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 09-15-2024



One time while I was studying the first reading from Isaiah Chapter 50, I came across an interesting commentary on a web site. This supposedly Christian pastor wrote about the identity of the servant figure in the reading either as the Nation of Israel as a whole, or perhaps as he said, "an individual person." Then he gave an analysis of verses 4 – 9a in which he never once identified the "servant" mentioned there with the Person of Jesus Christ. This contradicts the Gospel narrative who very clearly ascribed these exact events in describing the Passion of Jesus Christ (for example Matthew 26:67). This week we will study that reading from Isaiah and learn about what Jesus had to say in the Gospel reading about those who like the pastor I mentioned, deny or ignore that Jesus is the Christ of God presented by Isaiah. This week we will also learn from James about two types of faith, one that saves and one that does not. The key idea that runs throughout the three readings today is the faithfulness (or lack thereof) of God's servants.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Isaiah 50 and is one of what is known as Isaiah's "Servant Songs." The

Servant Songs prove in a powerful way that Jesus of Nazareth is God's Righteous Servant, the long-awaited Messiah. As we mentioned in the introduction, some present-day scholars (especially including Jewish writers) identify the servant in these songs as the entire Nation of Israel. This is true in a certain sense and especially about the one spoken of in the opening verses of Chapter 50 just prior to today's reading. Verse one reads, "*Thus says the LORD: Where is your mother's bill of divorce with which I put her away? Or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? No, because of your sins you were sold, and for your transgressions your mother was put away*" (Isaiah 50:1). Clearly, the Lord is using a figure of speech in referring to the Nation who went astray from Him and was sold into captivity for their sins. However, in contrast to the servant we will read in the subsequent verses, the servant figure implied in this verse is an unfaithful one. As we will see in the reading below, the Servant beginning in verse 5 is undeniably the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

The overall preceding context of today's reading is the preparation of Judah's return from captivity at Babylon, something we know happened during the times of Nehemiah. Isaiah had also just introduced the prophecy of the future captivity under a yet to be born ruler named Cyrus (Isaiah 44:28 – 45:1). This future Persian King would be responsible for the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem and is also called a servant or shepherd of God (Isaiah 44:28). Isaiah prophesies about both faithful and unfaithful servants, be they Jews or Gentiles like Cyrus. This same idea of faithfulness carries into the second reading today as well as the Gospel lesson in which Jesus is the faithful Servant of God. As you read, take careful note of the characteristics of the faithful Servant.

First Reading:

> *Isaiah 50:5-9 NAS95 5 The Lord GOD has opened My ear; And I was not disobedient Nor did I turn back. 6 I gave My back to those who strike Me, And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting. 7 For the Lord GOD helps Me, Therefore, I am not disgraced; Therefore, I have set My face like flint, And I know that I will not be ashamed. 8 He who vindicates Me is near; Who will contend with Me? Let us stand up to each other; Who has a case against Me? Let him draw near to Me. 9 Behold, the Lord GOD helps Me; Who is he who condemns Me? Behold, they will all wear out like a garment; The moth will eat them.*

Although the Nation of Israel sinned, God was obedient in fulfilling His promises of redemption through His Servant Son Jesus Christ. The Servant (whom we know as Jesus) was obedient in doing all that God had for Him to accomplish (v. 5). Although Jesus was condemned by the then leaders of the world, He was obedient to God and looked to His Father for His ultimate vindication. In a similar way, we too are called to obey our Father God in accomplishing all the things He has for us to do

and we will ultimately be vindicated when we meet the Lord.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is a continuation of the study from James we read last week, but moving ahead to verse 14. The content of his teaching is the quality of true faith. Throughout the Bible, there are many examples of people possessing different qualities of faith, one that saves and one that does not. Rahab was commended for her saving faith by the author of Hebrews when he said, "By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace" (Hebrews 11:31). Rahab was a prostitute in Jericho who received the two spies sent by Joshua and hid them in defiance of the King (Joshua 2:1-6). Had she not taken this bold step of faith she would have perished at the hands of the Israelites when they toppled the city. As we read from James, we will see both kinds of faith, the kind that saves and expresses itself in godly actions (Ephesians 2:10), and the kind that cannot save. It is this latter kind about which we will read later in the Gospel lesson about which Jesus said, "*For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels" (*Matthew 8:38).

Second Reading:

> *James 2:14-18 NAS95 14 What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? 17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. 18 But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works."*

James asks a hypothetical question, essentially, "What good is a dead faith because a dead faith doesn't result in the salvation of one's soul" (v. 14). He then went on to illustrate the works that proceed from a person possessing such a dead faith. This person could say something like, "be warmed and filled" (v. 16b) to a person that is cold and hungry. There are two types of faith, that which can save and that which cannot. The faithful servant is one whose works manifest themselves into acts of service. This is a type of faith that can save, and does save a person (1 John 5:13). Although they are saved by God's grace through faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9) this faith manifests itself in good works (Ephesians 2:10).

As we move onto the Gospel lesson, remember how in the first reading we saw how Isaiah portrayed Jesus as the faithful Servant Who willingly surrendered Himself to the vile treatment of His tormentors. In contrast, we also saw how Isaiah in the earlier verses spoke of the unfaithfulness of the implied servant figure, the Nation of Israel who was sold into captivity for their sin. In the Gospel lesson, we will see how Jesus is the faithful Servant of God and how Saint Peter boldly proclaims this message even though he misunderstood the nature of God's Servant Son.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading from Saint Mark begins Jesus' inevitable and irreversible journey to the cross. As we saw in the pleas of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah, in today's Gospel reading Jesus testifies about the difficult plan that His Father has for Him (Mark 8:31). The context of the reading is in Caesarea Philip. This is a place that I encountered during my trip to Israel that has an eerie sense about it, almost as if Jesus' conflict with Satan had somehow permeated the rocks of that place to this very day. As you read, keep in mind that the purpose of Jesus' miracles was to show the people Who He was, to bring them to repentance of their sins, and to move them to place their trust in Him for eternal life.

Gospel Reading:

The reading omitted verses 36-38 which have been included below.

> *Mark 8:27-38 NAS95 27 Jesus went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way He questioned His disciples, saying to them, "Who do people say that I am?" 28 They told Him, saying, "John the Baptist; and others say Elijah; but others, one of the prophets." 29 And He continued by questioning them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ." 30 And He warned them to tell no one about Him. 31 And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32 And He was stating the matter plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. 33 But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." 34 And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. 35 For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. 36*

> *For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? 37 For what will a man give in exchange for his soul? 38 For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."*

For the very first time Jesus revealed His Father's plan for Him which was to offer His body as the ultimate and final sacrifice during the Passover celebration. Jesus knew that He had to fulfill the plan His father had for Him exactly, including how and when He was to die. Jesus used the term "I am" in verse 27, something which His Jewish hearers would have known was a claim of divinity. In asking them who they thought He was, Jesus was clearly identifying Himself as God, the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, the One Who would offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. After Jesus had warned them not to tell anyone that He was the Christ (v. 30) although His miracles spoke profoundly about His nature (see John 10:25, "The works that I do in My Father's Name bear witness of Me"), He explained to His disciples "plainly" (v. 32) what was to happen to Him in Jerusalem. Note how the text says, "He **began** to teach them" (v. 31a, emphasis added) about this, because even after He rose from the dead, His disciples still didn't understand. He told his disciples to keep quiet about His identity in order to fulfil the Father's timing of His life as the Jews were already seeking to kill Him (John 5:18). We see that in verse 32 Peter, the student, took Jesus, the Teacher, aside and began to rebuke Him! Jesus identification of Himself as the Suffering Servant from Isaiah didn't accord well with Peter's view of Jesus as the conquering Messiah. Peter unwittingly spoke for Satan in attempting to change Jesus' destiny on the cross, in the same way that Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness (Mark 1:12-13). We will say more about this below.

Peter, like many of us, was impulsive and frequently acted first and too stock of his actions later. After having spent the better part of three years, he was obviously upset that anyone would harm Jesus, especially the chief priests and scribes. He was clearly the leader of the group of twelve disciples and the first one and a representative of all twelve to whom were later given the "keys of the kingdom," meaning that He entrusted them with the dispersion of the Gospel message to the world. His main role was as a witness to the Jews (Galatians 2:8). Sometimes called the "first among equals," he played a leading role in the early church as can be seen in Acts Chapter 1 when he was the first to gather the ten remaining disciples in order to replace Judas Iscariot the traitor. Peter, whose heart was changed by the Holy Spirit, was the first of the disciples to confess Jesus as the Messiah (Matthew 16:16-18). He was called a "pillar of the church" in Paul's Letter to the Galatians (Galatians 2:9) and acted as the de facto spokesman of the disciples (see Matthew 15:15, 18:21, 19:27, Mark 11:21, etc.). Peter couldn't bear the thought of losing his best friend and ministry partner for whom he had dedicated his life the past several years. Peter, like the Old Testament Prophets and Jesus, had also suffered from the constant persecution of the scribes and Pharisees, and one can only imagine his anger when Jesus told him that this nemesis would kill his Messiah!

Yes, the purposes of God had to be fulfilled through Jesus offering Himself as a Savior for our sins. Peter, who was overcome both with his passion and love of Jesus, was as Jesus said, also influenced by the Father of Lies (v. 32). The time of Jesus ministry was an era of extreme demonic activity. Almost a dozen times in the Gospels Jesus was confronted by a demon possessed person and cast it out of them (for example Matthew 9:33, Mark 7:26, Luke 4:33). Our enemy the devil seems to have a lot of capabilities, but we know for certain that Peter wasn't in any way "possessed by a demon." No, what happened in this incident was that Peter simply repeated a mantra that was implanted in the world by the father of the world (2 Corinthians 4:4), the father of lies (John 8:44), Satan, the devil himself. This lie was the Messiah would come and set up his eternal kingdom without the need for anyone to deal with their sin, either in a personal or corporal sense for all of Israel. The people of the god of this age (2 Corinthians 4:4) saw no need to humble themselves before God, repent of their sins, and allow God to give His life as the perfect, once for all sacrifice of sin forever (Hebrews 10:14). For a very brief instant Peter was conformed to this world, something about which Saint Paul later warned us when he said, "Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your heart (Romans 12:2).

Concluding Thoughts:

In the introduction of today's lesson, I mentioned a theologically liberal preacher who studied the same text we read in Isaiah and came to a completely different conclusion regarding the identity of the figure in the song of the servant. Perhaps he was ashamed of Jesus so as not to offend his Jewish readers. As we saw in the Gospel reading, Jesus had a stern warning for those who would not confess Him as the Messiah. Jesus made a scary statement concerning this in today's Gospel reading about people who express that kind of faith. "*For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels*" (Mark 8:38). This pastor's denial of the obvious identity of Jesus in Isaiah 50 contrasts sharply with Peter who through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit recognized and confessed Jesus as the Christ. Peter's faith is the kind about which James spoke, the kind saves, the type that expresses itself through good works.

Throughout the readings today, we saw two types of servants, the faithful ones like Jesus and His true followers, and the unfaithful ones that God will send into permanent captivity, unlike the temporary condition suffered by the Nation of Israel. My prayer is that we will live boldly as faithful believers in the Lord Jesus by not denying Him, whether in print, in the ways that we treat others, or in the ways in which we are obedient in serving Him. What if **we** knew how and when we were going to die? How now would we then live?

Reflection Questions

1. That faithful servant is one whose life is marked by good works done as a result of a heart changed by God, however, we all fall short in various ways (Romans 3:23). One of the areas in which I have caught myself falling into a trap over and over again in my marriage (and in other relationships) is to propose a five-point plan to fix someone once they have poured out their heart to me concerning their problems. Have you ever fallen into this type of sinful behavior? In light of what you learned today from the readings, how can you through God's power counteract this in the future?

2. Peter was the first to boldly express that Jesus was the Christ (Mark 8:29), but his confession ended up leading to Jesus' rebuke when his concept of the Christ didn't align with the Father's plan for Jesus which included suffering, death, and resurrection. Discuss in what ways you too have misconceptions about Jesus in your life. In what ways do you expect Jesus to do something in a certain manner or timeframe, but find yourself frustrated when He accomplishes His plan in a contradictory manner?