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 Sunday, 3-10-2019



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. Today we learn about the nature of faith and the importance of knowing God's word so that when we need it we have it to combat temptations we encounter in our lives.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Deuteronomy, the last Book of what is called the Pentateuch, the first five Books of the Bible. Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land (see Numbers 20:12), so God gave him instructions about what the people were to do when they entered the land. As always, understanding the context is important because some forty years had passed since God had delivered the Israelites from their captivity in Egypt. Only the people who were twenty years and younger were allowed to enter because of their sin of unbelief (Numbers 14:29). This was a time of much grieving because many memorials would likely have been held for the numerous people that had died during the era of wandering in the desert. The chapter opens with an introductory statement which sets the tone for today's reading. "Then it shall be, when you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance, and you possess it and live in it" (Deut 21:1). Finally, God had opened the way for the people to enter the Promised Land.

First Reading:

> *Deuteronomy 26:4-10 NAS95 4 "Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the LORD your God. 5 "You shall answer and say before the LORD your God, 'My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; but there he became a great, mighty and populous nation. 6 'And the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, and imposed hard labor on us. 7 'Then we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction and our toil and our oppression; 8 and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with great terror and with signs and wonders; 9 and He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. 10 'Now behold, I have brought the first of the produce of the ground which You, O LORD have given me.' And you shall set it down before the LORD your God, and worship before the LORD your God;*

God architected the people's entry into the Promised Land at a time to correspond with the harvest, at which point the manna would cease (Joshua 5:12). God provided instructions to the priest that the first thing that was to be done was to make an offering to Him (v. 4). God affirmed the legacy of the father of the Israelite nation, "a wandering Aramean," likely referring to Jacob who sojourned for a long period in that region (Syria) under the control of his father in law Laban (v. 5). During the Nation's time in Egypt, the population of Jews greatly multiplied, a trend which began way back when Jacob had first entered Egypt (v.5e). This is affirmed in Genesis, "Now Israel lived in the land of Egypt, in Goshen, and they acquired property in it and were fruitful and became very numerous" (Genesis 47:27). The Egyptians then began to resent and distrust the people, and took them as their slaves (v. 6). God however heard their cries and began the process to move them out in the Land that he had promised to Abraham. The closing verse of the reading marks a bookend of God's instructions to make a kind of "first fruits" offering to the Lord upon entering the Land.

Today's message served as a reminder to the people who were about to enter the Land about the naure of God's fruitfulness. When the people entered the Land, they would find it very fruitful, just as the Lord had promised them (Exodus 3:8, Numbers 14:8, etc.).

In our day it is perhaps easy for us to overlook the fact that everything comes from God when His actions are more behind the scenes compared to His bold and obvious acts in leading the people out of captivity in Egypt and eventually into the Land. As we approach Easter Sunday, we also have the opportunity presented to us from God to reflect upon the nature of God as our supreme provider. God has given us fruitful blessings beyond comparison by sending His Son to atone for our sins once and for all. Like the fruit of the harvest that waited for the Jewish people for which they had done nothing to earn, we can celebrate how God gave us Jesus as a totally free gift which we cannot earn and not deserve. We will learn move about this gift in the next reading.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Today's second reading is from one of the most important texts in the entire New Testament Bible. The context of the tenth chapter or Romans deals with the current situation of the Nation of Israel.

This section of Romans is sandwiched between chapter nine dealing with Israel's past situation, and chapter 11 which deals with Israel's future. Chapter 10 opens with a message concerning the Nation, "*Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation*" (Romans 10:1). This is God's present-day message for all people, not just Israel. Many in the Nation of Israel in Paul's day misunderstood the message of faith, a condition which continues until the present time. Paul said in the second verse, "*For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge*" (Romans 10:2). In today's reading, Paul will explain the basis of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Second Reading:

> *Romans 10:8-13 NAS95 8 But what does it say? "THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, in your mouth and in your heart" –that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, 9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. 11 For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; 13 for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."*

Here, Paul quoted from a crucial Old Testament text in Deuteronomy which explained the conditional nature of the Mosaic Covenant. It is important to understand the biblical citation anytime when all capitals appear in the text. This section in the Law first provided the list of blessing that God has promised to the Nation, but then concluded with the condition, "*if you obey the LORD your God to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this book of the law, if you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and soul*" (De 30:10). The Law then went on to say that the Law was undeniably right within their reach, "*But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it*" (De 30:14). Paul quoted from the Greek version (Septuagint) of this important text to say that God's message of the New Covenant is right here among them through his message. Whoever trusts in the Lord through belief that God raised Jesus from the dead will be saved, whether they are a Jew or a Gentile. "Whoever will call on the name of the LORD will be *saved*" (v. 13), period.

Paul wrote his message to a church which was being tossed by the false Gospel that salvation came through works and not by faith alone which produces the fruit of good works. In fact, he dedicated the entire Book of Galatians to refute the controversy brought about by the Judaizers who taught this false doctrine. Paul summarized the matter in the second chapter of that Book, "*nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified*" (Galatians 2:16).

What does Paul's message mean to the church in our time? Everything, since this same false

message has continued from the time when Paul first wrote against it. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is a free gift (Ephesians 2:8-9), one that is brought about from reading the word of God. Paul made the source of our Christian faith clear just a few verses past today's reading, "*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ*" (Romans 10:17). As believers in the resurrection and life of the Lord Jesus Christ we can trust in our salvation as an accomplished fact of God from which will flow the fruit of our good works. Our salvation does not come from works any more than the Creator comes about from its own creation. This is a crucially important core truth about salvation that makes today's reading one of the most important texts in the entire Bible.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The context of the reading from Saint Luke is right after Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist (Luke 3:21), which marked the opening of His ministry when He was around 30 years of age (Luke 3:23).

Gospel Reading:

> *Luke 4:1-13 NAS95 1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness 2 for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry. 3 And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." 4 And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE.'" 5 And he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. 6 And the devil said to Him, "I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. 7 Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours." 8 Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'" 9 And he led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here; 10 for it is written, 'HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU TO GUARD YOU,' 11 and, 'ON their HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.'" 12 And Jesus answered and said to him, "It is said, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.'" 13 When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time.*

Luke recalled how Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit of God to be tempted by Satan in the desert for a period of forty days during which he fasted. These temptations were many (see verse 13, "every temptation"), however since Jesus was hungry the first one recorded here dealt with Satan's offer of food (v. 3). Satan's question to Jesus began with the word "if," through which the master deceiver doubted Jesus' identity as the Son of God. Jesus replied to each inquiry of the devil by answering with the Word of God. "If you are the Son of God," then make the stones into bread (v. 3). Also, "If you are the Son of God," throw Yourself down from the height of the temple (v. 9).

Today's reading teaches us how we are to resist temptation, whether we understand that it comes from the devil or not. By placing God's word into our hearts through reading and memorization of it,

we can "answer" each temptation with the word of the Lord in our hearts.

I remember once when I was a teenager our family went on a summer vacation trip to the Washington, DC area with its rich history. One day we visited a old well which was famous for some events during the Civil War in which people through coins into expecting a blessing. As I peered into the well, I saw the large amount of money sitting just a few feet below the edge and within an easy hop into the now dry ditch. I looked around and seriously considering jumping in at a time when nobody was watching. However, a thought began to reverberate through my mind as I began to carry out my plan. "Though shalt not steal" (Exodus 20:15). I had evidently heard this from my Catechism classes. But, I thought, this isn't stealing, these people are just throwing their money into this hole. Still, the words echoed through my heart, and I finally turned away from my folly. Looking back on this many years later I realized how knowing just a bit of God's word had protected me from carrying out something that was truly stupid!

Carrying God's word in our heart takes hard work and isn't something that comes about by accident. Instead, we have to endeavor to prepare before we face temptation such that when it comes, we will be prepared to answer it with God's word in our hearts. If we don't have the word in our reserves, we will never be able to rely upon it when the need arises. That is the heart of what Luke taught us in today's reading.

Reflection Questions

1. In the first reading we saw how God prepared the Nation of Israel before their entrance into the Promised Land by asking them to first prepare a sacrificial offering from the goodness of His provision from the fruit of the harvest. In what ways can you prepare your heart to celebrate Easter Sunday in such a way, so that then it comes you can see things differently in light of God's provision?
2. In the second reading we learned about God's teaching regarding faith. Once a person understands the Gospel message faith is indeed truly mixed together with works (please refer to James 2:18 on your own). In what ways have you ever perhaps trusted in works instead of faith for your salvation at some point in your life by going through the motions of your religious practices?

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