our king? Does that take away from the priestly authority of Jesus? No. It manifests it. Like pure light hitting a prism shows the intrinsic hidden beauty of that light as those rays are refracted, you see what was there in the light all along but we couldn't see it until it was refracted against the prism. That's the beauty of Christ, refracted through his saints and their intercessory prayers. And they sing the song about the Lamb and they talk about how he has received the power and the wealth and the wisdom and the might and the honor and the glory and the blessing. But what does Christ do with all of it? He turns around and gives it to us.**

**They have thrones and they have crowns and what do they do? They lay down their crowns. Christ picks them up and hands them back again and says, "Sit down on the thrones. You're my priests. You're my kings and I commit unto you judgment." You can see that over in chapter 4, verse 4, "the twenty-four thrones with the golden crowns." Why is this, because Christ isn't enough? Not at all. Because Christ is too far away? Of course not. On the contrary, it's because these saints trust that Christ's grace is sufficient, the very grace they now possess as martyred saints glorified in heaven.**

**Revelation 14:13 says it all. "And I heard a voice from heaven saying, ' Write this down: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth. Blessed, indeed, says the Spirit that they may rest from their labors; for their deeds follow them." Now, we don't worship the blessed saints who have been martyred and raised and glorified in heaven. We don't worship them. In fact Revelation 19, verse 10 tells us not to worship them - where the angel comes to John and John falls down and what does he say? "Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, ' You must**

not do that. I am a fellow servant with you and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.'" Hear, hear, "Worship God." That's the only one we worship. Then what do we do? Because we worship God and because we try to imitate God, we bless those that he has blessed. We honor those that he honors. That's the way of the covenant. That's always been the way of the covenant as we shall see.

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### Three Classes of Saints

Throughout the Revelation there are three classes of saints, the martyrs, the virgins and the confessors who are consistently held up as the example for us. For instance, turn with me now to Revelation 14, verse 4 (Beat 'ya! Give that woman a star. That's great. I wasn't ready for that. A taste of my own medicine.) In 14, verse 1, we are told about the hundred and forty-four thousand. The twelve tribes of Israel all donate twelve thousand saints. What kind of saints? We're told they sing a new song before the throne of the Lamb. It's a song but no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand of them redeemed from the earth. Must be a Jewish song, you know? Only the Jews can sing from the twelve tribes of Israel.

"It is these who have not defiled themselves with women for they are chaste," my non-Catholic version reads and in the footnote it says, "Greek: virgins." So why not translate it virgins? What are they? We dare not say that word too loud, too often in our society. Why? Is sexual intercourse wrong? No way. It's what consummates the marital covenant. It's what makes the sacrament legally indissoluble. It's what makes new life, as we become co-creators with God by the grace of Christ. Is intercourse bad? No, it's good. Is marriage bad? No, it's holy. It's a sacrament in the Catholic Church. It confers Christ's grace *ex opere operato*.

But God does reserve special blessings for those who renounce very good earthly goods for even better heavenly goods. 1st Corinthians, 7. Let's turn to 1st Corinthians, 7 (On your mark, get set, go. I didn't tell you which verse though.) 1st Corinthians 7, verse 32. Saint Paul says, "I want you to be free from anxiety. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord, but the married man is anxious about worldly affairs and how to please his wife." So his interests are divided and the unmarried woman or girl is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly affairs and how to please her husband. All married people say, "Amen."

Does that mean we can't serve the Lord? Of course not. We can serve the Lord but we also have to take care of very mundane, temporary, transient things. That's okay. God will use those as means of grace. But they are not permanent and our families here below are not permanent because they are bound by the bonds of

**Adam's flesh and blood which has got to die and be resurrected in Christ and be members of a new covenant family.**

**Does that mean family life is bad? No, it's holy. We should be priests in our domestic churches. Fathers, bless your kids at night before they go to bed. Sing songs at the dinner table. Pray prayers, and not just, "Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts which we are about to receive from thy bounty." I dare you to try some extemporaneous prayer sometime. It's not a Protestant monopoly. We can pray from our heart as God's children and we must.**

**But Paul, the inspired, errorless apostle here is communicating what God wants to communicate because the Holy Spirit is the principal author even of these words. "I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you." We're allowed to marry and it's glorious. "But to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord." And it goes on. We won't read any further but, verse 38, "So that he who marries is betrothed does well, but he who refrains from marriage does better."**

**I had a good friend of mine, an ex-Catholic and an anti-Catholic now say to me just last week, "Well, Paul does not mean for life." I said, "Okay, show me where that's the case." We looked and we looked some more and we looked in vain. And I said, "You know, when you go back and you look at Revelation 14:4, those one hundred and forty-four thousand virgins were not temporary virgins. God makes us all temporary virgins and then make many permanent virgins, but in marriage we should all be virgins, right?"**

**No, that's not what the Bible is saying. We put words in Christ's mouth and in Paul's mouth? These people died as virgins. Now if somebody could say, "Well, in ancient Israel there was no customary tradition that extolled virginity." Among the Pharisees, sad to say, it's very true. There was no such custom. But you have to deny what is plain and evident in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Essene community in the Qumran sect, at least, because they extolled virginity. Now, if you were married, you could also be a holy member of the community. Noahan Essenes like Josephus and Philo and other Jews recognize it even though they weren't Essenes, they might be Pharisees, they might be Sadducees, they might be Zealots; nevertheless all the other groups of Jews knew which group was the most righteous and holy, the Essenes.**

**They were the ones who extol virginity. This is no novelty. Mary when she refers implicitly to this pledge of virginity, when she says, "How can this be since I have not known a man?" Well, the angel would just simply have said, "Well, in a few months when you do get married, you'll make love and you will have a baby." I mean, did she not know basic anatomy and biology? No, as the early Fathers of the Church have always said implicit in that text, the only way it makes sense for her not to be saying something nonsensical, it means that she, like the Essenes was entering the marriage with a full recognition of the glory and the holiness of**

**marriage and marital love, physical, sexual love, but even a greater superior blessing if God confers the grace to live virginally in a marriage.**

**And that's what Paul's talking about in Corinthians 7 when he says, "If your passion for your betrothed is too great, if your passion for your virgin is the literal rendering." Now some translations say, "Is it daughter, is it the fiancée, is it your sister or what?" Well, Paul was saying something that he assumes the Corinthian Christian understand clearly. And from earliest days people were imitating Mary and Joseph, and even before Mary and Joseph this custom was found in Judaism among the holiest. It might be a hard pill for Americans to swallow because we like our sex in as many different ways as possible. That's the best way to sell books and films and whatever else you've got. And sex is not bad but good.**

**Marital sex is sacred. It's the means by which natural life is co- created with God. But there is something even greater. We've got to pray for our priests and religious, brothers and sisters. I'm not sure there has ever been a culture which has so sorely tried and tempted them. We've got to pray that they, too, can somehow join the one hundred forty-four thousand and we'll join with them too, because in addition to the hundred and forty-four thousand, there are those who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb, a vast multitude that no man can number. And they sing songs and worship the Lamb. They are priests and kings as well. God shows no partiality. St. Paul says to Timothy, "If you suffer with Christ, you will reign with Christ." If you suffer. And that's who we see reigning with Christ in the Book of Revelation.**

**This is why in the litany of Loretto, for instance, what is Our Lady? Queen of martyrs, Queen of virgins and Queen of confessors and then Queen of all saints, pray for us. This is taken right from the Apocalypse. It's really taken right from heaven, taken from the work of Jesus Christ. We can also see in Revelation 20, verses 4 through 6, the same idea. "Blessed and holy are those who have been martyred. They are seated on heavenly thrones" And what? Why? Verse 4, "Then I saw thrones and seated on them were those to whom judgment was committed."**

**Jesus Christ is the true judge. He sits on the great white throne that is described later on in Revelation 20, verse 11. But then He has subsidiary thrones. Why? Because He commits judgment for them. St. Paul says to the Corinthians, "Don't you know that you will judge the angels? They sit enthroned with divine judgment entrusted to them." They're like deputies. They're like Barney Fife only with much greater wisdom and power. They're deputized by Christ himself. They execute Christ's judgment for His glory for Christ, in Christ and through Christ.**

**Then let them judge. Let them pass sentence. Let them find out what things need judgment. Let them know. Pray to them and ask for their intercession in the one, sole mediator because, why? Because they are priests of God and of Christ we are told right in this text, verse 6. "They shall be priests of God and of Christ and reign with Him. Amen! Thank you, Jesus. Why? Because Christ's priesthood is not**

enough? No, because Christ is a generous giver and He gives a share to all of us who will cooperate with that grace.

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### Suggestions for Talking with Non-Catholics

Now I've got to tell you that whenever you talk to non-Catholics or even some Catholics who may be confused or ex-Catholics, you've got to ground this in Christ. You've got to root all of it in Jesus. It's His life, it's His grace, it's His blessing and His blessedness that we share in. The reason why the dead are blessed in 14:13, the reason why the martyrs are blessed in 22:14 is because they are in Christ; but they are blessed.

When Christ blesses you, rest assured, you are blessed! And that's why Our Lady can say in Luke 1:48, "Henceforth, all generations shall call me blessed." We're only proving her right and all we are doing is joining in with the angels because, what did the angels say? The angel blessed her, "Hail, full of grace, blessed are you among women." And when we call to the mother of God, that's practically what Elizabeth says, "The mother of my Lord has come."

So why is the rosary so offensive? The first half is nothing but scripture: "Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary," (because Christ has made her holy,) "Mother of God," (Elizabeth declared her to be the mother of the Lord,) "pray for us sinners," (what are we confessing? We're confessing our own depravity). I mean that's the doctrine of sin. "Pray for us sinners," (now because we are weak and dependent) "and at the hour of our death," (when we come before God). Look at all the good theology there.

We've got the doctrine of sin. We've got the doctrine of salvation. We've got the doctrine of grace. We've even got eschatology, the "hour of our death." I mean seldom do you find a paragraph in a theology textbook that's got so much good doctrine and good scripture. And all we are doing is echoing the angel and all he was doing was echoing Jesus because all he is, is a messenger of God, with God's message.

We bless God who is blessed over all and then we bless those whom He blesses because that is the nature of the covenant. It always has been. On your mark, get set, Genesis 27:29 (greater distance, this time. I'll give you a clue. It's after the table of contents and before the maps.) Genesis (Okay, okay, you both get a star.) The blessing of Israel, listen to this blessing of Israel, "Let people serve you," Isaac blesses Israel, "and nations bow down to you. Be Lord over your brothers and may your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you. Blessed be everyone who blesses you."



**That's what we do in venerating the saints. We bless those that God has blessed. That's it. "Blessed be everyone who blesses you." That is the nature of the covenant in the Old Times and the blessings don't diminish in the New Covenant. They increase. And so, if you are blessed when you bless those that God blessed back then, how much more blessed are you going to be when you bless those that God has blessed in Christ? It's ultimately the blessing of Christ.**

**We don't pray to the saints instead of Christ. We pray through the saints to God in Christ. Now you can say it various ways and you can have secondary meanings that could be right, but ultimately, the saints don't answer our prayers. They echo our prayers with greater profundity, insight and love. "The prayer of a righteous man availeth much." That's not only found in the New Testament, but that is basically witnessed throughout scripture. "The prayer of a righteous man availeth much." It's not just righteous men on earth but righteous men and women in general, wherever they are. They can pray and have it avail much.**

**That is beautiful. The German word for bless is segnum. It's actually derived from the Latin signare, which means to make the sign of the cross. The cross is the source of all blessing. We don't detract from the cross when we bless the saints whom Christ has blessed. We hold up the cross. We exemplify the cross. We exemplify the work of Christ. 2nd Timothy, 2, verses 11 and 12. I've already mentioned this, but I will mention it one more time. "If we die with Christ, we shall live with Him. If we suffer or endure with Christ, we shall reign with Him."**

**We imitate Christ. That is the call of the Christian. We honor those whom Christ honors with the same honor with which He honors them. That's the first and perhaps most fundamental reason but secondly, we want to follow their heroic example as they imitated Christ. I know for a fact that I've seen in many families where, if you have a good firstborn, the others can follow his example. I know from my experience that if you get a firstborn who goes astray, the chances are much greater that the others will go astray, like I did. Thanks be to God, he reaches us no matter where we are or who we are or what we do, but the fact is examples, especially heroic examples often help a great deal.**

**Think of American culture. The father of our country, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and so many others inspire courage and so what do we do? Erect monuments. And so what do Christians do, bash them and crash them and crush them? That's idolatry? No. We're not worshipping the statues, but we are venerating and honoring the memory of those who have sacrificed that we may live and prosper in natural life here below. And how much more would it be fit and proper to erect statues and have paintings and icons of those whose sacrifice provided us with supernatural life to prosper in Christ.**

**All we are doing is celebrating Christ's works, Christ's masterpieces, especially when it comes to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Worship God and God alone, but venerate, honor and bless those that he has honored and those he has blessed. We're**

only imitating Christ and we are only helping ourselves and others to follow the heroic example of His virtue and His sacrifice.

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### Concluding Tangent

Now before I close, I want to take a kind of concluding tangent. Perhaps I should have taken it yesterday, but I've talked about Mary quite a bit this morning as well as yesterday. I focused upon our Lady yesterday, so you might think I shouldn't focus on her this morning, but I like to focus on her every day. In particular there is one question that has already risen at least implicitly. We've talked about her and the Church teaches that we give *dulia*, we give veneration and honor to the saints, but to the one who is the Queen of all saints, we give *hyper-dulia*, which is not the same as *latria*, which is worship.

They're finite. They're creatures. They'd be lost and dead in sin were it not for the grace of Christ. God alone is infinite, eternal. He alone possesses *esseity*, self-existence. They have being. He is being itself. We never forget it. Let's help others realize that we never forget it and make the distinction clear. And let's make our worship of God all the better so that our *dulia* will be distinguished from our *latria*.

But what about the perpetual virginity of Mary? I mean we've talked about Mary and the *hyper-dulia*. We've talked about the virtue of virginity. Why the doctrine of perpetual virginity? Why is that defined *de fide* as something Catholics must believe to be in good standing with the Church? Well, for one reason because it's true. Second, because the Church has always accepted it and the Church has always taught it. The Creed of Epiphaneus in 374, "Mary, ever virgin." Second Council of Constantinople in 553 as well as the Lateran Council in 649, "Mary, ever virgin." Augustine insisted upon it. In addition to St. Augustine, St. Jerome wrote a book on the Perpetual Virginity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in response to Helvidious who in 380 was the very first person on record to actually deny Mary's perpetual virginity and to suggest that Jesus' brothers were blood brothers and sons of Mary.

Jerome didn't even want to write the book. He thought Helvidious was so weird. He referred "to the novel, wicked and daring affront to the faith of the whole world" at the denial of the perpetual virginity that this upstart represented. Luther believed in it. Calvin affirmed it. Zwingle, they all spoke of "Mary, ever virgin" in their writings. Well, wait a second. How do you deal with the Biblical passages?

Why don't we do that just briefly? The brethren of Christ is probably the greatest obstacle. Matthew 1:25 is the passage we looked at before, "He knew her not until she brought forth her firstborn son." Now I've already said that the word "until" can be a conjunctive. What I mean is that "until" does not always mean something like, "Well, she was a virgin until after she had a child and then she ceased to be a virgin." It doesn't always mean that. For instance in 2nd Samuel 6, verse 23,

**"Mishal, Saul's daughter and David's wife, had no children until the day of her death." 2nd Samuel 6:23, "Mishal had no children until the day of her death," which obviously does not mean she had twins at her funeral. Deuteronomy 34, verse 6 speaks about Moses' burial, which God apparently performed and it says, "No man knows of Moses' burial place until this present day." Well, it doesn't mean that when Deuteronomy was written, they found it. They never found it.**

**So the Knox translation of Matthew 1:25 is that he knew her not at any time before she brought forth her firstborn son. Well, what about that phrase "firstborn?" Doesn't that imply second and third born? No, of course it doesn't, and anyone who knows the Old Testament realizes it because firstborn in Exodus 13:2 and elsewhere and Exodus 34 as well is actually a technical term for the child that "opens the womb." The firstborn is consecrated automatically to the Lord. Even if you have many others that firstborn is consecrated and special.**

**Well, you could say, "This is unnatural for her not to have relations with Joseph." Well, not if she made a sacred pledge which apparently was a custom back then, even if it was rare. But let's take it a step further and say, "Okay, it is a little bit unnatural to be married and not have sexual relations with your partner, but it's also unnatural to conceive the second person of the Godhead in your womb and to have your womb become the ultimate, cosmic tabernacle of salvation for all God's children. To be set apart for the holiest conceivable purpose in all of human history."**

**I mean we don't use our finest china for backyard picnics, do we? And so, if God uses this vessel for the holiest purpose conceivable to man, Joseph may have had a sense of propriety about other uses that are not unholy in themselves, just like picnics and plastic cups are not unholy, but things belong in their proper place. It is a little bit unnatural to give birth to the Second Person of the Trinity, teach the God who created you to walk and to talk and to pray. It wouldn't be unnatural, I think, if you found yourself in this situation, it wouldn't be unlikely to devote yourself so entirely to serving God in this absolutely unique and spectacular and strange opportunity of a lifetime.**

**It's not just a normal family. The Holy Family is an exemplar, but it isn't the typical family because not many people have for a son or a brother the eternal Logos. That's one of a kind. So their marriage was one of a kind.**

**But wait a second. What about those who were called specifically the brothers of Jesus? Take one example, James. James, we're told is the brother of Jesus. But wait a second, if you study the cross scene, you might learn what that means. Matthew 27:56 speaks of Mary at the cross who is the mother of James and Joseph. Mark 15:40, you can go to the Paramount text describes Mary the mother of James the Less. And then in John 19, verse 25 we read about Mary, Jesus' mother and then the next phrase is, "Mary the wife of Cleophus."**

Now it's obvious as you correlate these three texts, Matthew 27:56, Mark 15:40 and John 19:25, that Mary the wife of Cleophas, distinct from Mary, the mother of Jesus, is the mother of James. But only after you have correlated the three texts. Somebody could say, "Wait a second. Matthew 10:3 describes James as the son of Alphaeus, but the overwhelming majority of scholars say that probably Cleophas is the Greek name for the same man who is called Alphaeus, because it was very typical to have an Aramiac name like Alphaeus at the same time you took a Greek name for the Greek-speaking folks in your community, such as Cleophas. Like Saul, the Pharisee. Saul is his Jewish name. God didn't say, "I'm going to change your name to Paul." That was already his legal, Roman name. It was common back then.

I also would suggest that you turn and consider John 19 at the foot of the cross. If Jesus had other brothers, older brothers, like in John 7; a lot of people supported the fact that he seems to have older brothers -- then who do you think he is to entrust his mother to John, the beloved disciple? But if you do some in-depth study of this, you will discover that James and John were Jesus' cousins and what Jesus was doing was entrusting his mother to one of his cousins, the beloved disciple. At least that's what countless scholars hold. Which would be very natural if you had no blood brothers but you did have cousins. And in the Hebrew there is no word for cousin. The word that's used is brother, not just for cousin but for nephews, as well.

Examples abound. Genesis 14:14, Lot is called Abraham's brother. Technically Uncle Abraham had Lot as a nephew. Genesis 29, verse 15 speaks about Uncle Laban being Jacob's brother. Actually, I think it's the other way around, Jacob is Laban's brother. It's a nephew relationship but in Hebrew there's no word for cousin. And so what you find the Greek Old Testament doing is not translating Genesis 14:14 "cousin," but transliterating it adelphos or brother, even though the translator knows we are talking about a nephew or a cousin in other cases. And what seems to happen in the New Testament is quite the same thing. That is, this custom is carried over into the New Testament books.

Adelphos is used frequently to denote those that we can prove to be cousins, not anepsios which is used infrequently because it wasn't in keeping with Hebrew custom. We could go on looking at other examples and other proofs. But let me say again that when this novel discovery, when this brand new teaching that Jesus had brothers and sisters was introduced by Helvidius in 380, almost four centuries after Christ, all St. Jerome could say is that this is novel, wicked and a daring affront to the faith of the whole world.

We, brothers and sisters, have a bad case of amnesia. We have forgotten what we need to recall. And not only do we need to recall it, we need to live it and love it and share it and increase our knowledge about it. And after all, you might say, "I don't have time. I don't have energy. But look, we've got sixty, seventy, eighty years here. Some have thirty, forty, fifty, but what better use for our time can you think of than to get to know the Blessed Trinity and all that Christ has done to save us and to make us his family? Can you think of better things to do with your time? I can't.

**We've got boot camp here. We've got training ground. We've got to prepare ourselves for an eternity with God. We've got to learn to love worship. We've got to learn to love the saints. We've got to practice so that when we get up there, it isn't going to be strange and new. What will be strange and new will be to behold the glory of Christ in their faces, but those fraternal bonds will be just increasingly strengthened through this life preparing us for that grand reunion, for that great homecoming. Because heaven is our home. The Blessed Trinity is the first family and all of the saints are our brothers and sisters.**

**And so we imitate Christ. We hold fast to the ancient faith of the Church as we venerate saints, especially the Blessed Virgin Mary.**

# **EUCCHARIST, HOLY MEAL**

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**In this program Scott brings to life the Biblical background of the Eucharist as a sacrifice and as the establishment of the New Covenant. Focusing on the Biblical concept of covenant or blood-oath, Scott explains how the Eucharist is the way in which God swears His final and eternal promise to His children. Finally, Scott highlights the specific objections some have with the Catholic Mass and provides listeners with key scriptural passages that will help anyone to understand the true nature of the Eucharist.**

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## **Introduction**

**We're going to be focusing on the very center of the faith this morning, and I feel so woefully inadequate because there is just so much to say about the Blessed Sacrament. It's a sacrament and it's a sacrifice in which Our Lord Jesus Christ not only establishes a covenant, but really, is the covenant. And the sacrament contains our Lord Jesus Christ, body, blood, soul and divinity; but it's also an offering. So in the Eucharist Our Lord Jesus Christ body and blood, soul and divinity is offered to the Father continually in an unbloody manner. Then, finally, it's not just contained. It's not just offered but it's received. All three of those elements are crucial to understanding how the Eucharist is both a sacrifice and a sacrament. And when it's received, we call that Holy Communion. All three of those belong together. They are inseparable. They are critical.**

**Now we've got to say one thing right off the bat. We are talking about an unbloody sacrifice and we are talking about a sacrifice in which Christ's death is represented. We are not talking about a bloody sacrifice where Christ is still bleeding. We are not talking about the fact that Christ is still dying on Calvary. He's not dying. He's been buried. He's been raised. He's ascended. He's enthroned and there he is in glory. But as he is in glory, he is the Lamb of God, enthroned as the Pascal Lamb; and so all of this belongs together in a very deep and mysterious way and I for one do not pretend to think that I can encapsulate or summarize it all adequately.**

**Now let's just also remind ourselves of another important theological doctrine. God is omnipresent. God is present everywhere; but Jesus Christ in His humanity, that is the flesh and the blood that He assumed for Himself from the Blessed Virgin Mary, that is only in heaven. That is spatially limited. In addition to its space, to its place in**

heaven however, we also say that through the miracle of the Mass and the Eucharist, Jesus Christ, not just in His divine nature, which is present everywhere; but in His human nature is present on the altars of the Church around the world as Mass is celebrated daily approximately 300,000 times each day.

So we are talking about the humanity of Jesus Christ which is inseparably united to His divinity. This is done, of course, to establish the New Covenant. Jesus Christ wants to be with us. His name, in a sense, is Emmanuel, God with us. God is with us in such a unique way with the New Covenant that we have to say it's a completely different kind of covenant because in the Old Testament, the covenants were all preparations.

In a sense, the first time a covenant is mentioned explicitly is with Noah and the covenant is that rainbow. So that covenant prepares for Christ because we see that when the Lamb is enthroned in Revelation 4 and 5, around his throne is that rainbow. Then the next covenant is with Abraham and Isaac and that oath covenant is established in Genesis 22 on Mount Moriah when Abraham was ready to sacrifice his only beloved son, but God stopped him. That covenant was not really completed until Jesus Christ, God the Father's only beloved firstborn Son went to Moriah to a peak called Calvary and there He was offered. And on it goes.

When Moses led the people out of Egypt and to Mount Sinai and he slew the animals and he took the blood and he threw it upon the people and he said, "This is the blood of the covenant." Those exact words were taken by Jesus in the Upper Room when he instituted the Eucharist, only to insert the word, "new" covenant, but it's there, practically verbatim because what Moses was doing was only a symbol or a shadow of what Christ would accomplish.

Likewise when David, seeing in himself and then in his firstborn son, Solomon, a priest king after the order of Melchizedek, there in Salem, there in Jerusalem as he took the Ark up and as he requested the building of the temple and as he gave the people bread and wine; all of this was a shadowy anticipation of what Christ would accomplish. But it was only a partial picture. So how can we possibly exhaust the meaning and beauty of the sacrament? It's impossible, but we can say this: God is not done in history until he is with us, until he is one of us.

For the first time in history, with the New Covenant, God is the covenant in his human nature. The Christian religion is the only religion established on the basis of the divine oath. All religions have divine oaths in this sense but we swear oaths to God, "So help me God." "Curse me God, if I don't fulfill this promise." But only in the Jewish scriptures and in the fulfillment of the Christian New Covenant do we have God swearing the oath, pronouncing upon himself the curse, and then establishing in his own body and blood, the covenant -- absolutely unique and distinct.

Now, I could say many more things about that and some other aspects catechetical, historical and so on. But I want to stop now and let you know something that you may be aware of. I have spoken on the Eucharist several times and I can see the tape supply on the table dwindling. That suggests to me that several people here may have already purchased these tapes. Now, I have given talks on the Eucharist. One is entitled, "The Lamb's Supper." Another one is entitled, "The Fourth Cup," and one is just basically a presentation of the meaning of the Eucharist in the series that I did on the sacraments.

Now, I don't want to repeat myself because, you know, it just wouldn't be kosher. Many of you are going to be listening to these tapes. We're making a tape this morning and so I want to go on and cover some new ground, but on the other hand it would be unfair of me to assume too much because I doubt if anybody here has had a chance to listen to any of those tapes just this week. So, I want to suggest a plan for the rest of our time this morning. What I would like to do is rapidly summarize the main points of the talks that I gave, especially the one entitled "The Fourth Cup," and then the one entitled "The Lamb's Supper." And if I had to give a title to this one, I would entitle it "The Meal of Melchizedek." All right, "The Meal of Melchizedek," it's somewhat cryptic and illusive but I think you will understand as we go on.

Before I go on, I want to just read to you some quotations from early Church Fathers about the Eucharist to give to you an awareness that this is not some innovation. This is not some novel invention in the Middle Ages. For instance, there at the end of the 1st Century, St. Ignatius of Antioch, disciple of the beloved disciple John, spoke of the heretics who were plaguing the Church in his day. "They abstained from the Eucharist because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior, Jesus Christ." It's a perennial problem, isn't it?

Then St. Justin Martyr in the 2nd Century, one of the great apologists, defenders of the faith, stated, "This food is known among us as the Eucharist. We do not receive these things as common bread and common drink but as Jesus Christ, our Savior, being made flesh by the word of God." Then in the 4th Century, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, another venerable Church Father, wrote, "Since then he has declared instead of the bread, 'This is my body,' who after that will venture to doubt. And seeing that he has affirmed and said, 'This is my blood,' who will raise a question and say it is not his blood?"

So we have testimony throughout all of the first centuries of the Church to this effect. You are hard-pressed, I would say it is practically impossible to find a single statement by anybody in the first eight centuries of the Church where you have a denial of the Real Presence of Jesus Christ, flesh and blood, body, soul and divinity there in the Eucharist. I remember when I first discovered that, I was still anti-Catholic, but boy, did that bother me; because I wondered how could John's disciple get it so wrong? How could St. Ignatius say something so patently false and superstitious after spending all this time at the feet of the beloved disciple, St. John?



**Now I'm convinced that he didn't get it wrong. Now I'm convinced that Vatican II got it right when it said, "In the Sacrament of the Eucharist, the unity of believers who formed one body in Christ is both experienced and brought about." We are in a sense what we eat. We're only in the supernatural body of Christ because in the Eucharist we receive the supernatural body of Christ.**

**Now before I go on and summarize those two talks, I would like to call your attention to something you've probably heard many, many times. It's taken from the Eucharistic Prayer # 1, the Roman Canon. First of all, just to kind of summarize the whole approach we've taken all week long. "Father, accept this offering from your whole family." In the middle of the Mass, we are told what we are and we are told what we are doing and that is we are praising and loving and sacrificing and worshipping our Father as he gathers his family.**

**Then it goes on in the same prayer to speak about God. We say, "Father, we celebrate the memory of Christ, your Son," etc. "Look with favor on these offerings and accept them as once you accepted the gift of your servant Abel who offered himself as an oblation." It was a perfect sacrifice of his own body and blood in an act of martyrdom, a very substantial image of Christ, but it was not perfect because it wasn't voluntary. It was involuntary; it's murder. "The sacrifice of Abraham, our father in faith who offered his only beloved son, on Moriah." Another very powerful symbol of our Lord, Jesus Christ. But then, he didn't really kill him, did he? So it's only an inadequate image and the bread and wine offered by your priest Melchizedek.**

**Now, that's taken from Genesis 14 where it says, "After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings," the four kings were with them. It goes on to talk about the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaven, that is the King's Valley, and Melchizedek, king of Salem which we said in another setting, later is called Jeru-salem, Psalm 76 shows us that, and "Melchizedek, the king of Salem, brought out bread and wine for he was priest of God Most High and he blessed Abram." This is the first time in the Bible that the word coen, the Hebrew for priest is used. He was the priest and he brought out bread and wine and those two things are in close conjunction. He brought out bread and wine and then it says he was a priest. Well, what's the connection?**

**Back then the priest did not need to offer the bloody sacrifices. Those only became necessary, we learn in Exodus and Ezekial 20 when Israel becomes enslaved and addicted to the gods of Egypt and to idolatrous customs which God has got to break by having him sacrifice the gods of Egypt ceremonially on Mount Sinai. But back when we had the patriarchal family religion rooted in nature, what was the sacrifice that pleased God? Well, bread and wine offered by God's priest Melchizedek, the first time that somebody is called a priest, he is offering bread and wine to Abraham who has come and paid his tithes and receives bread and wine and then he receives a blessing.**

**Have you ever had that experience where you pay your tithes and then you receive what appears to be bread and wine and then you receive a blessing from a priest? This is the pattern of the Eucharistic liturgy, where we give our offerings and then the priest, Christ working through the human priest, transforms them into his own body and blood and then he gives us that under the appearance of bread and wine and then he gives us the blessing.**

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### **Summary of "The Fourth Cup"**

**Now this is going to become very important as we unfold and unpack all of this. But before I go on with Melchizedek, let's just step back and let me summarize these two talks that are on tape. The first talk is "The Fourth Cup." What I did in that talk I will just summarize rapidly. I was investigating one of the last sayings of Jesus on the cross when He says, "It is finished." I had a professor and a pastor friend of mine ask the question from the pulpit, "What was Jesus talking about when he said, 'It is finished?'" My first response was, "Well, it's the work of redemption." Then he said from the pulpit, "You might be tempted to say, 'the work of redemption.'" Well, I just did, you know. And he said, "Well, actually, if you're going to do careful exegesis and interpret the passage in context, there's no suggestion of that big theological doctrine, there in the context of that passage. So you have to ask yourself, 'What is the primary meaning of the text in context. What is the "it" that is finished.' And besides we can't just summarize and say, 'Well, redemption is completely finished,' because Jesus hasn't been raised from the dead yet. And St. Paul tells us that He was raised for our justification. So redemption still has to unfold some more."**

**"It is finished," boy, that bothered me. I remember going out and really resolving to do some work. So I did. I went back and I went, I think five or six chapters backwards in John and I started reading the Synoptic Gospels and I believe I found a connection with the Passover, and I'll share it with you. Luke 22, verse 15, our Lord says, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you." So we are assured that the Last Supper in the Upper Room was a Passover meal. In Mark 14, verses 22 through 26, we hear the words of institution, "And as they were eating He took bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them and said, 'Take, this is my body.' And He took a cup and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them and they drank all of it and He said to them, 'This is my blood of the New Covenant which is poured out for many. Truly I say to you, I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.'"**

**And I thought, "Huh, I never noticed those words before, 'I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.'"** Elsewhere you have the same idea expressed in the gospels where Jesus says, "I won't drink of the fruit of the vine until," you know, I'm being glorified. And I thought, "Well, wait a second, what he said, when he said, 'It is finished,' he had

just taken some sour wine." I wanted to work on that connection a little more. And then I noticed the next phrase, "And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the night." They went to the Mount of Olives, in fact.

Now something disturbed me because I had been studying the ancient Jewish Passover liturgy for some time and I knew the four cups of the Passover liturgy represent essentially the basic liturgical structure of this meal. The first cup is called the kadush. It's the blessing that is pronounced over the first cup. The second one actually initiates the Passover liturgy in a technical way. The second cup of wine is drunk after you do the singing of Psalm 113, which is known as the Little Hillel Psalm and then the third cup, which is called the cup of blessing is drunk after grace is given. This is also done in conjunction with the prayer that is spoken over the bread. But what is so significant about this is that after the third cup but before the fourth and final cup, the Hillel Psalms are sung. It's one great hallelujah Psalm. We get the word hallelujah from hillel which means praise yah, yahweh, hallel-u-yah. And the Hillel Psalms 114 through 118 constitute a gorgeous and majestic Psalm of praise to Yahweh.

As soon as the third cup is drunk, you go ahead and sing that Psalm of the Hillel Psalms and then you proceed to the fourth cup of consummation, which is the climax of the Passover. What's so odd and what many scholars have noticed is that Jesus -- it says, "They sang a hymn, which is obvious, the Hillel Psalm, there's really no disputing that point. You know Jews who read this expect them to go on to drink the fourth cup. But it says, "They went out into the night." And right after they drank that third cup and right before they sang that Psalm, the Hillel Psalms, Jesus said, "I'm not going to drink of the fruit of the vine again until the kingdom is come."

Now there are actually some scholars who suggest that Jesus botched it. Maybe He was just so anxious. But to botch the liturgy at this point would be a disaster. It would be like a priest saying High Mass alongside the Pope and forgetting to say the words of consecration. Sure, Jesus is anxious but the disciples would have stopped Him. There would have been something else, I think. Well, somebody could still say, "Well, you know, maybe He was just too fearful."

Well, I would suggest otherwise, and if we go on a little bit further in the Gospel of Mark, I think we have a good reason to believe that Jesus did this deliberately. He interrupted the Passover liturgy right at its climactic moment. For what purpose? Well, in Mark 14, verse 32, it goes on to read, "And they went to a place which was called Gethsemani and He said to His disciples, 'Sit here while I pray.' And He took with Him Peter, James and John and went up a little farther. Greatly distressed and troubled, He said to them, 'My soul is very sorrowful, even unto death. Remain here and watch.' And going a little further He fell on the ground and He prayed that if it were possible the hour might pass from Him. And what does He say? He said, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee.' (Remove this cup.) "Remove this cup from me, yet not what I will, but what thou wilt.'"

What cup? I thought He was scared about dying. Why does he refer to his suffering and death as a "cup"? Hmm. Careful Jewish/Christian readers would see a connection. Why hasn't He partaken of the fourth cup? Why did He interrupt the holiest moment of the liturgy? Why does He go out into the night after the Hallel Psalms are sung? Why does He fall down on the ground and then ask the Lord to 'take this cup' away. Well, somebody could say it's a reference to some prophecy Psalm of Isaiah and Jeremiah regarding the cup of suffering, and I think that it does have a secondary reference to those. But if we are following closely the deliberate motions of our Lord, I think it's very plausible to draw a connection between the interrupted Passover liturgy and this anguished prayer of our Lord in the Garden.

Now you know how it goes on from here. He's arrested. He's beaten. He's mocked. He's tried and then He's convicted and sent out to Calvary. Remember when He was carrying his cross what happened? Mark 15, verse 23 says, "On the way up Calvary they offered Him wine mingled with myrrh," which is like an opiate, a great and powerful pain killer; but He didn't take it. After all He said, I won't drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom comes." And it hasn't come at that point, right?

Then, all of a sudden, we go on and we discover something I think very, very significant. In John 19 we're told that Jesus seeing that all was now finished, He said in order to fulfill the scripture, "I thirst." Now He's racked with pain. It's an agonizing death but He still has presence of mind. In order to fulfill the scripture, He says, "I thirst." Now do you think that man was not thirsty before now? Seconds before His death, is He just noticing, "Boy, I could use a drink?" No, I mean that would be to trivialize the matter. Jesus says in order to fulfill the scripture, "I thirst." John is depicting all this in very beautiful terms.

John (the Baptist) is the one who introduced Jesus as the Lamb of God in the first chapter, and now Jesus has become the High Priest, the sacrifice as well as the victim-sacrifice. How do we know? Well, for one thing, John records how Jesus had a linen garment that was without seam. A seamless linen garment is exactly what the priest was supposed to wear as he sacrificed the Passover lamb. And we also know that the hour of sacrifice was the hour when the Passover lamb was slain. We also read on in John 19 and we discover that the two thieves had their legs broken, but Jesus didn't because he had already died, thus to fulfill the scripture, "not a bone shall be broken." And if you trace it all the way back to the Old Testament origin of this, "not a bone of his shall be broken," you go through the Psalms back to Exodus and you discover that the Passover lamb's bones were not allowed to be broken. If your lamb had a broken bone, you had to chuck it and find another one.

Priest and victim and it's all according to a divine plan. And so Jesus says in order to fulfill the scripture, "I thirst." And just by coincidence, there's a little sour wine down there, a vinegar-like substance and a man takes a hyssop branch, which incidentally and coincidentally was what you use to sprinkle the lamb's blood over the door post, he takes a hyssop branch with a sponge at the end with the sour wine dipped in it and he lifts it up to Christ and Christ says, "No, I'm not going to drink

of the fruit of the vine?" No, he doesn't say that. This time He receives it and He says, "It is finished."

What is it? The Passover begun in the Upper Room. It is now consummated. The fourth cup, the cup of God's wrath, the cup of consummation wasn't drunk in the Upper Room. The reason why Jesus does this, I believe, is to show us that the Passover sacrifice of the Lamb of God, the firstborn son and the priest begins not at the foot of Calvary but in the Upper Room when the Old Testament Passover begins to be transformed by our Lord into the New Covenant Eucharist.

You could also say it this way: that if the Passover isn't finished until Calvary, I would suggest that Calvary is really begun in the Upper Room with the Eucharist. When does Jesus' sacrifice really begin? Well, He insists on the fact that His life is not being taken away from Him. He is laying it down. Now in the trial, in the passion, it's being taken away; but in the Upper Room, prior to all of that, Jesus lays it down. He says, "This is my body. This cup is the blood of the New Covenant."

What happens when you differentiate and separate body and blood? You signify death. When your body and your blood are separated, death begins. That's obvious, I think. So Jesus is symbolically and actually beginning the sacrifice. St. Augustine has said that Our Lord held himself in his own hands and commenced the sacrifice of the New Covenant Passover as He was transforming the old. Calvary really began in the Old Testament Passover being celebrated in the Upper Room, when the Eucharist was instituted and the Passover Eucharist of the New Covenant really isn't over until Calvary, when He says, "It is finished."

But wait a second. You've got to say one more thing because way back in Egypt, fifteen hundred years before, if you had slain a lamb and sprinkled the blood according to Moses' command and say to yourself, "Well, thereby my firstborn son will be saved," and you went to bed, you'd be wrong, dead wrong.

You'd wake up and he'd be dead. Why? Because one other thing had to take place. You didn't just have to take a lamb without blemish without broken bones, then sacrifice him and sprinkle his blood. You had to eat the lamb. You HAD to eat the lamb. I mean, even if you hate mutton, you had to eat the lamb.

So, in a sense, "It is finished," what is the "it?" The bloody death sacrifice. But is that all sacrifice is? Sometimes non-Catholics find it easy to think that way until they go back into the Old Testament, and as I went back into the Old Testament, it dawned on me that that's really only the first half of the sacrifice. And it really isn't even the goal or the end of the sacrifice. The second half of the sacrifice is really what it's all about. God doesn't just want dead bodies with drained blood. He wants peace and He wants love. He wants to restore communion.

How is that symbolically enacted in the Old Testament? By eating the victim in a sacrificial meal, because that is what restores family communion and that's what the

covenant is all about. So Jesus says, "It is finished." What is the "it?" The bloody death sacrifice of the Passover victim and the priest of the New Covenant. And so, as Catholics we have always said that He does not die again. He does not continue to suffer. He does not continue to bleed. "It" is finished. That whole dimension of sacrifice is finished. What began in the Upper Room is now finished on the cross and so He gives up his breath and He dies. He gives up his spirit and He dies. But the sacrifice of Passover is not complete until you eat the lamb.

No wonder St. Paul says in 1st Corinthians 5, "Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed for us." Therefore, what? Therefore we don't have any more sacrificial offerings or ceremonies or feasts and so on to celebrate because all those ceremonies are outdated and done with? No. He says, "Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed; therefore, let us keep the feast." And he goes on to talk about how we take out the leaven of insincerity and we have this unleavened bread. What's he talking about? Christ, our Passover has been sacrificed; therefore, we've got to achieve the whole goal of that sacrifice, the second half is communion where we eat the lamb.

Now you can't eat a lamb cookie in Egypt. If you didn't like lamb, you couldn't have your wife make lamb bread, little biscuits in the shape of a lamb and say, "God, you understand, we just can't stand the stuff." No, you do that, your firstborn would die. You had to eat the lamb. Jesus Christ has said to us, "My flesh is food indeed and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has everlasting life."

Let's turn to John 6 and see the context in which he says that. John 6, verse 4 tells us, "Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews was at hand." So everything that transpires within John 6 is within the context of the Passover. Jesus is talking to them now. At the time of the Passover, after multiplying these loaves, ending up filling twelve baskets with the fragments from the five barley loaves, He uses that as his point of departure for one of the most important sermons that He ever preaches and also one of the most disastrous from a human perspective.

He goes on talking about this bread and He goes on talking about Moses in context with that bread. For instance, in verse 32, "Jesus then said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven. My Father gives you the true bread from heaven, for the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.' They said to him, 'Lord, give us this bread always.'" Welfare state! "Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall not hunger and he who believes in me shall not thirst.'" And He goes on talking about this some more. The Jews would then murmur at him in verse 41 because He said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven."

They're thinking, "What is He talking about? This guy is Joseph's son. How does He say, 'I've come down from heaven?'" They only look at it from a human perspective. They don't see that He's the divine Son of God. Verse 47, "Truly, truly,

**I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness and they died. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven.'"**

**How often did they eat the manna? Every day. How often do we receive the Bread of Life? Every day. This is not a once for all sacrifice, like many anti-Catholics allege in the sense that Christ is sacrificed and now there's nothing more to be done. Jesus Christ is sacrificed as priest and as victim, as lamb and as firstborn son and as the Bread of Life, he gives himself to us as well as the unleavened bread of the Passover meal, which commenced, of course, the whole feast of unleavened bread the week after the Passover celebration. Jesus Christ is the Bread of Life, the unleavened bread of God which came down from heaven which the Israelites received every day, the manna of the New Covenant.**

**Christ through the Holy Spirit makes himself available as the Lamb of God to be consumed continuously. That's the whole point of the Resurrection, incidentally. The Holy Spirit raises up that body and glorifies it so supernaturally that body and blood which is glorified may be internationally distributed through the elders and priests of the Church so that all of God's children can be bound back to the Father in the New Covenant sacrifice of Christ. He didn't die again. He's not bleeding and he's not suffering. He's reigning in glory and giving us his own flesh and blood.**

**Where do you get that? From the Old Testament -- the manna, the Passover, the sacrifice as it's described on Calvary as it's initiated in the Upper Room and as he states right here in verse 51. "If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh." Jews stop, wait a second. Hold the phone. "John, what do you mean 'my flesh?'" Verse 52, "The Jews then disputed among themselves saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?'" Cannibalism, paganism, barbarism, sin in the highest degree.**

**So Jesus said to them, "I didn't mean it, guys. I was just kind of, you know, using hyperbole or metaphor." No. He actually intensifies the scandal. He actually raises the obstacle even higher. "He said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you unless you eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood,' which Leviticus condemns, the drinking of blood, 'unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no life in you. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is food indeed and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him.'"**

**He said that four times in four different ways. How else can you get a point across? As a non-Catholic preacher, I used to enjoy preaching from John 3 where Jesus says, "You must be born again," or born anew, born from above. But he only says that one time. And we've heard it a million times in the last century. Because all the non-Catholic evangelists stress that rightly. We need to be reborn from the Holy**

**Spirit, but Jesus said it once. Here he says four times, "You have to eat my flesh and drink my blood. My flesh is food indeed. My blood is drink indeed."**

**Four times. It bothered me that I had never preached a sermon on this before, nor heard one. After years and years and years of hearing sermons from the New Testament, I began to figure out why. Because Jesus made it so clear. He is the manna. He is the sacrifice. He is the priest. He is the victim. He is the firstborn son. He is the lamb. He is all of it wrapped up in one and then He says so scandalously, "Eat my flesh and drink my blood," knowing what offense they would take. But He doesn't back off. In verse 60, "Many of His disciples when they heard it said, 'This is a hard saying. Who can listen to it?'" That is an understatement. "Jesus, however, knowing in Himself that His disciples murmured at it," get it, the disciples, now, the followers, the spiritual protégés, not just the crowd now, the disciples themselves are taking offense at this and murmuring and grumbling! "And He said to them, 'Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the son of man ascending to where He was before? It is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh is of no avail. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.'"**

**Well, some people try to use that verse to nullify everything which is so patently obvious in the preceding verses. I used to as well until I tried to deal as honestly and prayerfully as possible with that passage. I'm talking about verse 63. If the disciples had just proceeded to take the flesh off the body of Christ right there and drink His blood, they would have done nothing supernaturally beneficial. Jesus is saying, "It's the Spirit that gives life," and so wait until the Spirit is given. When I breath my spirit upon the Cross. When the Spirit comes down at Pentecost, but especially when the spirit of Christ raises the body of Christ from the dead, it will be the Holy Spirit that makes Christ's flesh and blood holy, glorious and powerful as food for our souls and bodies. Not just the flesh alone.**

**"And the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life." What words? That you've got to eat my flesh and drink my blood, those words. So we can't just say, "Well, the words themselves are all we need;" because if the words alone are all we take, we're disobeying the words themselves. Did you catch that? I used to always say to these Catholics in Bible studies, "Look at verse 63. It's the words of Christ that give life." The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. That's right, but what are those words? If you just simply take the words without the Eucharist, you're disobeying the words because the words say, "Eat my flesh and drink my blood." And it's because of the Holy Spirit that we receive life in that flesh and now it all comes together. There's no either/or; there's a both/and.**

**In 63 we discover why Christ's flesh and blood will be so powerful and animating for supernatural life. Verse 66, "After this, many of His disciples drew back...." We get the impression that the vast majority of them said, "This is just too much." "...and no longer went about with him. And Jesus turned to the twelve;" he didn't apologize. He didn't say, "Now that we're down to twelve, I'll tell you what I really meant." He didn't say that at all. In fact he is perfectly willing for this obstacle to**



remain scandalous even to the twelve. "Do you also wish to go away. Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go?'" Almost implying we would leave if there was somebody else that we could trust more than you because what you said is rather baffling. But he says, "To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God."

Peter speaks of the truth for those true disciples because there was one disciple who didn't have the integrity to leave. Next verse, the devil came to Judas because Judas, unlike the honest disciples who left, refused to leave although he disbelieved. This is where Judas really becomes the son of perdition. In a sense you've got to give more credit to the disciples who walked away.

So we have reason to believe that this sacrifice of the New Covenant Passover begun in the Upper Room and consummated on Calvary and ultimately as 1st Corinthians 5 suggests continued and celebrated as a climactic communion on the altars of the Church around the world when we receive the Eucharist in Communion, all of this is right from the Bible but you've got to know your Bible. You've got to know John. You've got to know Matthew, Mark and Luke. You've got to know Exodus. You've got to know the Psalms. You've got to know Corinthians and you also have to know Revelation.

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### Summary of the "Lamb's Supper"

Take a look at Revelation 5. In Revelation 5, there is a scroll with seven seals that nobody can break open and everybody is really upset. In fact John almost begins to cry. In 5, verse 2, "A strong angel proclaimed with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?' And no one in heaven and on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it." What is the scroll? The word is bible. Most likely it's a reference to a covenant document, the New Covenant document that nobody is worthy to break open. "And I wept much, but no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it," because this scroll would consummate and fulfill the promises of the Old Testament.

"Then one of the elders said to me, 'Weep not. Lo, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, he has conquered so that he can open the scroll and seven seals.'" You could almost feel the hallelujah rising up from within your soul. The Lion of the tribe of Judah, growl for me, King, you know. You turn. You look and John turns to look and what does he see in verse 6, " And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw," what? Azlam, the lion? No. David crowned with glory? No. You'd think so, a lion and a king are the words used to describe it. "I turned and I saw a lamb standing, looking as though it had been slain."

**Jesus Christ is the son of David and the king of the new and heavenly Jerusalem. He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah and He is the Lamb of God, slain from the foundation of the world, as it said elsewhere in Revelation. But here in heaven on the throne of glory, after His crucifixion, His resurrection, His ascension, His enthronement, He still looks like a lamb. He still looks as though He had been slain. Why not clean up the body? Why not wipe away the wounds? Why continue resembling a lamb? Because He's continuing the Passover offerings, the sacrifice. Not by dying, not by bleeding and not by suffering but by continuing to offer up Himself as the firstborn and as the unblemished lamb, as the perpetual, timeless, everlasting sacrifice of praise to the Father.**

**And what do the people do? They rejoice and they break out into a song. And what is the song, "Worthy art thou to take the scroll and to open its seals for thou was slain." Past tense, "And by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation." And what has he done? He's become a priest to be sure, but for what purpose? "He has made them a kingdom and priest to our God." He has made those whom he has saved priests. And what do priests do? They offer sacrifice.**

**Has Christ's sacrifice ended all sacrifices? No. Christ's sacrifice has ended all ineffective, bloody animal sacrifices that never did anything anyway. Now for the first time in history we can really begin to offer sacrifice to God. Romans 12 says, "Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God." And it wouldn't be holy and acceptable except that it's united to Christ's perpetual sacrifice. He's not bleeding. He's not dying. He's not suffering, but he is offering a sacrifice as a lamb does, as a priest king does continually, forever.**

**And that's what it's all about. John wouldn't see a lamb looking as though it had been slain if the whole kit and caboodle was completed and done. Past tense. Yeah, it's completed and done, past tense, and it's still going on present tense, and it's going to go on forever in the future. Why? Because Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever, as Hebrews tells us.**

**Now, is this strange? Is this teaching novel? Well, let's take a look at 1st Corinthians and see how natural it seems to the apostle Paul. We have already looked at 1st Corinthians 5, "Christ, our Passover," that's in verse 7, "Christ, our Paschal Lamb has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." What's he talking about? Is he talking about leaven being like sin. No. He's saying let us celebrate the feast with unleavened bread. What feast? The Eucharist! The sacrifice continues because communion must be celebrated. We've got to eat the lamb, the resurrected, glorified, enthroned lamb that still looks as though he'd been slain because he's still giving himself to us.**

**Turn over with me now to Corinthians, chapter 9, verse 13. He says, "Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the**

temple and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings in the same way the Lord commanded. That those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel." Now we might be tempted to read Corinthians 9, 13 and 14 and say, "Well, back in the Old Testament they did temple service and altar service and sacrifice, but now in the New Testament they only proclaim the word."

The problem with that is that Paul goes on to say, Corinthians 11, as we will see, how Christ's death is proclaimed. Take a look with me at 1st Corinthians, 11:23-26. "For I received from the Lord what I shall deliver to you." Interesting, he received it not from Peter and the apostles. When Jesus appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus or perhaps at some other time, what did Jesus deliver to Paul? Instructions for the Eucharist. "I received from the Lord what I also deliver to you. That the Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way also the cup after supper saying, 'This cup is the New Covenant in my blood. Do this.' Commandment, imperative tense. "As often as you drink it in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes."

You proclaim the gospel. Let's go back then to Corinthians 9, verse 14, "In the same way the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel." How does Paul proclaim the gospel? Just by preaching? Or by celebrating the Eucharist? "As often as you do this, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." That's the gospel. Paul is talking in verses 13 and 14 about how he should be supported as an apostle and he does so in conjunction with temple service at an altar where there is sacrificial offerings which he as an apostle has the right to receive from. What's he talking about? A New Covenant temple? A New Covenant altar? A New Covenant sacrifice where he proclaims the gospel by celebrating the Eucharist.

Now let's go on to Corinthians 10 and get things straight really quickly here because Corinthians 10, gives us a proper warning. In the first ten verses of Corinthians 10, Paul says that back in the Old Testament with Moses, verse 3, "They all ate the same supernatural food and all drank the same supernatural drink." The water from the rock and the manna in the wilderness and both, Paul says in a sense, were signs of Christ's presence among them. Nevertheless, verse 5, "with most of them God was not pleased for they were overthrown in the wilderness."

In the next three verses he describes the Golden Calf incident where thousands of them died. In other words just because you receive supernatural food and drink doesn't mean you've got it made in the shade. You have to set things right with God and keep things right with the Lord. Verse 11, "Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction upon whom the end of the ages has come." We now have a greater and much more supernatural food and drink. So we can relax? No. We've got to be even more circumspect in searching out our hearts and making sure we are right with God.

He goes on in verse 16, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a coena, a communion, a participation in the blood of Christ?" Not a symbol. But a share, a communion. The bread which we break, is it not a coena, a communion in the body of Christ. "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body for we all partake of the one bread." He doesn't mean to say that there's one enormous loaf that we all take a piece from. There are many loaves of bread. There are many breads in that earthly sense, but there's only one bread in the heavenly sense, and that's Christ. Because we receive from one bread Christ, the Bread of Life, we who are many become one body, namely, the Body of Christ. He's suggesting that we become what we eat.

He goes on to contrast our sacrifice with other sacrifices and he says, verse 18, "Consider the people of Israel. Are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar?" What he is saying is back then when you eat the sacrifice, you have a communion in the altar of those animals. Now we have a communion on all of our altars in the New Covenant with Christ, the Lamb of God. Verse 21, "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Shall we provoke the Lord with jealousy? Are we stronger than he?" For some reason God takes this with the utmost seriousness. Why?

Corinthians 11, he spells it out even clearer. We've already read verses 23 through 26. Now we can conclude with verse 27 where he says, "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread and drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the Body and the Blood of the Lord." Now that language is actually like civil judicial language. Somebody who's practically guilty of murder or capital offense is guilty of the body and blood. Now if it's only a symbol, he might be guilty in some lesser sense, but when you profane the Lord's Supper, you actually become guilty of profaning the Body and Blood of the Lord. "Let a man examine himself, therefore, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning," -- the symbolism? No. "...the body, eats and drinks judgment upon himself."

Now is he just speaking metaphorically? He couldn't be because in the next verse he says, "That is why many of you are weak and ill and some have died." To receive the Eucharist in a state of mortal sin is playing with fire of the worst sort. He goes on in chapter 12, verse 12, "For just as the body is one," the Church, that is, "...and has many members and all the members of the body though many are one body, so it is with Christ for by one Spirit we were all baptized in the one body." When we received the water of Baptism, we received the Spirit of God. "And all were made to drink of the one Spirit." When we receive Eucharist, Communion, we receive the Spirit as well as the flesh and the blood and the body, soul, humanity and divinity of Christ.

This is significant, very significant. This, in fact, gives us the whole interpretive key to the Book of Revelation. We can't go into it this morning. I go into it in the Lamb's

Supper tape, but the fact is many non-Catholic, as well as Catholic scholars have noticed that the whole structure of Revelation is a big Passover liturgy where Christ, the Priest King, the firstborn Son and the Lamb looking as though it's been slain conducts and celebrates the heavenly liturgy. And the earthly liturgy is meant to be a reflection in that, a participation in that, and the early Church took it for granted. There is the Lamb looking as though it's been slain and making all of the people in heaven priests so they can assist in the offering of the firstborn son of God to the Father and join themselves with it.

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### The Meal of Melchizedek

But now I'd like to call your attention to our final phase and that is the Book of Hebrews. Turn with me now to the Book of Hebrews. Hebrews, chapter 6 describes how God had made a promise to Abraham and then he changed the promise to an oath. In this morning's Mass we had a reading from Ezekial where we saw that oath and covenant are practically interchangeable terms. When God swears an oath to Abraham, he makes a covenant. In Genesis 22:18, right after Abraham went to Moriah to sacrifice his firstborn through Sarah, God prevented it and then swore an oath saying, "Surely all the nations of the earth will be blessed through your seed."

The New Testament begins, "This is Jesus Christ, the seed of the son of Abraham, the Son of David." Jesus Christ is the one in and through whom God fulfills that oath he swore to Abraham. Where did he swear it? On Moriah, where the temple was later built and where Christ, the New Temple was later destroyed and rebuilt three days afterwards. It talks about this oath and then it goes on to talk about the priesthood of Melchizedek. In chapter 7, the first ten verses, it describes how Abraham met Melchizedek. It talks about the meaning of his name. He's the king of righteousness, that's what Melchizedek means in Hebrew. He is the King of Salem, which means peace, shalom. He is the priest of God Most High and he blessed Abraham, so he was superior to Abraham. Everything is mentioned about the meeting between Abraham and Melchizedek except one thing, the bread and the wine.

Now we are going to ask a question. Is that because the bread and the wine was the only thing that was unimportant about Melchizedek and Abraham meeting, or is it because the importance of the bread and the wine is so great but so obvious that it goes without saying? Let's study the next few chapters, just briefly look at those and see whether or not you think that the writer understands Melchizedek's priesthood in relationship to the bread and the wine that he gave Abraham. I think it is. I think it's significant.

For one thing we already saw back in Hebrews 5, verses 5 and 6 where God has sworn an oath to Jesus Christ. He says, "Thou art my Son. Today have I begotten thee." And he also says in another place, "Thou art a priest forever after the order

of Melchizedek." To be God's Son is like the same thing as being a priest after the order of Melchizedek. Remember way back in the Old Testament before the Golden Calf, fathers were high priests and firstborn sons were priests under their authority. This seemed to be the natural family pattern of Melchizedek. This is how the ancient Jews as well as the ancient Church Fathers understood it.

Jesus Christ is not a Levite so Old Testament Jews might be tempted to say, "Well, he can't be a priest, then." But Hebrews is talking all about the wilderness generation under Moses and how they committed idolatry and rebelled against God and how God sent all these punishments. The first rebellion was the Golden Calf, and the first punishment was to take the priesthood away from the firstborn, which had been theirs for centuries, and to give it to the Levites temporarily. What the writer of Hebrews is suggesting is that Jesus Christ, God's Son, is righteous enough to restore the original pattern of the father-son family priesthood, because this is a divine family that God, through Christ, is adopting us into through the sacrifice of Christ.

He is a priest after the order of Melchizedek. The word "order" does not mean order like the Dominican Order. It means after the manner of Melchizedek's priesthood. The writer goes on to make a big, sharp contrast between the Levitical priests who continue to offer these animals in sacrifice. They had to offer. They had to kill. They had to sacrifice millions of sheep, millions of goats and millions of cattle with millions of gallons of blood running down through the temple. Why? It was all after and because of the Golden Calf, whereas before all of that, you had a father and a son and a clean priesthood that Melchizedek represents. "After the manner of Melchizedek" suggests that Melchizedek's manner of priestly sacrifice was bread and wine. This is how all the early Fathers understood this, as well.

Now, it says in Hebrews 7 in verse 18, "On the one hand a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness, for the law made nothing perfect. On the other hand, a better hope is introduced through which we draw near to God." And it was not without an oath and it talks about how God swore this oath, and the oath that has been talked about is the oath that was sworn by God on Moriah where Christ was slain. Verse 22: This makes Jesus the surety of a better covenant. The former priests were many in number because they were prevented by death from continuing in office; whereas Jesus is one. There's the single priesthood, and he lives forever up in heaven. But he holds his priesthood permanently because he continues a priest forever. Consequently, he is able for all times to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

"For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens. He has no need like those high priests to offer sacrifices daily." In other words to kill and to have blood shed continuously. "...first for his own sins and then for those of the people. He did this once for all when he offered up himself. Indeed, the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests." That is the Levitical law that was given after the Golden

**Calf, "...but the word of the oath which came later than the law appoints a son who has been made perfect forever."**

**Now there's a lot here I realize we can't cover, and it's very deep; but there's going to be enough here to really feed our souls if we pay close attention. Now the point in what we are saying is this. We have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven. Notice that the Lamb is the one enthroned in Revelation. The Lamb and the firstborn Son of the Passover is the priest who ministers in a sanctuary, the heavenly sanctuary. He is a minister in a sanctuary. It isn't complete. He is ministering in the heavenly sanctuary and the true tabernacle which is set up not by man but by the Lord. "For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices. Hence it is necessary for this priest to have something to offer."**

**I read that a hundred times before the obvious meaning hit me like a brick in the face. He is a priest in heaven ministering now in the sanctuary and he's got something to offer and he's continually offering it. He's just not bleeding and dying and suffering any more. He's not killing any more animals, but he's continually offering the once and for all sacrifice which is himself; but it's a continual sacrifice. It's a perpetual offering. He's not dying, but he's still offering. That's exactly what the Catholic Church teaches about the Mass.**

**I didn't understand that. Then I read some basic catechisms and I understood it, but I still didn't believe it until I studied and restudied and prayerfully re-restudied Hebrews until I saw that Jesus Christ, the firstborn Son, which is the theme in the Book of Hebrews. He's a much greater priest than the Levites. They replaced the sinful firstborn sons until the true and righteous firstborn Son of God would come.**

**Before we had an Old Covenant family on earth. Now we've got a New Covenant family in heaven, our divine family. The Trinity's life is our family life and it comes to us through God's firstborn Son who was like Melchizedek in being a son-priest. But the bread and the wine that Christ offers is not earthly bread and wine but heavenly bread, heavenly wine in the sense that it's the body and blood of Christ. He is still to this day and forever a minister in the sanctuary and the true tabernacle is now in heaven which the Lord has set up. And every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices and that is why God appointed his own Son to be High Priest, to offer gifts and sacrifices. And what are they? To offer himself and all of us in union with him.**

**The sacrifice isn't over. Oh, baby, it's just begun! And we're going to be doing it forever in and through and with Christ. Not bloody animal sacrifices but our hearts and our souls and our bodies in union with the One whose body and blood, soul and divinity are perfect and pure -- the only acceptable sacrifice which makes our otherwise unacceptable sacrifices perfectly acceptable. "Holy and righteous," Paul says. He goes on talking about the superiority of the New Covenant that Christ established. Now that phrase, "New Covenant," is kind of an odd phrase. And this**

really is unfortunate because we've heard the phrase New Covenant hundreds and thousands of times. So we are insulated, almost like filters have been planted in our ears so we don't hear the significance, the spectacular meaning of the phrase New Covenant. Why? Because it's only said once in the entire Old Testament, Jeremiah 31, which is what the writer of Hebrews in the rest of chapter 8 quotes from, a huge, extended quote from Jeremiah 31. "The days will come says the Lord when I will establish a New Covenant with the House of Israel." Verse 9, "Not like the covenant I made with your fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. That covenant, they broke." When? At the Golden Calf. The covenant that he made with them out of Egypt they broke at the Golden Calf.

This New Covenant will not be like the Golden Calf in the Mosaic covenant which was broken because they were the firstborn sons who were supposed to be serving as priests and were. See for instance in Exodus 24, but in Exodus 32 they all lost it and the Levites got it because the Levites had swords by which they slew three thousand of the idolaters, presumably many firstborn priests were among the victims.

It won't be like that covenant because this firstborn Son won't break it, and that's what makes it new. "This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts and I will be their God and they shall be my people." Verse 13, and in speaking of the New Covenant he treats the first as obsolete and what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. Old Testament only uses "New Covenant" one time. Jesus in the gospels only uses the phrase "New Covenant" one time. When? At Passover time. Where? In the Upper Room. Why? To institute the Eucharist.

Now, do you see a connection? In other words, the writer of Hebrews has focused upon the key phrase, "New Covenant." He's made a mountain out of a molehill, if you're judging by numerical usage: one time in the Old Testament. Not how many, it's how significant it is. Jesus only used the phrase, "New Covenant" one time, when he transformed the Old Testament covenant of Moses, the Passover Covenant by offering himself as the unblemished Lamb and the firstborn Son and the Priest and the King and the Victim and all of it wrapped up in one. That is the New Covenant.

And so he goes on in Hebrews 9 to talk about the superiority. Back in the Old Testament, verse 9, we read, "According to this Old Testament arrangement, gifts and sacrifices were offered which cannot perfect the conscience of the worshipper. What is the contrast implied? Back then sacrifices were offered which couldn't perfect the worshipper's conscience, implying that in the New Covenant, what? Sacrifices are offered which do perfect the conscience of the worshipper.

That's what the Eucharist does. It cleanses our soul. It wipes away all venial sin. These Old Testament sacrifices, verse 10, deal only with food and drink and various ablutions, baptisms, in the Greek, regulations for the body imposed until the time



of reformation. Do you know when the real Reformation came? Not in 1517. The real reformation came in the Upper Room when the Eucharist was instituted, when the Catholic Church was formed. The time of reformation wiped away the weak ineffective Old Testament sacrifices. To do away with all sacrifices altogether? No. To initiate a new sacrifice which has intrinsic power to cleanse our consciences.

Verse 11, now, "The one Christ appeared as a High Priest of the good things that have come. Then through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with human hands, that is not of this creation, he entered once and for all into the holy place, that is heaven, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption." He took his own blood up there. He's not bleeding in the sense that he's suffering and dying, but he's up there as a Lamb looking as though he's been slain, offering his own blood. That's a Eucharistic Passover sacrifice and that's why the entire structure of Revelation is a Passover liturgy.

And it goes on to talk about the Old Testament's weakness in comparison with the New Testament's power. "For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls or with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ who through the Eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God purify your conscience?" The body was cleansed externally in the Old Testament sacrifices, but with Christ's Passover sacrifice which he continues to administer up in the heavenly sanctuary, our consciences are cleansed as we offer and receive that down here below on earth.

"Therefore," verse 15 says, "he is the mediator of a New Covenant." He only said that word covenant one time. "This cup is the blood of the New Covenant," when he instituted the Eucharist. That fulfilled Jeremiah 31. That's when he offered what appeared to be bread and wine. That's when he became a new Melchizedek, feeding the new children of Abraham so that through Abraham's seed, Jesus, all the nations of the world, all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Something which God had sworn but had not performed until Christ, the son of Abraham, was sacrificed on Moriah on the peak called Calvary.

And he began it in the Upper Room when he instituted the Eucharist which goes on and on and on here on earth and in heaven above forever and ever. He is the mediator of this new, everlasting covenant so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance which goes back to the promise that God gave to Abraham. Verse 24, "For Christ has entered not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf to offer himself repeatedly as the High Priest enters the holy place yielding with blood not his own. He offers Himself repeatedly not like the Old Testament priest who took in blood that wasn't his own. He offers Himself repeatedly with His own blood without any death and suffering, an unbloody sacrifice, but one that belongs and pertains to the Lamb of God. For then He would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world, but as it is, He

appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

So what do we conclude from this? He's abolished the Old Testament and he's established the New Testament. We have a sacrifice in heaven that is perpetual and effectual. Turn with me now to Hebrews 10 and here is where we will draw our conclusions. Verse 19, "Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter into the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus..." It's because of that Eucharist and because of Christ the High Priest offering Himself that I've got confidence to draw near to the presence of God. That's how John could do it. That's why the scroll's seals could be broken open.

We have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living language He opened for us through the curtain, that is, through His flesh, His flesh and blood. When were they offered? His body and blood were offered when He instituted the New Covenant in the Upper Room. "And since we have a great High Priest over the family of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith with our hearts sprinkled clean, a reference to Baptism, from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering for he who promised is faithful, and let us consider how to stir up one another in love and good works." Amen! Let's do it.

If Jesus Christ who is our master creator gave Himself up for us, we have got to learn how to treat other people as though they are more important than we are. Let's figure out new ways to stir each other up to love and good works. The Bible study that starts this fall -- get involved in it and encourage others to feed upon the Bread of Life, the holy Word of God. Think of other ways, too, that you can serve and love in this community to show people we really are the Body of Christ. Let's stir each other up, but not provoking anger, but provoking love and good works. Not neglecting to meet together as has become the habit of some, but encouraging one another all the more as you see the day draw near.

Verse 26 is often misunderstood, "For if we sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins but only a fearful prospect of judgment and a fury of fire which will consume the adversaries." What's he mean? Does he mean in some generic sense that if you guys deliberately sin, there's no longer a sacrifice for you? You're dead. You're going to be burned alive. If we interpret it in the general sense, I'm afraid that's what it means. But let's not interpret it out of context. What is the sin he's deliberately referring to? Well, what's the preceding verse? "Don't neglect to meet together as has become the habit of some."

The Lord's day, from the earliest times, was the regular meeting for the people of God. Even the Romans tell us that early on Sunday morning they would get together. They would sing hymns worshipping Christ as God. And then we are told that they would take an oath. The Latin word is sacramentum. They would take an

**oath sacrament and swear not to sin. All right. What does it mean? It means if we sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth -- what truth? -- the truth of Christ's sacrifice which is represented in the Eucharist on Sunday.**

**People who don't meet together on the Lord's day are repudiating the only sacrifice that will work for their sins. The sinning deliberately refers to deliberately sinning by not going to Mass. We don't know anybody who has committed that sin, do we? All American Catholics go to Mass every week. It hasn't become the habit of some Catholics not to go to the Eucharist, has it? God help us if we don't attend weekly liturgy as has become the habit of some. We're sinning against the most beautiful laws that God has delivered to humanity, that there is a once and for all powerful sacrifice, God be praised! And we renew that sacrifice every time we draw near to the Eucharistic banquet.**

**It goes on, verse 29, "How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the men who spurn the Son of God?" Notice, "They profane the blood of the covenant." Now that phrase is only used by Jesus once when he instituted the Eucharist of the New Covenant. "This cup is the blood of the New Covenant." And you profane the blood of the covenant when you neglect the Eucharist, when you miss Mass, when you say, "It's not that important. I've got better things to do."**

**We've got to go there. We've got to be there, but we've got to prepare to be there and we've got to be there with hearts and minds, with soul and body. We've got to be there with the help of the Holy Spirit. We've got to offer up ourselves in union with Christ because we are members of his mystical body and that body is what's being sacrificed continually. If we don't, we profane the blood of the covenant by which we've been sanctified and outrage the Spirit of grace, but if we do, what will happen?**

**Turn with me to Hebrews 13, verse 9, "Don't be led away by diverse and strange teachings for it is well that the heart be strengthened by grace, not merely by foods, like the Old Testament elders which have not benefited their adherence." Verse 10, "We have an altar." If there's no sacrifice, there's no need for an altar. We have an altar; therefore, we have a sacrifice, Christ Himself. "We have an altar from which those who serve the sanctuary," the tent, the Old Testament priests -- " have no right to eat for the bodies of those animals, those whose blood is brought in the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp." It goes on to talk about how Jesus left the camp and suffered.**

**So we should, too. Verse 14, "For here we have no lasting city." The earthly Jerusalem is not our city, the heavenly Jerusalem is. And it goes on. "Through Him, then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God." We still sacrifice; "that is the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name." "Now may the God of peace," verse 20, "who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant equip you with everything good that you may do His will, working in you that which is pleasing in His sight." It is the blood**

**of the covenant that we receive in the Eucharist with souls made right with God by which we are enabled to do His will, by which God works in us that which is pleasing in His sight.**

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### **Conclusion**

**The meal of Melchizedek is the bread and the wine, but it's so much more. We go beyond the appearances of bread and wine to the reality of the Son of God and His body and His blood and the soul and divinity. By that one sacrifice we've got confidence. By that one sacrifice we've got forgiveness and by that one sacrifice we've got power to do the will of God.**

**Let's ask the Lord to renew for us our devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, the Holy Eucharist. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit we pray. Father in heaven, we ask that you would renew that devotion, increase our understanding, magnify our zeal and give to us, O Lord, a spirit of constancy so that we will not neglect the Mass, the sacrifice of the New Covenant. We will not outrage the spirit of grace nor profane the blood of the covenant. We will appreciate and correspond to and cooperate with all that you have done and given to us to grow up as your sons and daughters. Your New Covenant family, O Lord, is the most treasured possession in the cosmos and we cling fast to it now and ask that you would hold fast to us and never let us go and hear us as we pray: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Thank you very much.**

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