

Lesson 7
Universal Truth: The Catholic Epistles
The Epistles of St. John
AD 85 or about

The First Epistle of St. John

Commentary:

Fr. Farley opens his introduction to this epistle by saying that it is written with “such overwhelming simplicity that it startles and shakes us.” He quotes the Apostle with hard lines – “everyone who hates his brother is a murderer” (3:15) and “the one not loving does not know God, because God is love.” (4:8)

On first glance this does not look like an epistle. 1John does not have an opening salutation, no opening prayer, no closing greetings and nowhere does it claim to be written by him. However, both the Gospel of John, which we studied a few years ago, and this epistle has the same style. John writes both claiming, and rightly so, to be an eyewitness. (John 21; 24 and 1John1:1-3) The emphasis is firmly on the incarnation of the Son of God. The witness of the incarnation is the hallmark of a true apostle. The central theme of the epistle is love. The Word of life is manifest in the flesh. He rose in the same flesh that He died.

This epistle was written from Ephesus by John the Apostle to the 7 churches of Asia under his authority. The Church of Ephesus was considered the first of the seven with John as its head (Revelation 2) It was written to counteract the heresy of denial of sin (no guilt) and that Jesus was not the Christ (Messiah) and had not come in the flesh. Also, that the spirit of Christ came on Jesus at His baptism and left Him before His cross! Therefore, Jesus’ suffering on the cross has no saving value. This was an aggressive teaching of the heretic Cerinthus and John writes to his flock to keep the truth of the apostolic teaching.

1. If we say we do not have sin, we are _____ ourselves.
2. If we confess our sins, He is _____ and _____ that He may _____ us and cleans us from unrighteousness.
3. T. or F. The assurance of the forgiveness sins means we can sin freely.
4. Jesus Christ is called: (check)
____righteous ____advocate of the Father ____the anointed ____a helper
____true light ____sinless

On confession and Love

According to the Venerable Bede: “Since we cannot live in this world without sin, the first hope we have of salvation is through confession, nor should anyone be proud enough to claim that he is righteous in God’s sight. The next step is love, which John often commends to us in this letter, because love covers a multitude of sins. Each of these things encourages us to pray for our sins and to ask God’s forgiveness when we do so. This is why John says that God is faithful and will forgive our sins.....But in the life to come he will cleanse us from every sin, so that there will be no longer any sign of wickedness in the eternal Kingdom of the blessed.”

5. St. John urges his followers not to love _____ nor _____.
6. Christians must be _____ for they cannot _____ both the _____ and the _____.

The Christian Life

The way to be sure that we know him is to keep his commandments, an injunction that the Fathers interpreted as having two dimensions. At one level it is holding the orthodox belief that the Son of God had become incarnate. In practice it meant loving others and fighting against the power of evil. As the **Lord** is an **advocate**, so the **Holy Spirit** is an **advocate** whom he sent after His ascension. Our judge becomes our advocate. The Lord intercedes for us not only by words but also by His active compassion in taking our sins upon himself. While Christ's humanity pleads for sinners, his divinity propitiates their sin. (Gregory of Nazianzus; Ambrose; Clement of Alexandria; Maximus of Turin; Bede)

The Christian life is a spiritual battle against everything the devil is (forces against God and his people referred to as the "evil one.") and does to subvert us from the service of God. Learn to use the world as needed, but do not love it inordinately, for it is soon to vanish. Let the power of your eyes be focused on the light. The lusts of the flesh is what pertains to our physical appetites, whereas the lusts of the eye and the pride of life are what pertain to the vices of the soul, such as inordinate self-love from the devil. The lusts of the world are destined to disappear. There is no place for it in the new creation. (Didymus; Cyril of Alexandria; Severus, Symeon; Bede; Hilary of Arles; Andreas; Oecumenius)

Comforter and Intercessor

Advocate means one thing when applied to the Savior and another when applied to the Holy Spirit. Advocate (paraclete) means intercessor or propitiation for our sins. He intercedes with the Father for our sins. He asks the Father to be patient with us. When used of the Holy Spirit it means comforter. He provides comfort to our souls to whom he opens and reveals spiritual knowledge. (Origen)

Fighting the Antichrist

7. What is meant by "the last hour" according to St. John?
8. What is the general meaning of the term "an antichrist is coming"?
9. List and quote the apostolic warnings about the times of conflict and threats within the church.

10. Your anointing from the Holy One implies: (check)

apostolic teaching the indwelling of the Holy Spirit
 peace of God
will give you the understanding to detect false teaching.

11. Heresy according to Fr. Farley in St. John's context is: (check only 3)

embrace of darkness pride over tradition rejection of truth
 causes division contradicts doctrine False teaching

12. Why will the heretics be rejected on the Last Day?

It is a lie to say that the Christ is merely another human being and not truly God. No one comes to the Father except through the Son. Only by confessing him in heart, word and deed by the Spirit will you have fellowship with both the Father and the Son. Insofar as you have been taught by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit you do not need innovative teachers. Those in the church who were filled with the Holy Spirit came to know what the teaching was. Perfect righteousness is possible for those who trust God's righteousness by faith, who have not succumbed to pride but have remained attentive to the word of God and accepted no lord other than the one who created them. When the Lord appears at the Second Coming, the one who knows the Son and the Father will have confidence and will not shrink in shame or be confounded. (Oecumenius; Hilary of Arles; Andreas; Theophylact; Bede; Clement of Alexandria)

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