

# **Adult Catechism Class February 1, 2016**

## *The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John*

### **Part 1: Scripture Readings:**

**Matthew 5: 1-11:** When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

**Mark 8: 31-36:** Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?

**Luke 21: 1-4:** He looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury; he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. He said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on.”

**John 10: 11-17:** I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again.

## **Part 2: What are the Gospels?**

Until recently the Gospels were thought to be biographies of Jesus. However, scholars now agree that they are catechisms of teachings concerning the risen Lord written to increase the faith of the readers. Each writer chose special material for different audiences in different decades which account for some of their variances. They were anonymously written. In fact, most scholars today do not believe that the evangelists were eyewitnesses for the simple reason that their chronology of events and theological interpretations are different. The titles of the gospels were added in the second century and very well could designate the authority behind the finished gospel or the one who wrote one of the main sources of the gospel. The Church takes no official stance on their authorship. It is important to understand that the Church by its authority and the guidance of the Holy Spirit canonized these four gospels over many others that were circulated and read in the early centuries.

The material used in the gospels went through three distinct stages:

1. What Jesus said and did during his ministry in Palestine. This would include his actual words during his preaching and teaching about the kingdom and himself. If we had a video tape of those events, we would have a true biography.

2. What the apostles and preachers taught after experiencing the resurrection. This stage was the product of the "Easter Faith" where they had experienced Jesus as the risen and glorified Lord.

3. The evangelists finally wrote their gospels using selected material which they edited and rearranged to develop their respective themes. In addition to this they reflect the actual teaching, preaching, and practices of the emerging Church at the close of the first century.

**Part 3: The Gospel of Mark:** Mark, the first gospel, was written almost forty years (c.68 AD.) after Jesus completed his public ministry. The early followers of Jesus were expecting the second coming (parousia) in their life time (Acts 1: 11; 1 Thess.1:10). Thus the delay. It is the shortest gospel and clearly was a catechism written for the teachers and preachers. Papias (AD.130) testifies that it was written in Rome. The text suggests impending persecution. St. Mark was the son of Mary whose house at Jerusalem was a meeting place of the Christians. It was to Mary's house that St. Peter went after his miraculous deliverance from prison. Some conjecture that the youth who fled naked from Gethsemani (14:51) was the Evangelist himself. St. Mark was baptized and instructed by St. Peter. In about the year 42 A.D. he came to Rome with the Prince of the Apostles. There at the request of the faithful he wrote his Gospel about the year 50 A.D. His Gospel is a record of the substance of St. Peter's preaching concerning our Lord. St. Peter's discourse in the house of the Roman centurion Cornelius (Acts 10:34-43) has been justly considered as an outline of St Mark's Gospel - as St. Mark's Gospel in miniature.

The Gospel of St. Mark gives special attention to St. Peter. The vivid descriptions, the swift movement of thought, the frequent use of such words as "straightway," "immediately," "quickly," "forthwith," "at once," strongly recall the quick and impulsive fisherman of Galilee. The Gospel suppresses incidents indicative of his position and dignity among the Apostles, such as, for example, the walking upon the water (Matt. 14:29), the finding of the coin in the fish's mouth (Matt. 17:26), the promise of the Primacy (Matt. 16:16-19), and the commission to confirm the brethren (Luke 22:31-32). On the other hand, events which are derogatory to St. Peter are deliberately emphasized - even when they are minimized or passed over by the other Evangelists. Nowhere, for example, is the depth of St. Peter's fall more fully indicated than in Mark's Gospel. One can well imagine St Peter supervising "over St. Mark's shoulder" the composition of the Gospel so that the Apostle's defects rather than his merits are emphasized. Internal evidence shows that the Gospel was written for Gentiles, especially for Roman Gentile converts. The Gospel quotes but seldom from the Old Testament (cf. 1:2, 3; 15:28), since an appeal to the prophets would have been meaningless to the Romans. So, too, the title "Son of David" is rarely applied to our Lord. Comparisons between the Old and the New Law - which form so striking a feature in the Sermon on the Mount are also missing. On the other hand, St. Mark is careful to explain Jewish rites and customs which might prove unintelligible to a pagan reader, as, for example, the purifications (7:3), the passover (14:12), the day of preparation (15:42). He explains words and expressions which Gentile converts would not be likely to understand; for example: "Boanerges" (3:17), "Talitha cumi" (5:41), "Ephpheta" (7:34), "Corban" (7:11), "Bartimaeus" (10:46), "Two mites" (12:42). He uses Latin terms which no other Evangelist employs; for example, "spiculator," executioner (6:27), "sextarius," a cup (7:8), "quadrans" a farthing (12:42), "centurio," a Roman officer in charge of 100 soldiers (15:39). The aim of St. Mark's Gospel is to show, especially from our Lord's miracles, that Christ is true God, that He alone verifies in Himself the Roman title of "Lord of All." The very first verse of the Gospel contains the triumphant assertion of Christ's Divinity: "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." The Evangelist not only affirms the fact of our Lord's Divinity but also indicates its consequences. He shows that all things in heaven and upon earth must needs be subject to Christ. It is for this reason that Mark insists so much on miracles and dwells upon them with a fullness of detail not found in St. Matthew's and St. Luke's Gospels. Writing for the pagans who peopled nature with divinities and admitted the existence of "many gods," St Mark describes especially Christ's miracles over nature and shows that even evil spirits must be subject to Him. In St. Mark's account, Christ never uses explicitly the title "Son of God" but always refers to Himself as "Son of Man." Our Lord's humble ways thus stand in sharp contrast with those of the Roman Emperors who boldly and proudly styled themselves the gods, lords and saviours of the world. St. Mark excels in portraying the emotions and affections of both Christ and His hearers. He gives minute details of our Lord's gestures, looks and words. He calls attention to Christ's anger, indignation, love, pity, grief and wonder. At the same time the Evangelist records the deep impression which Christ's words and miracles had on His followers. He tells us that the disciples and the multitudes were in astonishment at His doctrine and works.

**Part 4: The Gospel of Matthew:** Matthew was written in the eighties in the first major Church outside of Jerusalem, Antioch in Syria. It was there that the believers were first called Christians (Acts 11:26). St. Paul started his missionary journeys from Antioch. St. Matthew's Gospel was intended for the Jewish converts of Palestine, and was written in Aramaic, the language of the country. Unlike St. Luke (3:38) who in his genealogy of Christ goes back to God, St. Matthew goes no further back than Abraham (1:1-2). From the outset St. Matthew shows us in Jesus the son par excellence of Abraham and David - the Messiah in Whom were fulfilled the prophetic oracles. Writing primarily for members of the chosen race, the Evangelist does not explain such Jewish terms as "raca" ("fool") (5:22), "carbona" (27:6), etc. St. Matthew does not explain as St. Luke does - Palestinian geographical terms, but simply speaks of Christ's "own city" and "own country" (9:1; 13:54). He repeatedly dwells on our Lord's denunciations of the Pharisees and of the Jewish leaders (ch. 12, 16, 22, 23). The aim of the first Gospel is to show that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah - the Christ or the "Anointed One" - promised in the Old Testament, and that His kingdom is the Church which He founded. St. Matthew constantly refers to prophecies fulfilled in our Lord in words such as these: "As it is written." "This was done that it might be fulfilled what the Lord spoke." St. Matthew reproduces some sixty or seventy passages from the Old Testament; the other Evangelists together quote the Old Testament about fifty times. Again, St. Mark and St. Luke as a rule adduce only those quotations which occur in our Lord's discourses; St. Matthew, on the other hand, argues from the pages of the sacred text. While proving that Jesus is the fulfillment of the ancient prophecies, St. Matthew at the same time explains how the Jews - always resisting the inspirations of divine grace - rejected Him Who came upon earth primarily to save the Jews. Although St. Matthew wrote chiefly for Jewish converts, his Gospel is not restricted to them. The adoration of the Magi - who represent the first fruits of the conversion of the Gentiles to Christ - should more naturally find a place in the third Gospel, the Gospel of universal salvation; yet the account of it is found in the first Gospel. Again, St. Matthew narrates parables in which special preference is given to the Gentiles - as, for example, the parables of the two sons, of the wicked husbandmen, and of the marriage of the king's son. He quotes prophecies concerning the Gentiles (8:11; 12:18, 21; 21:42 to 22:14; 25:32) and narrates miracles worked by our Lord for them (8:5-13; 15:21-28). He declares the universality of the Messiah's kingdom in narrating Christ's commission to His Apostles to go and teach all nations (28-19). On the other hand, the first Gospel leaves to the third the narration of such specifically Jewish incidents as the mission of the Precursor, the Circumcision, the ransoming of Jesus, and Mary's purification. While the opening chapters of St. Luke's Gospel are composed from the viewpoint of the Mother of Jesus, those of St. Matthew's are composed from the viewpoint of St. Joseph. In St. Luke's Gospel all events seem to converge toward Mary, in St. Matthew's Gospel all events gravitate around St. Joseph. It is to Joseph that the angel announces the approaching birth of a Saviour from a virgin mother. He it is who is head of the Holy Family. He receives the order to take the Divine Infant as quickly as possible to Egypt in order to withdraw Him from the plots of Herod. It is to him again that the order is given - when the danger is past - to bring Jesus back to Palestine. On the

basis of this double circumstance, may we not legitimately argue that, directly or indirectly, it is above all to St. Joseph and Mary, who took so great a part in the mysteries of the Infancy and Hidden Life, and to the members of their family, that St. Matthew and St. Luke owe their remarkable acquaintance with these phases of Christ's life?

**Part 5: The Gospel of Luke:** Luke written in the mid eighties in Greece or Syria, by a well educated and skilled writer, was not an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry. He may have been a Jewish convert before becoming a Christian. St. Luke was a native of Antioch - a city renowned for its learning - where he received his early education. From the fluency and perfection of his literary style, it is inferred that he was a Greek. The teaching of Tradition that St. Luke was a physician is based on certain statements in his own writings. The Evangelist manifests great interest in diseases and their cure, and describes them in the language of ancient medicine. St. Paul explicitly refers to him as "the most dear physician" (Colossians 4:14). The belief that St. Luke was a painter is based on the statement of Nicephoras Callistos of the sixteenth century that the Empress Eudocia "sent to Pulcheria from Jerusalem an image of the Mother of God, which the Apostle Luke had painted." After his conversion he became a special friend of St. Paul, whom he first met at Troas. He remained St. Paul's companion on the missionary journeys. He visited St. Paul frequently during the latter's imprisonment at Caesarea, remained at the Apostle's side during the two years' imprisonment in Rome, and was alone with St. Paul at the time of his last imprisonment (II Timothy 4:11). Little is known of St. Luke after St. Paul's death. St. Luke's Gospel is a record of Christ's life and teaching as preached by St. Paul. It stresses those facts which illustrate - in the spirit of the Apostle of the Gentiles - the universality of salvation for both Jew and Greek. It sets Christ forth as the Saviour of mankind. In exquisitely tender colors it depicts our Lord as the merciful and pitying Divine Physician - as the Friend of sinners and Consoler of afflicted. It describes those incidents which would touch the hearts of the heathen and awaken their confidence in God. The love of Christ for sinners is illustrated in the accounts of Zachaeus (19:2), the sinful woman (7:37), and the penitent thief (23:42-43). It is St. Luke's Gospel alone that narrates the beautiful parables of the Good Samaritan (10:25), the Prodigal Son (15:11), the Unjust Steward (16:1), Dives and Lazarus (16:19), the Pharisee and the Publican (18:10). The doctrine of universal salvation appears even in the genealogy of Christ, which is brought down from Adam, the father of all mankind (3:23-38), and not - as in St. Matthew's Gospel - from Abraham, the father of the chosen people. The Evangelist omits whatever might be offensive to the Gentiles or cause the Jews to glory over them. The mockery and execution of Christ by the Roman soldiers is passed over in silence. Besides being called the "Gospel of Mercy", St. Luke's Gospel is frequently designated by various other titles. Occasionally it is referred to as the "Gospel of antithetical pictures." St. Luke has left us such contrasts as the following: Simon and the Sinful Woman; Martha and Mary; the Pharisee and the Publican; the Good Samaritan and the Priest and the Levite; Dives and Lazarus; the Good Thief and the Bad. St. Luke's Gospel has also been called the "Gospel of Hymns" because it contains the Magnificat, the Benedictus and the Nunc Dimittis. It is also said to be the "Gospel of Prayers," not only because it contains the Our Father and the Hail Mary but because it alone

records that our Lord prayed on several distinct occasions - at His baptism, after cleansing the leper, before calling the Twelve, at His Transfiguration, on the cross for His executioners, and at the moment of His death (3:21; 5:16, 6:12, etc.). St. Luke's Gospel has in a special manner been designated as the "Gospel of women." It places before us and describes the following feminine characters: Elizabeth, the Mother of John the Baptist; Anna, the aged prophetess; the "sinful woman" who anointed the Lord's feet in the house of the Pharisee (7:36-50); the women "who ministered unto Jesus of their substance," among whom was Mary Magdalen (8:2); Martha, the sister of Lazarus, and Mary, Martha's sister (10:38-42); "the woman in the crowd" who lifted up her voice and said to Jesus: "Blessed is the womb that bore Thee" (11:27); the widow of Naim (7:11-17); the woman whom our Lord delivered from her infirmity (13:10-17); the women of Jerusalem who met Jesus on the way to Calvary (23:27-31). Preeminent among all these is Mary, the Mother of God, who occupies a prominent place especially in the first two chapters of the Gospel.

**Part 6: What are the Synoptics?** There is a further stage to be addressed that deals with the similarity of the first three gospels because they have so much in common and that they are very different than John's gospel. They are called "the Synoptics" because they see through the same eyes. It was concluded that somewhere in the third stage they became interdependent because of using the same source or one of the gospels was a source for the others. Of the many theories proposed to answer this problem, the most widely accepted solution today is the two source theory. It holds that Mark was the oldest gospel and both Matthew and Luke used Mark for one source. However, they have material in common that Mark does not have indicating another source that is called "Q" (from German 'quelle' – source). This was a saying source of early origins. Mark has 661 verses. Matthew has 1068. Luke has 1149. 80% of Mark's verses are used by Matthew and 65% is used by Luke. This is called the "triple tradition". The approximate 220-235 verses or parts of verses of non-Markan material that Matthew and Luke have in common is called the "double tradition". They also have their own exclusive material, "M" and "L" i.e. infancy narratives, Luke's extensive parable source; Matthew's Petrine narratives, etc.

**Part 7: The Gospel of John:** It was written in the 90's probably in Ephesus and reveals subsequent editing by other hands as late as 110 AD. While John has some dependence on the synoptic tradition, it is primarily based on an independent source, a product of the "Johanne school" of the followers of the "Beloved Disciple" within the Johannine churches. It seems to have been composed after the expulsion of the Christians from the synagogue. The gospel and the three letters of John reveal that the Johannine community was fractured by a schism. As a result the gospel was slow in getting canonical acceptance because it was popular with heretical groups and was so different from the synoptics. The "Beloved Disciple," an enigmatic figure, was identified by Irenaeus (d.202) as John the son of Zebedee, the author of the gospel. Thus he argued for its canonicity. However, today there is a strong consensus among scholars that the "Beloved Disciple" who stood at the foot of the cross (Jn.19:26) was a minor figure in

the synoptics but later became important in the Johannean community. This problem was compounded because there also was John the presbyter and possibly another John, author of Revelation. According to the traditional order, the Gospel of St. John occupies the last place among the four canonical Gospels. Although in many of the ancient copies this Gospel was, on account of the Apostolic dignity of the author inserted immediately after or even before the Gospel of St. Matthew, the position it occupies today was from the beginning the most usual and the most approved. As regards its contents, the Gospel of St. John is a narrative of the life of Jesus from His baptism to His Resurrection and His manifestation of Himself in the midst of His disciples. The chronicle falls naturally into four sections:

- the prologue (i, 1-18), containing what is in a sense a brief epitome of the whole Gospel in the doctrine of the Incarnation of the Eternal Word;
- the first part (i, 19-xii, 50), which recounts the public life of Jesus from His baptism to the eve of His Passion,
- the second part (xiii-xxi, 23), which relates the history of the Passion and Resurrection of the Saviour;
- a short epilogue (xxi, 23-25), referring to the great mass of the Saviour's words and works which are not recorded in the Gospel.

When we come to consider the arrangement of matter by the Evangelist, we find that it follows the historical order of events, as is evident from the above analysis. But the author displays in addition a special concern to determine exactly the time of the occurrence and the connection of the various events fitted into this chronological framework. This is apparent at the very beginning of his narrative when, as though in a diary he chronicles the circumstances attendant on the beginning of the Saviour's public ministry, with four successive definite indications of the time (i, 29, 35, 43, ii, 1). He lays special emphasis on the first miracles: "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee" (ii, 11), and "This is again the second miracle that Jesus did, when he was come out of Judea into Galilee" (iv, 54). Finally, he refers repeatedly throughout to the great religious and national festivals of the Jews for the purpose of indicating the exact historical sequence of the facts related (ii, 13; v, 1; vi, 4; vii, 2; x, 22; xii, 1, xiii, 1).

**Part 8: Why Should We Read the Gospels Every Day?** Pope Francis in 2014 was addressing a large crowd at the Vatican one day. "I'll ask you a question" he inquired of the crowd gathered, "do you read a passage of the Gospel everyday?" Echoing their responses, he stated "Yes, no...yes, no...half and half. Some yes and some no." "But it's important! Do you read the Gospel? It's good," the Pope repeated, stating that "it's a good thing to have a little Gospel, small, and take it with us, in our pocket, in our purse, and read a small passage in any moment of the day." "It's not difficult," he continued, adding that "it's not even necessary" to have all four, but just "one of the Gospels, a very little one" always with us, and "listen to it."