

First Letter of Peter . . . Catholic Scripture Study

Memory Verse: *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.*

Week 3 - The Obligations of Christians (1 Peter 2:11-3:12)

I. OVERVIEW

After outlining the fact that their vocation requires Christians to be holy because of the awesome gifts God has given them through Jesus' Christ, Peter goes on to describe in concrete terms how their good conduct will attract Gentiles to the faith (2:11-12).

Being Christian obliges us to behave in an exemplary manner in social and civic life.

- Christians must obey lawful authority;
- Household servants must be obedient to their masters, and
- There must be mutual respect between husband and wife.

Finally, he encourages all to practice fraternal charity (3:8-12).

II. EXHORTATION TO GOOD CONDUCT (2:11-12)

Read: 1 Peter 2:11-12

[11] Beloved, I beseech you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh that wage war against your soul.

[12] Maintain good conduct among the Gentiles, so that in case they speak against you as wrongdoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

A. Aliens and Exiles (2:11)

Heaven is the true homeland of believers. In this life on earth we are **aliens and exiles** on pilgrimage to our heavenly home.

Even though we have become part of God's people, we still remain resident aliens among the peoples surrounding us, and we long for our true homeland in heaven (see Heb 11:13).

B. Waging War against Worldly Desires

Peter urges us to keep away from **passions of the flesh** (worldly desires) **that wage war against the soul**.

The first charge he gives is a negative one:

- To abstain from the disordered (literally, “fleshly”) desires of our fallen nature in general.

We should note the warfare imagery employed here: our disordered desires **wage war** against us and, by implication, we are to wage war against them.

- The same word, “to wage war,” is used by St. Paul to describe our spiritual and moral struggle as Christians.

C. Maintaining Good Conduct (2:12)

This second charge Peter gives is a positive one:

- To ***maintain good conduct among the Gentiles***, that is, among those who are not part of the Christian people.

Though most of Peter's audience probably come from the Gentiles, there are called to leave behind Gentile ways. Our "***conduct***" or "***way of life***" needs to be above reproach even by the standards of those around us.

Christians are to stay true to the faith even when pagans criticize them (2:12), cause them to suffer (3:13-15), or insult them for following Christ (4:14).

If they lead exemplary lives, those among whom they live, although they may initially misinterpret their conduct, will end up glorifying God on ***the day of visitation***.

D. The Day of Visitation

The ***day of visitation*** is a Biblical expression of the day of divine judgment, when God vindicates the righteous and wreaks vengeance on the wicked.

Jesus spoke in these terms about the judgment of Jerusalem (Luke 19:44).

III. OBEDIENCE TO CIVIL AUTHORITY (2:13-17)

A. Overview

Peter urges the saints to be model citizens. Subordination to civil authorities is part of one's submission to God, by whose will earthly government is established (Wis 6:1-3).

- Jesus taught the obligation of conscientious fulfillment of civic duties (cf. Mt 22: 21-22; 17:24-27).

Justice demands that we give honour and taxes to these authorities in return for the benefits of a stable society that would not exist without them (Rom 13:1-7). See also CCC 2238-42.

CCC 2240: Submission to authority and co-responsibility for the common good make it morally obligatory to pay taxes, to exercise the right to vote, and to defend one's country.

2242 The citizen is obliged in conscience *not* to follow the directives of civil authorities when they are contrary to the demands of the moral order, to the fundamental rights of persons or the teachings of the Gospel. "*Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.*"⁴⁸ "*We must obey God rather than men.*"⁴⁹

Read: 2:13-17

[13] Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme,

[14] or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right.

[15] For it is God's will that by doing right you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.

[16] Live as free men, yet without using your freedom as a pretext for evil; but live as servants of God.

[17] Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

B. Subordination to Secular Authorities

Peter now calls upon everyone in the Christian community to **be subject to every human institution for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the king as supreme or to governors as sent by him.**

“Subjection” can convey the sense of domination, whereas here Peter calls the members of the Christian community to place themselves voluntarily in proper order (subordination) under the various authorities.

They are to do this **for the Lord's sake**, that is, not because of fear or domination but because of their reverence for the Lord.

C. True Freedom in Christ

“Live as free men . . .”

Peter then tells us to be free, **but without using freedom as a pretext for evil.** Now that we have come under the Lordship of Christ we are truly free. But Peter cautions us not to use our freedom as a pretext for doing evil.

Christian liberty is not license to do whatever our disordered desires crave but rather freedom to become **slaves of God**, that is, to submit ourselves freely to Christ and his way of life.

Christians are free from absolute servitude to the State because they are servants of the Lord. By obeying political authority, the faithful are not surrendering their freedom; on the contrary, they are correctly using the freedom which Christ has won for them.

On the other hand, we have an obligation to refuse to obey civil authority when it oversteps its bound (See CCC 2242, above).

IV. HOUSEHOLD SERVANTS (2:18-25)

A. Overview

Slavery was a deeply entrenched institution in Roman society. There were an enormous number of slaves in the Roman world which was a slave-based society and economy.

Peter never condones slavery, nor do other New Testament authors, but neither does he criticize it directly. Rather, by addressing Christian slaves, he establishes their dignity and treats them fully as equals with the Christian community.

Moreover it is noteworthy that Peter chooses to address slaves first of all, before wives and husbands.

Treatment of slaves was often brutal, and they had no official rights; but some slaves, especially **household servants**, served as honored members of the household and were given significant responsibility.

Peter now addresses these household servants within the Christian community, urging them to be subject to their masters with all due reverence.

- They are encouraged to bear unjust treatment with patience.

Neither slavery nor physical abuse is thereby condoned; the point is only that innocent suffering can make one more like Christ.

As slaves they had at best very limited means to change their status or circumstances. What they could change was *themselves*, and they displayed their freedom in Christ by their ready service to their masters.

Read: 1 Peter 2:18-25

[18] Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to the kind and gentle but also to the overbearing.

[19] For one is approved if, mindful of God, he endures pain while suffering unjustly.

[20] For what credit is it, if when you do wrong and are beaten for it you take it patiently? But if when you do right and suffer for it you take it patiently, you have God's approval.

B. Obedience of Slaves

Peter exhorts these servants to obey their masters, even if they are harsh (v 18), because God is pleased if they put up with injustice for his sake (vs. 19-20). In doing so that they are imitating the example of Jesus, and they have God's approval or grace.

Peter is **not** saying that unjust suffering, in itself, is commendable. Rather, it is when we endure this patiently, mindful of God, that we receive God's approval and grace.

Reflection and Application (2:18-20)

Times have changed dramatically since Peter's day. Slavery has been effectively banished in the Western world.

Does Peter's counsel to slaves apply to us today? And, if so, how?

Many of us face employment situations where we do not have complete freedom or recourse to justice but often have to serve

under unjust or manipulative bosses. In order to keep our job we sometimes have to put up with abuse and "suffer unjustly."

Peter's words apply no less to us. We are to keep on "doing good" while being properly subordinate to those in authority over us.

While making use of all legitimate and upright means to get what is justly ours and to resist evil, we have the opportunity to share in Christ's suffering and to experience the comfort and blessing of the Lord.

V. THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST'S SUFFERING (2:21-25)

After speaking about "unjust suffering" Peter is now led to reflect on the Passion of Jesus.

His thoughts are dominated by Isaiah's vision of the Suffering Servant (cf. Isaiah 53:5-11) in which the prophet foresees the rejection and agony of the Messiah.

Read: 1 Peter 2:21-25

[21] For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

[22] He committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips.

[23] When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly.

[24] He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

[25] For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

A. Jesus' Suffering Fulfills Isaiah's Prophecy of the Suffering Servant

Before examining the details of Peter's passage above (v. 21-25), it will be helpful to see how Peter makes use of Isaiah's prophecy of the Suffering Servant (Is 52:13-53:12).

[22]: *"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth"* (Is 53:9);

[23]: *"When he was insulted, he returned no insult"* (Is 53:7);

[24]: *"He himself bore our sins"* (Is 53:4, 11, 12);

[24]: *"By his wounds you have been healed"* (Is 53:5);

[25]: *"For you had gone astray like sheep"* (Is 53:6).

In verse 21 Peter tells us we have been called to bear up patiently under unjust suffering because Christ also suffered for us, leaving an example for us to follow.

Christ's suffering is both a work on our behalf that we could never have done for ourselves and a model that we are meant to imitate according to our own circumstances.

B. He Committed No Sin . . .

Peter now sketches the passion of Jesus using phrases from Is 53.

He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.

In a preeminent way Christ was free of all sin and wrongdoing and deserved no punishment whatsoever.

- The sinlessness of Jesus is an established doctrine of the New Testament (Jn 8:46; Heb 4:15; 1 Jn 3:5; CCC 612)

C. When He Was Insulted . . .

But ***when he was insulted, he returned no insults; when he suffered, he did not threaten.***

Christ had every justification to strike back and defend himself, but he did not. When verbally abused, he did not return the abuse; when physically suffering, he did not threaten his attacker with vengeance.

Instead he handed himself over to the one who judges justly.

He handed Himself over to his human enemies, but, more profoundly, he handed himself over to the Father (*Father, into your hands I commend my spirit*).

D. He Bore Our Sins . . . On the Tree

In his offering to the Father, Christ ***bore our sins in his body on the tree.***

He took our sins upon himself and nailed them to the cross, offering himself as an atoning sacrifice. This means that we are free of our sins (“dead to sin”) and can live “to righteousness,” that is, can live for holiness with the help of grace.

We are the ones burdened with sin, but he took this burden on himself when he offered his life as a sacrifice that resulted in the forgiveness of our sins.

When we turned back to Isaiah 53, we understand that the Lord laid on the Suffering Servant the rebellion of us all, the punishment of our rebellion and all the evil consequences of rebellion.

E. The Tree

Why does Peter speak of Christ's body "**upon the tree?**" He probably wants to establish a link to Deut 21:22-23, which states that one executed by hanging upon a tree is cursed by God.

Christ took on himself the curse of our sins by bearing those sins on the cross, **so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness.**

F. By His Wounds You Have Been Healed

Through Christ's innocent suffering our sin has been taken away. We have died to sin (Rom 6:11) and now are free to "live for righteousness," that is, to live a life of holiness according to the Gospel, what Peter calls "doing good."

G. "For You Had Gone Astray Like Sheep" (Is 53:6).

In the closing line, Peter sums up our redemption in Christ: **for you had gone astray like sheep, but you have now returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.**

What is the problem of the human race? What have we all done?

We have not all committed murder or adultery or apostasy, gotten drunk, stolen or cheated, but there's one thing each of us has done: we have done our own thing, gone our own way, which is not God's way. God describes that as *iniquity* or *rebellion*.

- The root problem of the human race is rebellion against God.

The human problem is universal. All of us, Jew or Gentile, Catholic or Protestant, Asian, American, African, without exception, have gone our own way. We are all the same; we are rebels!

But the marvellous message is, God laid on Jesus, as he hung upon the Cross, the iniquity, the rebellion, of us all.

All that Jesus did for us on the Cross can be summed up in what is often called the Divine Exchange.

H. The Divine Exchange (Substitutionary Atonement)

On the cross a divinely ordained exchange took place – something conceived in the heart and mind of God from all eternity and acted out at Calvary. Very simple, but very profound!

All the evil due, by justice, to come to us came on Jesus, so that all the good due to Jesus, earned by his sinless obedience, might be made available to us.

There are nine specific aspects of this exchange drawn from the Scriptures:

1. Jesus was **punished** that we might be **forgiven**.
2. Jesus was **wounded** that we might be **healed**.
3. Jesus was **made sin** with our sinfulness that we might be **made righteous** with His righteousness.
4. Jesus **died our death** that we might **share his life**.
5. Jesus was made a **curse** that we might receive the **blessing**.
6. Jesus endured all **poverty** that we might share his **riches**.
7. Jesus bore our **shame** that we might share his **glory**.
8. Jesus endured our **rejection** that we might enjoy his **acceptance**.

9. Our **old man died** in Jesus that the **new man might live** in us.

Reflection (2:21-25)

You and I will never be able to find any reason why we deserved this exchange. It is the outworking of God's sovereign *grace*. It is the expression of his measureless *love*.

Why did God send his own Son to the cross in our place? He did so because he loves us. Why does God love us? The Bible never offers an explanation, and eternity will be too short to find out.

You and I do not deserve it, we did not earn it and there's nothing in us to warrant Jesus' incredible sacrifice. It was the sovereign choice of Almighty God. And the only way that we can receive the grace Jesus won for us on the cross is by faith.

*For by **grace** you have been saved through **faith**; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God -- not because of works, lest any man should boast (Eph 2:8-9)*

Preparation for Week 4 (1 Peter 3)

1. Read: First Peter, Chapter 3.
2. Review all Study Questions on Chapter 2, pg 39 in ICSD
3. Look up Scripture references.
4. Study *Memory Verse*.

