

Jesus Interpreted Scripture

Acts of the Apostles 2:14, 22-33

Psalm 16

1 Peter 1:17-21

Luke 24:13-35

As I read over this weekend's Scripture readings in preparation to preach today, I was struck by the story of the two men on the road to Emmaus and how, "beginning with Moses and all the prophets, [Christ] interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures" (Luke 24:27). According to this reading, Jesus interpreted numerous Old Testament Scripture verses, explaining how His life, death, and Resurrection were foretold in them. Immediately, I thought, "Wouldn't it be great to preach on the various Old Testament Scripture verses that Jesus shared with those two men?!" Unfortunately, the author of Luke didn't write which Old Testament readings Jesus quoted. As I pondered this misfortune, I was overcome by a new inspiration!

I think it's very safe to say that the Old Testament Scripture verses that Jesus shared with those two men on the road to Emmaus were the same ones that He shared with the Apostles during His many post-Resurrection encounters with them. These would have undoubtedly been some of the very same Scripture verses quoted by the Apostles in the New Testament, since Jesus had told them that He Himself was the fulfillment of these Old Testament Scriptures. For example, in our first reading today, Saint Peter quoted Psalm 16 as a prophecy about Christ.¹

Since we don't have the exact conversation that Jesus had with the two men on the road to Emmaus, I thought the next best thing would be to look at the Old Testament Scripture verses that the New Testament writers understood to be prophetic of Christ, knowing that most of them were probably explained to the Apostles by Christ Himself! Unfortunately, when I researched the Old Testament quotes in the New Testament, I found that there are 343 quotations and more than 2,000 allusions! That would be a LOT to cover in one homily!

Not willing to give up on my homily idea, I decided to focus on just the Messianic prophecies in the books of Isaiah and Psalms. As I continued my research, I found that those are the two most highly quoted Old Testament books, with 66 direct quotations from Isaiah and 79 direct quotations from the Psalms. That would still be a LOT of material to cover in one homily.

Still unwilling to give up, I went back to the story of the two men on the road to Emmaus. Jesus asked those men, "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:26). Obviously, the Scripture verses that Jesus interpreted for them had to do very specifically with the Paschal Mystery. Therefore, I am going to share with you just eight of the Old Testament Messianic prophecies regarding the suffering, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ noted in the New Testament, knowing that these could very well be the very same Scripture verses that Jesus interpreted for the two men on the road to Emmaus.

The Old Testament prophesied that the Messiah would be a *priest*. Psalm 110 describes the priestly role of the eternal Messiah in these words, "Like Melchizedek you are a priest forever" (Psalm 110:4b). The letter to the Hebrews refers frequently to Jesus Christ being the final, eternal High Priest. In addition, the author of Hebrews very clearly understood Christ to be the fulfillment of the priesthood spoken of in Psalm 110 (see Hebrews 5:5-6, 6:20, 7:15-17).

As a priest, the Old Testament prophesied that the Messiah would bear the sins of others. In the book of Isaiah we read—

¹ Acts 2:25-28

Yet it was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured, while we thought of him as stricken, as one smitten by God and afflicted. But he was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins, upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole, by his stripes we were healed. We had all gone astray like sheep, each following his own way; But the LORD laid upon him the guilt of us all.

--Isaiah 53:4-6

Saint Paul confirmed Christ's fulfillment of this prophecy, writing that Jesus, "was handed over for our transgressions and was raised for our justification" (Romans 4:25). Saint Peter expressed something similar, writing very simply, "Christ also suffered for you..." (1 Peter 2:21).

Psalm 22 offers us a very detailed description of what the Messiah would suffer. While this Psalm contains numerous separate prophecies about Christ's crucifixion, I'll point out just four here—

The Messiah would be mocked	Psalm 22:7	Luke 23:11, 35-39
The Messiah's hands and feet would be pierced	Psalm 22:16	Luke 23:33, 24:36-39; John 19:18, 20:19-20, 24-27
The Messiah's bones would not be broken	Psalm 22:17	John 19:31-33, 36
Men would gamble for the Messiah's clothing	Psalm 22:18	Matthew 26:59-60; Mark 14:56-57

The Old Testament also prophesied that the Messiah would have to die, but would rise again. Psalm 16 states, "For you will not abandon me to Sheol, nor let your faithful servant see the pit. You will show me the path to life" (Psalm 16:10-11a). In our first reading today, Saint Peter made it very clear that he understood this to be speaking about the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. In addition to this verse, there are countless other New Testament readings that testify to Christ's Resurrection.

Lastly, the prophet Micah expressed the eternal nature of the Messiah writing, "But you, Bethlehem-Ephrathah too small to be among the clans of Judah, From you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel; whose origin is from of old, from ancient times" (Micah 5:1). Not only does Jesus Himself testify to His eternal nature in the Gospel of John (8:58), but Saint Paul also testified to it in his letters. For example, in his letter to the Colossians, Paul writes that Christ "is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation" and that He is "before all things" (Colossians 1:15, 17).

Obviously, we could spend months looking at all of the various Old Testament quotes found in the New Testament and how they testify to Christ being the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies. The reason I chose to look at just eight of them was to save time, and to make an interesting mathematical point. The author, Josh McDowell, once calculated the mathematical odds that Jesus Christ would have fulfilled just eight of the Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament and he found that it is a 1 out of 10^{17} chance (that's 10 with 17 zeros!). The fact that the early Christians, and Christ Himself, all understood His life to be a fulfillment of the Old Testament's Messianic prophecies should be a source of tremendous faith for us, as it was for the two men on the road to Emmaus!

SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISE:

- ✚ What Old Testament verse most reminds you about the life of Jesus Christ? Spend some time reflecting on that verse and talking to Christ about it.