Study Notes for the Sunday Mass Published by Christians for Christ Ministries. We are a non-denominational Christian ministry that seeks to encourage and facilitate Christians in studying the Holy Scriptures. **"For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus."** 1 Timothy 2:5

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 02-13-2022



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we look at a reading from the Prophet Jeremiah, the second reading from Paul's Letter to the Corinthians, and finally the Gospel from Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the prophet Jeremiah, who was known as the weeping prophet, due to the devastation and grief he experienced with the exiled people of God in the days of the Old Testament. He makes a set of contrasting statements in this passage, that provide a stark interpretive framework for the meaning of life on this planet. While there are many confusing and chaotic experiences in life, some things are very easily defined, based on Jeremiah's words here.

First Reading:

Jeremiah 17:5-8 NAS95 5 Thus says the LORD, "Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind And makes flesh his strength, And whose heart turns away from the LORD. 6 For he will be like a bush in the desert And will not see when prosperity comes, But will live in stony wastes in the wilderness, A land of salt without inhabitant. 7 Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD And whose trust is the LORD. 8 For he will be like a tree planted by the water, That extends its roots by a stream And will not fear when the heat comes; But its leaves will be green, And it will not be anxious in a year of drought Nor cease to yield fruit."

First of all, Jeremiah delivers the bad news: cursed is the one who puts his/her trust in the wrong things. What are these false places of trust? The list includes: 1) mankind, 2) one's own strength, and 3) anything that causes one to turn away from the LORD. Then he provides a word picture to help the reader taste the severity of this misplaced trust. Putting our trust in the wrong things creates a desperate situation, likened to a bush in a desert where there is no water. The unquenching thirst becomes a wasting sort of lifestyle, where there is no hope for flourishing or true prosperity. The "bush" lives in a wasteland, where it is surrounded by unsatisfying and harsh conditions, incompatible with life. This is an excellent picture of the soul that is disconnected from the Lord. While there may be signs of life on the outside, the sentence of death is already pronounced on it and it cannot survive, let alone thrive in this world.

Jeremiah describes this inhospitable environment as "a land of salt" where there are no people who can stand to live there. Again, this picture conjures up a truth about the soul, namely, that it is thirsty. But apart from God's provision, there is no satiation for our thirst. It is a land of salt. And though we may try and try to find water, we end up joining in the song that is sung by the world (in a myriad of different ways): "I can't get no satisfaction."

What hope is there for the thirsty soul? Jeremiah delivers the good news. There is a blessing for those who are tired of living under the curse. There is life for those who are feeling the sting of death. There is abundance for those who are willing to give up their pursuit of false notions of satisfaction. The key to true blessing is to put your trust in the Lord. The result of putting your trust in the right place is likened to a tree that is planted where it can flourish, next to water. Even in a time of heat and drought, it still finds water, because the roots extend into the rich and fertile soil that has been saturated with the life-giving stream. The tree is not "anxious" because the water gives it stability and strength to weather storms and extreme conditions. The tree can give its energy to bearing fruit, even if the immediate climate is not conducive to growth and flourishing. What a picture of contentment and satisfaction. Who would not want to experience the abundance of this second picture of the flourishing tree and avoid the forlornness of the first picture of the scroungy bush?

The problem is not that the tree is thirsty; the problem comes when the tree is not planted into the One who can satisfy the thirst. And there comes the rub. We all want an abundant and fruitful life, but there are different philosophies of how to get there. Will we trust the Word of the Lord, or will we experiment with trying to find life outside of God's provision for us? Will we trust the Lord, who Is the One who created all things, knows all things, and provides us with all things? Or will we determine our own path and put our confidence in our own paths?

Trusting in the Lord. How simple, and yet how very difficult this is for us. The human soul has a tough time believing and trusting in the Lord, especially when life's circumstances are going poorly. We wonder where God is and why He is not doing more to protect and help us. Hardships and setbacks, like what the people of Israel experienced, mock us for being naïve enough to trust a God who seems impotent to save us from the difficulties of life. But is it possible that when God is not saving us from trials, He may be saving us from something more destructive and dangerous that is intangible? Is it possible that God really is helping us, even when we hurt and He doesn't take the pain away?

Jeremiah had to live out of this type of crusty, determined faith in the LORD in the midst of the exile and physical oppression during the siege of Jerusalem. His roots had to extend very deep and far to find streams of living water, for God's chosen people were being brutally attacked, pillaged, and destroyed. If Jeremiah can trust in the LORD, then maybe we, too, can walk by faith in the One who is ultimately "faithful and true" (Revelation 19:11). The two ways are clearly depicted in this passage. The question is, where will we plant ourselves and where will we place our trust?

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading drops us in the middle of a heated discussion that was being tossed around in Paul's day and was affecting the Corinthian church. Some were heretically saying that resurrection from the dead was emphatically an impossibility. But instead of divorcing themselves totally from the message of Christianity, they were trying to syncretize this belief into the Gospel (Good News). Paul starts out this chapter by clarifying the message of the Gospel. In verses 1-4 of chapter 15, he states the heart of the Gospel: Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and was raised from the dead on the third day. All of this happened according to what Scripture had predicted and what had been recorded by eyewitnesses. Paul himself was an eyewitness of the resurrected Lord Jesus. God's Word was trustworthy on this point, which meant it was trustworthy on other points as well.

Second Reading:

1 Corinthians 15:12-20 NAS95 12 Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

Omitted: (vv. 13-15)

13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; 14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. 15 Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised.

16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; 17 and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. 20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.

Paul continues to adamantly proclaim the importance of the resurrection of Christ from the dead as the linchpin that holds the Christian faith together. For if Christ did not rise from the dead, "your faith is worthless" (v. 17). Paul, a master orator, takes their logic to the final outcomes and shows how ludicrous it is to believe in a Christian message that is devoid of resurrection power. Some points of logic that he makes include:

- The resurrection of Christ and those who follow Him is a fundamental part of the Gospel (Good News). For if the resurrection is impossible, then Christ was not raised, and cannot raise us.
- IF the resurrection did not happen, then
    - Paul's preaching (and suffering) was in vain and he was a false witness,
    - their faith was in vain, worthless, and, in fact, they were still in their sins,
    - those who had already died in Christ were completely lost—without hope and never to rise again, and
    - Hoping in Christ for this life only is a fool's game—not at all a smart move.

Seeing the nature of the ridiculous conclusions that were stacked up on top of this heresy makes this position untenable with the Christian faith.

The definitive "But" comes into play in the last verse of this passage (v. 20a). "**But** now Christ *has* been raised from the dead" which makes all of the above obsolete. Paul in this sweeping way, underscores the importance of the resurrection of Christ, which has bearing on our lives today. For He was the line leader of what is to come for all who trust in Him. He was the first "fruit" and our resurrection from the dead will be a fruit that follows this inaugural event. Christ changed the trajectory of the human race by living a perfectly righteous life as a human being, which meant that death had no hold on Him. He bore the weight of the world's sin on His shoulders, even though He did no deserve the punishment of our sin, which is death. Therefore, His victory over the grave is our victory over the grave. And while we still experience physical death, we no longer are sentenced to spiritual death, if we will but entrust ourselves to His provision of grace. This is not just good news, it's the best news ever! May the resurrection life of Christ reorient our lives and become the most important organizing principle of our lives.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The heavenly perspective of Jesus is often shocking to those of us who have been saturated in a worldview where there is no God and that operates according to the prince of this world. The Gospel passage for this week provides one of these experiences where the world's values are juxtaposed to God's value system. If we don't have eyes to see, it's not that God is out of step with reality, but more likely that we are blind to the power of an unseen world. Jesus came to shine light into our darkness.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 6:17-26 NAS95 17 Jesus came down with them and stood on a level place; and there was a large crowd of His disciples, and a great throng of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon,

Omitted: (vv. 18-19)

18 who had come to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were being cured. 19 And all the people were trying to touch Him, for power was coming from Him and healing them all.

20 And turning His gaze toward His disciples, He began to say, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. 21 Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. 22 Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. 23 Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets. 24 But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full. 25 Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. 26 Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way.

The setting of the Gospel reading finds Jesus gaining acclaim and recognition amongst not only the Jewish people, but even those from more distant regions that were not particularly God-fearing (Tyre and Sidon). His acclaim, though, seemed to have more to do with what He could do to alleviate finite trials, than about what He could to do to alleviate the infinite problem of sin and disconnection from the Father. So, while He was willing to demonstrate the power of God by healing people of diseases and delivering others from demon possession, He was not willing to further the bent of the human soul that seeks to "use God" for devilish purposes. This passage clarifies that God is not a genie in a bottle, or a vending machine that can be formulaically approached for one's own desired ends.

Instead, Jesus redefined "blessing" in a way that is unrecognizable if we are not yoked to His mindset and value system. Here is what He calls blessed:

- Being poor, for this signifies that you are not operating on the world's value system. Instead, it shows that you belong to the kingdom of God.
- Being hungry, for you are trusting God to satisfy your needs.
- Being tender-hearted enough to weep, for then you are at a place to be comforted by God's perspective, which leads to His joy and laughter.
- Being hated, ostracized, insulted, and scorned for Christ's sake, for then you will no longer be trying to find your joy in the approval of others, but will find it in the approval of God and His rewards.

Here is what He cautions us against by saying "Woe" to you who:

- Using your wealth as an end in itself; thinking that material goods can fill the cavernous hole in your soul
- Satisfying your hunger now with finite things, leaving no room for spiritual hunger to drive you to pursue eternal satisfaction
- Seek to always be amused, for there is a somber reality of this life that is designed to bring us to a place of contemplating the meaning and purpose of human existence
- Find approval from others as the organizing principle of your life, for you will never find truth. Instead, you will be willing to accept what is false in order to impress others and fit in with the crowd's worldview.

This teaching of Jesus is not popular, nor easy to incorporate into our lives. The very fact that we have a hard time with it is one of the authenticating proofs of its validity. If it meshed with our human value system, we could hardly believe it as representative of heavenly realities. So, before we try to domesticate what Jesus teaches, we must ask ourselves if we trust Him. If we do, then we will seek to understand and incorporate His perspective into our worldview and allow Him to reorient our value system, no matter how difficult or long this process may take. The good news is that we do not have to attain this perspective on our own strength or through our own striving. When we feel overwhelmed by these truths, we are in a good spot to look up and call out for help. A heartfelt acknowledgment of our weakness to live out of this heavenly mindset is the entry point for God to do a new work in our lives. The Spirit is willing to reshape us to have the mind of Christ—the question is are we willing to let Him do this work in us? Do we trust Him enough to let Him take us where we need to go, to become the type of people who have a counter-cultural mindset? If we do, then we will stand out as lights in a dark and decaying world.

Reflection Questions

1. The Prophet Jeremiah listed three false places of trust which were mankind, one's own strength, and anything that causes one to turn away from the LORD. It was perhaps easier for this man of God to understand his own weaknesses. Can you identify with any of these three false places of trust? In what ways does having faith in Jesus help to deliver you from any of these in which you identify?

2. In the Gospel reading we learned how Jesus redefined "blessing" in a way that is unrecognizable if we are not yoked to His mindset and value system. Review the four points of blessing. With which of these can you identify with and what spiritual circumstance brought (or is bringing) this about?

- Being poor, for this signifies that you are not operating on the world's value system. Instead, it shows that you belong to the kingdom of God.
- Being hungry, for you are trusting God to satisfy your needs.
- Being tender-hearted enough to weep, for then you are at a place to be comforted by God's perspective, which leads to His joy and laughter.
- Being hated, ostracized, insulted, and scorned for Christ's sake, for then you will no longer be trying to find your joy in the approval of others, but will find it in the approval of God and His rewards.