

## THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

*Lesson 11 – Study Questions*

*Matthew 15:1-39; 16:1-28*

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**Review:** *From your experience at the Cornerstone meeting last week, share something that helped build your faith.*

### DAY ONE

Read Matthew 15:1-20

**NOTE:** Pharisees were a group or movement, primarily of laymen, who developed particular traditions for how God's law was to be observed. There were about 6,000 Pharisees at the time of Jesus, out of a total Jewish population estimated at a half million to one million in Judea and Galilee. The Judaism of today is not identical to the Judaism of the Pharisees of the time of Jesus, but the traditions of the Pharisees are part of the roots of modern Judaism. *Martin*

In the New Testament period the scribes were the professional interpreters of the Law in the Jewish synagogues. The Law was revered as the precise expression of God's will, and by its multifarious prescriptions the daily life of every pious Jew was regulated in all its minute details. *Catholic Encyclopedia*

1. Today's lesson begins with the Pharisees and scribes coming to Jesus from Jerusalem and questioning why his disciples "break the tradition of the elders." What does the Commentary, page 83, note is missing in their traditions?

2. From verses 3-6 briefly summarize how Jesus responded by turning the tables on the Jewish leadership in regard to the Mosaic law to honor their fathers and mothers:

What Jesus tells them God said:

What Jesus says they said:

**NOTE:** To justify his accusation, Jesus shows how the rabbinic custom of dedicating property to the temple, and thus withdrawing it from "secular" use (even aid for one's parents), frustrates God's will in the fourth commandment (Ex 20:12) ...God does not want sacrifices for himself but compassion...Their commandments honor neither God nor their parents. *Meier*

3. Jesus goes on to quote Isaiah and then apply it to the scribes and Pharisees, once again calling them hypocrites. He also warns the people that what comes out of the mouth reveals what is in the heart (verses 7-11). What could be current examples of that, both positive and negative?

**NOTE:** In verses 12-15 Jesus' disciples asked him if he knew that the Pharisees were offended by what he said. Jesus replied with another parable, invoking agricultural imagery. "A farmer might plant a plot of beans and pull out weeds that sprout up among them. So too God will uproot whatever he has not planted (meaning the Pharisees) ...The Pharisees are "the blind leading the blind." ... thus, Jesus accuses them of being incompetent in their leadership, and those who follow them will also fall into a pit." *Martin*

4. Peter says the disciples don't understand and Jesus retorts, "are even you still without understanding?" (verse 16) He then explains that what goes into the mouth is expelled, but what comes out of the mouth comes from the heart. What are the evil thoughts that Jesus says can come from the heart and defile? (verse 19)

5. CONNECTION: The Pharisees' focus on purification laws didn't address the interior of the heart and the closeness that God desires. Thus, it is possible that we too can follow the traditions of our Church and yet feel far from God. Yet, God is never far from those who love him and worship from the heart. Share a time when you were unexpectedly reminded that God is always near.

Read Romans 8:38-39 and begin your prayer today with the grateful assurance that our God will never leave you.

## **DAY TWO**

**Read Matthew 15:21-28**

**NOTE:** As today's lesson begins, Jesus has just torn down the wall of laws about clean and unclean which kept Jews and Gentiles apart. Now he acts out his own teaching in one of his rare contacts with a Gentile. The story is similar to that of the centurion (Matthew 8:5-13). *Meier*

The verses regarding the Canaanite woman are an example of a "pericope," a section of related Scripture verses that express a coherent unit of thought or a story and may be given a title. In ancient Greece, the word was used to describe a bit of any book that was "cut out" or excerpted from the larger text, but it's come to refer mainly to Scripture passages selected to read on special occasions or in liturgies.

6. Jesus and his disciples then traveled to Tyre and Sidon (coastal, pagan territory). What about verses 22-23 seems unusual or surprises you?

7. In what way(s) does the Canaanite woman show her faith?

**NOTE:** What is faith? Faith is an experience of God. Faith happens whenever you become aware that you are not alone, that another who is not of this world is nonetheless in front of you... the Gospels are both good news and guide.

They proclaim Christ. Christ comes to us through the gospels. We stand when the Gospels are read because we believe that we are welcoming Jesus, the living Word of God, who has come into our midst. *America Magazine: "What is Faith? The Canaanite Woman Shows Us the Answer*

8. The Canaanite woman humbly accepts Jesus' judgment upon her world, but she doesn't give up. She replies, "Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters." How did Jesus respond? (verse 28)

9. One of the ways in which this pericope parallels that of the centurion's servant in Matthew 8:10 is that in verse 28 we read that the Canaanite's daughter was healed "from that hour" ("instantly," in some translations). In what other way do you see this pericope paralleling that of the centurion's servant?

10. CONNECTION: The story of the Canaanite woman is puzzling. We may wonder why Jesus would say that he came only for "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" or why he is curt with the woman, even referring to her people as dogs. This could have been a teaching lesson for the disciples; certainly, the faith of the Canaanite woman provides a contrast to the unbelief of the Jewish religious leaders. Our Commentary suggests that this could have been a turning point in Jesus' own understanding of his mission to all people. Share a lesson you can take away from the story of this encounter.

Read Psalms 25:4-5 and write a prayer today asking God to continue to open your mind to his will on your faith journey.

### **DAY THREE**

**Read Matthew 15:29-39**

11. We next see Jesus walking by the Sea of Galilee, (on the Gentile side of the lake, per the Commentary) then up a mountain, and sitting while the great crowds surrounded him. Briefly summarize what Jesus did and the crowds' response. (verses 30-31)

12. With verse 32 Matthew begins another rendering of the feeding of a great crowd. The USCCB-Notes on Matthew state that, "Most probably this story is a doublet of that of the feeding of the five thousand (Mt. 14:13-21)." Compare the two stories and note a few differences:

The number of the crowd  
Who initiates the feeding  
How long the crowd has been with Jesus  
Number of loaves and fishes  
Remaining baskets after the feeding

13. In this second rendering of Jesus healing and then miraculously feeding thousands, there is more emphasis on messianic fulfillment. Read Isaiah 35:5-6 and briefly note how Jesus fulfills this prophecy. (see also Commentary, page 85)

**NOTE: The feeding of the 5,000 is recorded in all three synoptic gospels; the feeding of the 4,000 is only recorded in Mark and Matthew. *Catholic-resources.com***

14. Jesus has satisfied their hearts with food, healing, and teaching. Read and record Psalms 107:8-9 and take a moment to pray for those who are hungry today, whether spiritually or physically.

15. CONNECTION: Both the feeding of the 5,000 and the feeding of the 4,000 can be seen to foreshadow the Last Supper when Jesus will take bread, say a blessing, break it and give it to his disciples as his body. Those who follow “the way” of discipleship will have the Eucharist to nourish and sustain them on their journey to “the banquet in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 8:11) (*Martin*) Share ways in which partaking of the transformative power of the Eucharist has affected your life.

Jesus gives himself to us in the Eucharist as spiritual nourishment because he loves us. By eating the Body and drinking the Blood of Christ in the Eucharist, we become united to the person of Christ through his humanity. *USCCB, The Eucharist*  
Read and record John 6:56 and take a few moments to meditate on this great Sacrament.

#### **DAY FOUR** **Read Matthew 16:1-12**

**NOTE: Once again, the Pharisees and Sadducees came to test Jesus. The Greek word for test can also be translated “tempt” and was used for Satan’s tempting of Jesus in Matthew 4:1,3. They ask Jesus to show them a sign from heaven... Jesus has just healed a great many people and fed a crowd, but those who are hostile to Jesus do not accept these works as originating in the power of God...Matthew’s gospel seems to be heading toward a showdown between Jesus and his adversaries. *Martin***

16. Jesus replies to the demand from the Pharisees and Sadducees for a sign from heaven (heaven and sky are the same word in Greek). From verses 2-3 briefly explain how he uses a familiar reference to the sky in his answer. Comment on what you think the tone of this answer would have been.

17. In verse 4, Jesus once again mentions himself in relation to Jonah (the first reference was in Matthew 12:38-45). Looking back on chapter 12, to what do you think Jesus is referring?

18. From verses 5-7, answer the following questions:

What had the disciples forgotten?

Of what did Jesus warn them?

About what did the disciples incorrectly think Jesus was warning them?

19. Jesus once again tells the disciples they are of little faith and reminds them that he had just miraculously met the needs of a multitude. He then issues a second warning of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. With verse 12, what did the disciples come to understand Jesus meant by “leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees”?

20. CONNECTION: Leaven (yeast) in the bible symbolizes moral influence whether good or evil. Good leaven can represent growth, such as loving words or kind actions. But, even a small amount of leaven, especially a small amount of sin, can wreak havoc over time. What is an experience you have had with good or evil “leaven”?

Read and record Psalm 34:9 and let these thoughts lead you into prayer.

## **DAY FIVE**

**Read Matthew 16:13-28**

**NOTE:** Jesus and the disciples moved north to Caesarea Phillipi, perhaps near the site of an ancient spring. The area around Caesarea Phillipi is verdant, and in Jesus’ time, served as something of a royal resort for the Romans. (*Faith ND, Caesarea Phillipi*). Jesus questions the disciples as to who people say he is; they respond “Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He asks who they say he is and Simon answers, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” (verses 13-16) What’s important here is that these two titles (Messiah and Son of the living God) are brought together. *Meier*

21. While the declaration of Jesus as Messiah is not new in Matthew (see 1:1,17,18; 11:2) Jesus' blessing of Peter is unique to this Gospel. Jesus shares that Peter's faith declaration did not come through human means, but through a revelation from God. (verse 17) Complete Simon's renaming and assignment of responsibility from verses 18-20:

And so I say to you,  
and upon this rock  
and the gates of the netherworld  
I will give you  
Whatever you bind on earth,  
and whatever you loose on earth,  
Then he strictly ordered the disciples

**NOTE:** Peter has recognized Jesus' role in God's plan; now Jesus informs Peter of the role he will play in this plan. Peter's name is a form of a word meaning rock, cliff, bedrock. The corresponding word in Aramaic- the language Jesus and the disciples spoke- means rocky craig (Cephas – see Galatians 1:18). Jesus means that Peter himself, not merely his statement of faith, is the rock on which he will build his community. *Perrotta*

22. In verse 21 Matthew uses the words "From that time on" to indicate a new beginning. Many of Jesus' efforts have been directed at teaching and healing the crowds; now his focus will be on preparing his disciples for his death. (*Martin*) What are the things that Jesus tells them must happen?

23. After Jesus announces his approaching death, Peter rebukes him. Comment on Jesus' response in verse 23, include noting anything in this response you hadn't noticed before.

**NOTE:** Thus, Peter is seen in his two contrasting aspects: he is the Rock of the church when he professes faith in the true revelation he has received; he is the stone of stumbling when he refuses to believe the further revelation he receives. *Meier, The Vision of Matthew*

24. Jesus defines the conditions of discipleship in verses 24-26. When you read these verses, in what way(s) and by what specific verses do you feel most challenged?

**NOTE:** Chapter 16 ends with a confirmation that for those who take up their crosses, they will be rewarded accordingly on the Day of the Lord. "A readiness to follow Jesus even to giving up one's life for him is the condition for true discipleship; this will be repaid by him at the final judgment." (*USCCB, Matthew*) But we will be reminded later (Matthew 24:36) that "of that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone."

25. CONNECTION: St. Rose of Lima said, “Apart from the cross, there is no other ladder by which we may get to heaven.” (*CCC 618*) Consider how the conditions Jesus describes as essential to discipleship apply to you in today’s world. How can the examples of Jesus’ early followers give you encouragement?

Read Romans 12:1-2 and write a prayer asking Jesus, our Lord and the Christ, to keep your eyes fixed on the future promise of salvation.

#### FINAL QUESTION for the WEEK

Who do you say that Jesus is?

Read pages 82-90 in the *New Collegeville Bible Commentary: The Gospel According to Matthew* by Barbara E. Reid, O.P. The Cornerstone Catholic Scripture Study acknowledges that scripture quotations in this study are from the New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE) © 2010, 1991, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, D.C. All Rights Reserved. Used by permission.

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