



# The Farewell Discourse

“Christ’s Final Address to His Disciples  
& His Priestly Prayer from John 14-17”

*An installment in the series:  
Orthodox Anglicans Studying Scripture*

## Lesson 1: St. John 14:1-14

### **Introduction: Jesus’ Last Address**

Where, When & Who: Delivered by Jesus to the Disciples after the conclusion of the Last Supper. The address is recorded only by St. John, the Lord’s “beloved disciple”

Main Message: Saddened by the shocking prediction of treachery and His imminent departure, Christ comforts and strengthens the Disciples with truths about Himself and His relationship with them, as well as promises for the future. Despite His need to go, come back, and then go again, Jesus assures them that His presence will always remain, both by the coming Holy Spirit and by abiding in Him in a way that is both mystical and moral. He also teaches them about the importance of living in community and of loving one another. Moreover, He warns them of persecution and rejection, but closes with a word of confidence: No matter how things might look they must remember—He has conquered the world.

### **Jesus the Way, the Truth, & the Life**

Read: St. John 13:31 – 14:7

QUESTION – Why were the disciples disheartened by what Jesus said to them after the foot-washing at the end of St. John chapter 13?

What encouragement does He give to cheer them?

Jesus cheers them with the promise that He is going away to prepare a place for them in heaven. The assurance is based on His own identity in relation to the Father (“believe in God, believe also in me”). The description of “many mansions” in His Father’s house cannot be taken literally—for heaven is not really a *place*—but is a word-picture for the for the infinite “spheres of beatitude” (think Dante) in God’s Kingdom, and the plenitude of graces/rewards that await those who enter each degree.

QUESTION – But how do we attain these mansions?

Jesus’ vow “I will come again and will take you to myself” is progressive. Ultimately, it means His return to fully establish the Kingdom at the Second Coming. In

the meantime, however, it must also reference the mystical union between Himself and His Church consummated by spiritual resurrection at death (Rev. 20:4); St. Paul also comments that we are raised and made to sit with Christ in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6).

Although Christ assures them that they know the way, St. Thomas admits that they don’t understand; but Jesus reminds them that the simple answer is...*He*.

- Jesus is the *Way* because, as the “Word-made-Flesh” His Person with dual Natures bridges the gap between humanity and God. As He participated in us, we must participate in Him and follow His holy example.
- He is the *Truth* because His coming into the world proves that God fulfills His promises, and because He teaches the truth about God and the proper way to know Him and to worship Him.
- He is the *Life* because the Son shares in the Triune life and has power over death by His Resurrection. These gifts He shares by grace that His saints might also enjoy eternal life in fellowship with God.

### **Jesus the Icon of the Father**

Read: St. John 14:8-14

“He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” means that Christ Himself is His exact image (Col. 1:15). “I am in the Father and the Father is in Me.” He is not the same as the Father (*Sabellianism*), but He and the Father are one in essence and undivided in nature while always being distinct Persons within the Godhead. What proves this? His miraculous works themselves certified the Father’s presence and power in Him. He continues by promising that He will give the Apostles a share in His power which will (incredibly) yield greater works than the miracles He Himself performed during His ministry.

QUESTION – *What* works and *how* do they relate to His pledge: “whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son”?

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## Lesson 2: St. John 14:15-31

### **Union with God: Love & Commandment**

Read: St. John 14:15; 20-25; 28-31

Jesus promises to the disciples in His Church a unique mystical union with all three Persons of the Holy Trinity, not just spiritual erudition. The way? Loving God and keeping His commandments.

QUESTION – How is the Christian to “love God and keep His commandments”? What does Jesus say to explain what this entails?

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The person who knows God is the one who loves Him, and maintains a living obedience to whatever God has for his or her life. Jesus then elucidates further that this love fosters an intimate union with all members of the Trinity in the soul of the believer—“*we will come to him and make Our home with Him*” (vs. 23). In some sense, the Father and the Son come to dwell in his soul because through the adoption of the Spirit (Rom. 8:15), the Christian is transformed into him a “temple of the Holy Spirit” (I Cor. 3:16; 6:19).

On the positive side, this means that loving God and keeping His commandments is the perfect alignment of our human will with God’s will. Because of our relationship with God, we want to do what He decrees because we love Him. On the negative side, this excludes inventing our own opinions and expecting that God will accept whatever we happen to think is right.

In addition to unveiling something of the mystery of the Trinity and how the Christian is incorporated into it—“*I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you*” (vs. 20)—Jesus also introduces a notion of hierarchy that has perplexed some people through the centuries: “*I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I*” (vs. 28).

QUESTION – Considering other verses like John 8:58, what did Jesus likely mean in this statement?

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How does verse 31 help? “*I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do.*”

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### **The Coming of the Holy Spirit**

Read St. John 14:16-17; 25-27

Jesus announces that after His Ascension, He will send to them the Holy Spirit whom He calls “Comforter” (or “Helper,” Counselor”, “Advocate”). As Jesus Himself mediates in heaven on our behalf as High Priest, so the Spirit comes to earth in that presence and power. By dwelling in us, He intercedes for us and consoles us through prayer, and counsels us in temptation. As a *Person* (not a “force”) of the Holy Trinity, He is sent on the authority of both Father and Son to represent and interpret them for the Church: He more fully reveals the Godhead and its action. Furthermore, His coming is exclusive to the Church, not to the whole world indiscriminately (see vss. 17-22). QUESTION – Why?

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What might this have to do with how Jesus Himself is received, as implied elsewhere in this chapter?

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How reconcile w/ Genesis 1:2, Wisdom 1:7, & Joel 2:28?

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Jesus also refers to Him as “the Spirit of truth.” He will take the critical role in the Church as Her *Teacher*.

- He will give the Disciples fresh teaching that they were not ready to receive in Jesus’ lifetime
- He will bring to remembrance Christ’s words and the meaning which they formerly did not understand

The point is to preserve the “deposit of faith” that constituted by the words and works of Christ. The Disciples would pass on to their hearers the Spirit’s teaching; He is often described as the Church’s “Memory” for all time to keep God’s truth changeless, but fresh. To quote St. Irenaeus, “Where the Church is, there is the Holy Spirit and the fullness of grace.”

QUESTION – What does Christ mean that, through the Spirit, He gives *peace* not like that of the world?

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Traditionally, how is this expressed liturgically in H.C.?

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## Lesson 3: St. John 15:1-17

### **The Vine & the Branches**

Read: St. John 15:1-8

To keep reassuring the Disciples of His continuance, Jesus uses a familiar illustration to stress the intimate and even *organic* connection between He and them. He tells them that “I am the vine, you are the branches.” Like the trunk to the shoots, Christ is the source of all life and power from which His people receive salvation.

QUESTION – Since Jesus and the Disciples were on their way to Gethsemane from the Passover in the upper room, what might have inspired this “vine” analogy?

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Whatever the case, His words rest on the prophetic use of the vine as a symbol of Old Testament Israel (Ps. 80:8, Is. 5:1-7, Jer. 2:21). Israel was planted to be God’s vineyard on earth—a place for Him to be glorified with the fruit of beauty, righteousness, and justice—but the prophets record that Israel rebelled; God vowed instead to abandon Israel to destruction. So, in contrast to Jewish disobedience, Jesus calls Himself the true vine because He fulfills God’s expectations for Israel. Together with the branches, this divine vine constitutes a new and faithful people of God: the New Testament Church. In a similar illustration, St. Paul describes this phenomenon as branches being broken off an olive tree while others are grafted in (Rom. 11:16-24).

However, Jesus emphasizes that being joined to the vine is not something to be taken for granted, hence the need to *abide*. To abide in Christ indicates a deep and personal union both dynamic and vitalizing: it is one of knowledge and of grace.

QUESTION – Practically-speaking, what does abiding mean in active and devout Christian churchmanship?

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The Father’s pruning of the branches is not a punishment, but—as Jesus explains—a refinement for those that abide. Pruning is a sanctifying work enacted by the Holy

Spirit to remove from our life all sin and attachment to worldly desires that would otherwise inhibit us from bearing more fruit. Branches that are “cast out” are Christians in whom has happened one of three things:

- They have apostatized from the Faith completely
- They have been excommunicated
- They have cut themselves off through disinterest

All such are removed because they have not fulfilled their calling as Christians. This image is akin to the fig tree (Matt. 21:19-21) and of the tares and vessels (Matt. 13).

### **The Law of Love**

Read St. John 15:9-17

As He did in chapter 14, Jesus emphasizes that one cannot love God and disobey His commandments. Love is expressed through obedience, and vice versa. Most of all, love brings *joy* which, for Jesus, was doing His Father’s will, and He wishes for us the same fullness of joy.

QUESTION – If love was essential to the “old commandment” (see Summary of the Law), what then is different about the “new commandment”?

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What does Jesus call us if we obey His commandments?

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Christ offers us this because He doesn’t want us to obey Him out of a sense of fear or duty but out love and a desire to do what is right. Only two of the Patriarchs were called this—Abraham (James 2:2) and Moses (Ex. 33:11)—because of their faith and unique closeness with God. What was once a limited privilege, Christ offers to all.

When Jesus says that He “chose” them, He is expressing the particular attention He gave to bringing His Disciples near to Himself, both for communion and for ministry. God, not man, takes the initiative in bringing us into relationship with Him because God’s grace is required.

QUESTION – How does Christ continue this special action of “choosing” His friends in the Church?

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## Lesson 4: St. John 15:18-27

### **The World’s Hatred**

Read: St. John 15:18-25

With this, Jesus warns the Disciples that they will face resistance after He is gone (Matt. 24:9). By “the world,” Jesus does not mean the creation in general, since nature itself (although tainted) is intrinsically good. Instead, He is speaking of the world’s system which resists God and His laws (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 2:8). This “world system” that Jesus describes is the structure of fallen humanity’s corruption and contrariness. It perpetuates his depraved ideologies, attitudes, and desires that are in league with the flesh and the Devil. In his famous book *The City of God*, this is what St. Augustine called “the City of Man”.

QUESTION – What are some examples of “the world” which, even if not consciously anti-Christian, have become prevalent in our own era?

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Jesus encourages us to bear the world’s hatred (as He did) because the world’s rationale may seem deceptively compelling. However, the Church cannot compromise (1 Jn. 2:15-17) in order to win its approval. The world only loves those who approve of its own wickedness, whereas the Church is left in the world to be the standard of the True, the Good, and the Beautiful. If the Church chooses to appease the world, then She has lost Her witness and forgotten Jesus words: “...I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (vs. 19). Like Her Lord, the Church lives with the tension of being in the world, but not of it. “The hostility of the perverse sounds praise for our life because it shows that we have at least some rectitude if we are an annoyance to those who do not love God; no one can be pleasing to God and to God’s enemies at the same time. He who seeks to please those who oppose God is no friend of God; and he who submits himself to the truth will fight against those who strive against the truth.” —Gregory the Great

QUESTION – Why does the world “hate” Jesus Christ and His Church so much?

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- The world hates Christ & His Church because Our righteousness and holiness emulating God’s Image and Likeness is antithetical to the “fallenness” of the world which it calls “natural” (Sin = Normal).
- The world hates Christ & His Church because the salvation we offer implies guilt, which it rejects. Thus, we become its condemnation, not redemption.
- The world hates Christ & His Church because it refuses to receive an objective God (the Holy Trinity) for its own opinions, which are merely idolatry.
- The world hates Christ & His Church for the same pride that caused the creation’s rebellion against its Creator in the beginning. This irrational pride toward the good God who desires our best, is what Christ meant that “*They hated me without a cause*” (vs. 25).

### **The Spirit’s Help**

Read St. John 15:26-27

Jesus again promises that the Holy Spirit will help them declare the truth to the world, because He is the “Spirit of truth”. Christ particularly highlights that it is through the Holy Spirit that His Church will be enabled to bear witness of Him because “*He shall testify of me*” (vs. 26). The Spirit dwelling in the Church helps us to do what we could not ordinarily, because Jesus intends that we depend on His counsel and gifts.

Finally, St. John might reveal something about the essential nature of the Godhead. He comments that the Spirit “*proceedeth from the Father*” (vs. 26). Pastorally, Jesus probably just added this phrase to emphasize the connection between the Spirit and the Father. He had already mentioned that He Himself would send the Spirit, but now He assures them that the Spirit also comes from the Father, just as He did. Christian theology has come to explain that the Son is *begotten* of the Father and that the Spirit *proceeds* from the Father—both imply their dependence upon Him as their Divine Source.

QUESTION – In what statements do we find this Trinitarian theology declared?

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## Lesson 5: St. John 16:1-16

### **Prediction of Persecution**

Read: St. John 16:1-4

Literally, “...to keep you from falling away” (vs. 1), Jesus warns the Disciples because He does not want the negative resistance to their ministry to dishearten them or even cause them to lose faith altogether. Falling away might result in personal damnation, not to mention that Christ is put to open shame before His enemies and the integrity of the Gospel is hindered. Furthermore, Jesus warns that “...whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God” (vs. 2). Jesus cautions the Disciples that the world’s hatred for them could result in gravest consequences. For a Jew, the worst imaginable would be excommunication (being put out of the synagogues, and thus severed from the covenant) and execution (rejection and death at the hands of Gentiles).

QUESTION – The Christian Church no longer fears this from Jews, but where else do we observe this religious fanaticism in the contemporary world?

### **Promise of the Paraclete**

Read: St. John 16:5-16

“...for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you” (vs. 7). Earlier in the Discourse, Jesus presents the Holy Spirit as a provision from the Father, but now He links His coming directly to His Ascension. The Disciples (and Christians for all time) do not need to sorrow over Jesus’ departure, nor worry that His physical absence undermines the believability of Christianity. The kind of sorrow and faithlessness Jesus means indicates a grief leading to despair. Such despondency is a sinful passion that can overwhelm our trust in God, rob us of our joy in the Spirit, and prevent us from accomplishing God’s will for our lives. Instead, the presence of the Spirit means a closeness with God not matched even by following Christ in His earthly ministry!

QUESTION – What would the Disciples gain after Pentecost that they did not have while Jesus was there?

In addition to blessing the Church, Jesus also explains that the Spirit’s coming will have ramifications for the world, too. “He will convince the world...”:

- Of sin: He will convict the world of denying Jesus as the Christ, the ultimate sin that rejects His salvation
  - Of righteousness: He will reveal how the world could have been justified because Christ *is* righteous and was vindicated at the Father’s right hand. It should have accepted His glorification in heaven, but in its rejection, His merits give it no aid unto salvation
  - Of judgment: He will show that the world’s fate will be the same as that of Satan, who is the ruler of the world. The Devil has been vanquished at the Cross, but those who dismiss that victory share his penalty
- “I have yet many things to say to you” (vs. 12). Jesus explains that He has more to tell them, but they cannot handle it, mostly their lack of the Spirit’s presence and illumination inhibited them from discerning more. However, Jesus promises that when the Spirit does come, He will reveal the rest of the truth. “...whatever He hears He will speak” (vs. 13). Jesus reveals that the Holy Spirit’s relation to Him is like His to the Father. On numerous occasions, Jesus explained that He did not come on His own authority, but spoke that which His Father told Him (John 8:28; 12:49; 14:10). The Spirit comes is the mouthpiece of the Son, as the Son is the mouthpiece of the Father.

QUESTION – What points of theological & sacramental doctrine taught by Jesus has the Spirit elaborated since?

Furthermore, in vss. 13-16, Jesus hints at several mysteries about the Holy Trinity:

- Each comes seeking to do the will of the Other; authority is shared, and Their will remains unified
- Each Person seeks the glory of the Other. Jesus says that the Spirit will do it for Him (vs. 14), but the Son also does it for the Father (12:28; 13:32; 17:1; 21:19) and the Father for the Son (8:54; 13:32; 17:1, 5)
- What one Person has, belongs to the Others (3:35; 5:20). All of this points to the equality of all three Persons in the Divine Essence.



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## Lesson 6: St. John 16:17-33

### **A Little While**

Read: St. John 16:17-22

Jesus wants to encourage His Disciples that all of these trials about which He has warned them—His departure, persecution, etc.—will only be transitory. It will only last for “a little while”. We must remember that they had just left their Passover meal and were on their way to the Garden where Christ would be betrayed.

QUESTION – What about both the Old Testament Passover given by Moses and the New Testament Passover given by Christ convey about “a little while” both in ritual and in life?

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Thus, Jesus says: “A little while, and ye shall not see me”, and “Again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father.” He was trying to encourage them, as He realized about His own immanent ordeal, that His Passion would be just for “a little while”, then it would end; He would rise on the third day, then return to them. What Jesus wanted His Disciples to understand—as He wants us to understand—is that our own little crosses that we must all carry are but a segue to blessing. Suffering is not permanent, but a preparation. Nevertheless, Jesus realized that what all Christians will have to go through won’t be easy (and may seem like forever), so He assures the Disciples: “*Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.*”

QUESTION – How has Christ kept this promise to His Church around the world through the centuries?

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How will He especially keep this particular promise to all faithful Christians: “*ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice...*”?

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Ultimately, Jesus is saying that He will reveal Himself and His purposes to each one of us, and our struggles will turn into our reward. What a consolation!

### **Christ Has Overcome the World**

Read: St. John 16:23-33

At the end of His discourse, Jesus foretells a coming change regarding how He would prepare His Church and how He would abide with It. He explains that He had taught in proverbs and parables in order to disclose the Gospel to some but hide it from others. But that had only been temporary. Jesus prophesies that, the very next day, His Crucifixion would fulfill God’s promise of a New Covenant and that, by His Resurrection, He would teach His Church and dwell with us plainly—the Kingdom of God was nearer than ever. This promise would be finally consummated through two events:

- The Coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost
- His Return at the Second Advent

Now, and in the age to come, Christians will know the love of the Father personally and enjoy the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

QUESTION – What promise does Jesus make to the Disciples about how Christians may better obtain the grace of these promises?

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Of course, this promise is not a carte-blanche, but an assurance that our Father will listen to us through His Son. Our Father will provide for us, and Jesus will always mediate on our behalf, and our requests will be answered according to His will.

When the Disciples affirm their belief, Jesus is pleased that they understand Him, but He still warns them that they are not fully ready for what is about to transpire. He alludes to Zechariah’s prophecy: “*smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered*”. Nevertheless, He assures them He would defeat both His enemies and their lack of faith and courage. “*I have overcome the world.*” This promise assures us that in our case—as it was in His case—we don’t have to fear that an evil world or sinful people can ever conquer the Church. Jesus has triumphed for all time, and His Grace will raise us over all obstacles.

