

Commentary for Chapter 31

The prayer of Jesus. Why did our Lord pass the night in prayer before choosing His apostles? What was it that He laid before His heavenly Father as He knelt all alone? He was about to take an important step, and to lay the foundation of His Church by this choice of His apostles. He prayed for those whom He was about to choose, and for their successors, as well as for the countless Jews and Gentiles who through their preaching would be brought into the Church. "That holy night passed by our Lord in prayer and watching is the Vigil of the Founding of the Catholic and Apostolic Church. On that mysterious night the soul of our Savior must have been full of the deepest contemplation of His unfathomable work of love, of its results and destiny, as well as of thanksgiving to His Eternal Father for this great and beautiful new creation. He spent the night in prayer, wrestling with God for its welfare and final victory".

Our Lord also prayed in this manner to be an example to us that we should pray before any important undertaking. This is why we pray before each class, at the beginning and end of each day. Our Lord was God, He could have not prayed and still all He did would be perfect. But He wanted to teach us, and also to pray on our behalf. He prayed for the help we would need, for the things the Church would need.

The common office of the Apostles. Picture to yourselves the little company of the twelve apostles—twelve plain, unlearned men! Let us see for what object our Lord singled them out. He intended that, when He Himself had ascended into heaven, they should go forth into the world to preach the Gospel. They were to conquer the world for Him, and carry on His work of Redemption by delivering His truth and grace to mankind. What a gigantic task! Therefore, to make them more fit for this great office, our Lord chose them Himself, kept them constantly with Him, prayed for them, and made them His chief care. The whole Church is founded on the apostles, and is therefore called the Apostolic Church.

The miraculous preservation and extension of the Church. The question is, why did our Lord Jesus Christ choose for this stupendous office twelve ignorant men, of a low station in life, and of no importance in the eyes of the world? It was to show to the whole world that the maintenance and spread of the Church and her doctrine were not due to human wisdom and learning, but solely to His grace and protection. "The foolish things of the world hath God chosen that He may confound the wise; and the weak things of the world hath God chosen that He may confound the strong; and the base things of the world, and the things that are contemptible, hath God chosen; and things that are not, that He might bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in His sight" (1 Cor. i, 27. 28. 29).

The Leadership of Peter. A list of the apostles is given four times, viz. in the Gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark and St. Luke, and in the Acts of the Apostles. In each, St. Peter's name is put first; and St. Matthew expressly calls him "the first" (Matth. 10, 2). In what way was St. Peter the first of the apostles? He was the third, not the first, to be called (chapter XIII), but all the same he was the first in rank, being ordained by our Lord Jesus Christ to be the chief of the apostles. We have already come across several passages in the New Testament which point to

his primacy (*Primacy just means first place*). When our Lord first called him, He promised him the name of Peter. His mother-in-law was the first of many sick whom Jesus healed. It was Peter's boat from which He chose to preach; and it was to Peter especially that the miraculous draught of fishes was given, as also the promise that henceforth he should be a fisher of men.

The Number of the Apostles. Our Lord chose twelve apostles, this number having been fore-ordained, and pre-figured in the Old Testament by the twelve patriarchs. The kingdom of the Messias sprang from Israel, the chosen people of God; and even as Israel was descended from the twelve sons of Jacob (or Israel), so does the spiritual Israel or New Covenant of grace, the Church, proceed from the twelve spiritual sons of the true Israel (or Wrestler), Jesus Christ. Whoever was descended from Jacob's twelve sons, belonged to the Old Covenant, and had a share in its promises. In like manner, whoever wishes to belong to the New Covenant, and enjoy its treasures of grace, must be spiritually descended from the twelve apostles, the patriarchs of the Church, or, in other words, must be a member of the One Apostolic Church.

The fear of man and the fear of God. Our Lord told His apostles to fear God more than men, because these last could, at the worst, only deprive them of their mortal life, but that God could cast both their souls and bodies into hell. Christians ought never to do anything, or leave anything undone out of human respect. Daniel, by continuing to obey God even if it meant being thrown in the lions den, Susanna refusing to sin even if men threatened to abuse her and kill her, and the apostles, after Pentecost, continuing to preach what Jesus told them even when the council of the Jews had them beaten, are splendid examples of how the fear of man is overcome by the fear of God. "We should always obey God rather than men." Remember what human respect is? A good fear of God will help us overcome it.

The high dignity of the Apostles, and their successors and assistants, consists in this, that they are the true representatives of Christ. He who receives them, receives our Lord; he who listens to them, listens to Him; he who ministers to them, ministers to Him.

I recommend memorizing the names of the 12 Apostles