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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 11-11-2018



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with a story from 1 Kings that tells how God provided food in a time of drought for a faithful prophet through a poor widow who trusted God and gave all she had. Then we move to the book of Hebrews and learn how Jesus has provided a superior and final sacrifice for our sin. We conclude with a reading from the Gospel of St. Mark where Jesus condemns religious hypocrisy and commends humble, sacrificial faith.

Introduction to the First Reading:

In First Kings 17, the lives of a wicked king, a faithful prophet, and a poor widow converge when God sends a punishing drought upon the land. As God judges the evil, He simultaneously and miraculous preserves the faithful.

A little review of Israel's history is a necessary backdrop to this passage. The people of God were composed of twelve tribes descended from Abraham's grandson Jacob (renamed Israel in Genesis 35:10). These descendants and the land God gave them for a home were called Israel. From them, the Messiah Jesus would come, and through His salvation all the nations of the world would be blessed.

Despite their privileged position in God's plan for the nations, the people of Israel rebelled against

God and went after the false gods of the surrounding nations. They forgot the Lord's commands and worshiped idols. This was the fate of King Solomon when he ruled in Israel after his father David's reign. At first he followed God, and God gave him great wisdom to rule justly. But when Solomon married foreign women, he began to follow after their gods. Because of his idolatry, God said He would take ten of the tribes from Solomon's rule and leave only the tribes of Benjamin and Judah under the authority of his descendants. The ten tribes became known as the Northern Kingdom and were called Israel. The remaining two tribes formed the Southern Kingdom and were called Judah.

A series of kings reigned in Judah. Some followed the Lord and some did not. In Israel a different series of kings reigned, each one more evil than the previous one. Eventually King Ahab came to power, and he "*did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who were before him* (1 Kings 16:33)." He married Jezebel, a foreign woman, and created places of worship for her gods—Baal and Asherah. It was to this idolatrous, evil king that Elijah came as a prophet of God to proclaim judgment on Israel.

Elijah prophesied, "*As the Lord, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word*." In the ensuing drought, God miraculously provided food for Elijah. One of the ways He did this was through an unlikely source–a poor widow woman.

When Elijah's source of drinking water dried up, God sent him to a widow in Zarephath. Elijah arrived just as the widow was gathering wood to cook a final meal for her and her son. She had only enough flour and oil to make a little bread, and after that she believed she and her son would die. When Elijah requested bread from her, the widow explained her plight. Elijah promised her that God would not let the flour and oil run out until the day God sent rain upon the earth. Why the widow believed Elijah we do not know. But placing her trust in Elijah and Elijah's God, she did as he requested. God kept His promise, and the widow, her son, and Elijah were miraculously spared.

The story begins in 1 Kings 17:8. You will want to begin reading there and continue through the First Reading (v. 10-16).

First Reading:

> *1 Kings 17:10-16 NAS95 10 So he arose and went to Zarephath, and when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks; and he called to her and said, "Please get me a little water in a jar, that I may drink." 11 As she was going to get it, he called to her and said, "Please bring me a piece of bread in your hand." 12 But she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I have no bread, only a handful of flour in the bowl and a little oil in the jar; and behold, I am gathering a few sticks that I may go in and prepare for me and my son, that we may eat it and die." 13 Then Elijah said to her, "Do not fear; go, do as you have said, but make me a little bread cake from it first and bring it out to me, and afterward you may make one for yourself and for your son. 14 "For thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'The bowl of flour shall not be exhausted, nor shall the jar of oil be empty, until the day that the LORD sends rain on the*

> *face of the earth.'" 15 So she went and did according to the word of Elijah, and she and he and her household ate for many days. 16 The bowl of flour was not exhausted nor did the jar of oil become empty, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke through Elijah.*

Elijah and the widow trusted God, and God kept His promise. We will likely never go through a drought but we might experience a job loss or setback that greatly affects our ability to provide for ourselves and our family. The same God who took care of Elijah and the widow knows our needs, too. Philippians 4: 13 says, "*And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."* He is a faithful God who never changes. Like the widow of Zarephath, we can trust Him to provide.

It is rare, though, for God to provide through a direct miracle as He did when the flour and oil did not run out. More often He lays the need on the hearts of His people and moves us to give. After all, everything we have belongs to God. We are merely stewards or managers of it. Every time we pray for God to provide for someone's need, we should ask God if He wants any of our stuff (money, food, belongings) to be the provision for that need. The widow did not fear to give all she had. We don't need to fear either.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The book of Hebrews was written to Jewish believers who were experiencing persecution and, as a result, were contemplating returning to Judaism. The writer of Hebrews explains how Jesus is superior to all things under Judaism. He is greater than Moses, the Old Covenant, the Old Testament priesthood, and the earthly tabernacle with its animal sacrifices.

A reminder of the Old Testament sacrificial system would be helpful here. When an Israelite sinned, he would bring an animal (often an unblemished lamb) to the priest in the tabernacle. The priest would sacrifice the animal and shed its blood on the altar for the remission of sin. Behind a heavy curtain was the Holy of Holies where God would appear in a pillar of cloud or fire. No one could go in there except the high priest, and he could go in only once a year on the Day of Atonement. On that day the high priest would make a sacrifice for himself (for he is a sinner, too) and for the sins of all the people and carry the blood inside the curtain, presenting it to God. The sacrifices had to be repeated year after year since they were never able to perfect the worshipper. They were only a foreshadowing of the ultimate sacrifice of the Lamb of God (Jesus) who takes away the sin of the world (Gospel of St. John 1: 29).

The Second Reading shows us that Jesus, as the mediator of a new covenant, is superior in every way.

Second Reading:

> *Hebrews 9:24-28 NAS95 24 For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy*

> *of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; 25 nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own. 26 Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. 27 And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, 28 so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.*

Jesus Himself is the high priest who entered into the holy place, not an earthly one made by human hands, but into heaven itself. There He presented to God, not the blood of animals as a sacrifice for sin, but His own blood. Because Jesus was perfect, God accepted His sacrifice as final. There is no need for any other.

He is coming a second time to receive all believers to Himself, and we eagerly await that day! Will you be ready to meet Him when He comes?

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Many people in our parishes follow the practices of the church because they love God. Some however follow the rituals because they want to be thought of as "religious." Their concern is not so much how God sees them but how others see them. They are not so much interested in pleasing God as they are in impressing others. Some of the religious leaders of Jesus day were like that, too.

In the immediate setting of the Gospel Reading, religious leaders were pretending to be interested in Jesus, but they were actually trying to trick Him with difficult questions in order to discredit Him. Knowing their motives, Jesus confounded them with His superior wisdom until they had nothing left to say.

Jesus warned the crowd to beware of religious leaders who flaunt their religion for self-serving reasons— for personal gain or to be seen and respected by men. Instead, Jesus pointed out a poor widow and her small gift as an example of sincere faith, for she gave it quietly and sacrificially. Others gave out of their surplus, but she gave out of her poverty.

Gospel Reading:

> *Mark 12:38-44 NAS95 38 In His teaching He was saying: "Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes, and like respectful greetings in the market places, 39 and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, 40 who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers; these will receive greater condemnation." 41 And He sat*

> *down opposite the treasury, and began observing how the people were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums. 42 A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent. 43 Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; 44 for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on."*

Our religious acts of service are to be done humbly and quietly out of love for God not as a means to impress men and earn favor with God. God already looks favorably on us not because of what we have or what we do but because of what Jesus has done for us on the cross. God is not looking for impressive external religion but sincere and sacrificial devotion from the heart.

Reflection Questions

1. Jesus was the perfect and final sacrifice for sin. God looks on us with favor not because of what we have or what we do but because of what Jesus has done for us on the cross. How does this truth affect your day-to-day relationship with God?
2. Do a heart check this week. Are you practicing your religion to impress people or as an expression of sincere devotion from the heart?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 10-21-2018

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week Marla shares by opening with Isaiah 53: 10-11, which is part of a chapter that depicts in graphic detail Jesus' suffering and death for our sin. Then she turns to a passage in Hebrews 4:14-16 that shows how Jesus has faced the same temptations we face and as a result, is not only sympathetic to us in our struggles but can give us victory over them. Finally, she concludes with the Gospel of St. Mark 10: 35-45 where Jesus tells us the key to greatness is being a servant of all.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Isaiah 53 gives one of the clearest depictions in the Old Testament of Jesus as the suffering servant, as it predicts in devastating detail His rejection, humiliation, and death for our sin. Although the prophet Isaiah doesn't reveal the name of this suffering servant, later generations understood that only Jesus in His death fully corresponded to the one depicted here. This was confirmed by many New Testament writers as they quoted from Isaiah 53 in speaking of Christ. (1 Peter 2: 21-24 is a prime example.)

What Jesus suffered for our sin in order to redeem us is sobering. The 10 verses that precede the First Reading reveal the awful truth. He was despised and forsaken. Furthermore, He was smitten (struck), afflicted, pierced, crushed, chastened, scourged, and oppressed (Isaiah 53:3-7). Yet, "He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth" (v.9). His death was truly the just dying for the unjust that He might bring us to God (1 Peter 3:18).

Jesus did not open His mouth in protest because He knew He was fulfilling the Father's will. Referring to His life Jesus said, "No one has taken it away from me, but I lay it down on my own initiative (Gospel of St. John 10:18).

The next verses, which comprise the First Reading, may seem puzzling at first, for they teach us that the suffering Jesus endured was according to God's good pleasure. The word pleasure here does not mean happiness but that all would take place according to the LORD's will. As you read the First Reading note the Father's purpose for the Son's suffering.

First Reading:

Isaiah 53:10-11 NAS95 10 But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. 11 As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities.

Our iniquity (sin) separates us from God, but the LORD caused the iniquity of us all to fall on His Son (Is. 53:6). Jesus took our guilt and punishment, and by His suffering we are justified, that is, made right before God and restored to a right relationship with Him.

As we consider Christ's suffering and sacrifice on our behalf, let us seek to live out that sacrificial love for the benefit of others. One of the most important ways we can love others is to introduce them to Jesus and tell them of the One who suffered on their behalf.

The Second Reading speaks about another kind of suffering—the struggle against temptation. Jesus faced it and was victorious. When we face temptation, we don't face it alone. We have someone who understands and helps.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The Second Reading takes us to a group of verses set in a larger context that speaks of Jesus as our high priest. In the Old Testament sacrificial system, when someone sinned, he would bring an animal to the priest and the priest would sacrifice it (shed its blood) on the altar in the tabernacle/temple. Behind a heavy curtain was the Holy of Holies (or Holy Place) where God would appear in a pillar of cloud or fire. No one could go in there except the high priest, and he could go in only once a year on the Day of Atonement. On that day the high priest would make a sacrifice for himself (for he is a sinner, too) and for the sins of all the people and carry the blood inside the curtain and present it to God. The sacrifice had to be repeated year after year.

Hebrews Ch. 7 and 9 tell us that Jesus is a high priest, but one far superior to the human ones we read about in the Old Testament. And here's why. Jesus himself was both the high priest and the sacrifice for sin. His sacrifice was perfect and total, and God accepted it as final. There was no need for any further sacrifice. No more work needed to be done to procure our salvation. Jesus had done it all. He rested from His work, and now as we hear the Gospel and believe, we enter into that place of rest. We cannot work for our salvation. We can only by faith enter into the salvation and rest Jesus

has provided (See Hebrews 4:1-11).

Our First Reading along with all of Isaiah 53 depict the pain of rejection and suffering Jesus endured for our salvation. We don't have a high priest far removed from our pain and struggles but One who has experienced in a body like ours the sufferings of this world. Consequently He can sympathize with each of us in our weakness and suffering. This is true also of the temptations we face each day. He has faced them, too. Notice the comfort and encouragement found in our Second Reading.

Second Reading:

Hebrews 4:14-16 NAS95 14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. 16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Because Jesus has faced the same temptations we face, we can come to Him and find mercy and grace in our time of need. He displays mercy as He sympathizes with our struggles, and He gives grace to overcome them. Because He was victorious, we can be also.

In the following Gospel Reading, the subject again turns to suffering as Jesus takes his 12 disciples aside and reveals disturbing details about his upcoming suffering and death.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

This week we return to the Gospel of Mark. While on a journey to Jerusalem, Jesus takes his 12 disciples aside and tells them of the suffering He will soon be facing. He will be delivered to the Jewish leaders who will condemn Him to death. Then He will be handed over to the Romans who will mock Him, spit on Him, scourge Him, and kill Him.

Knowing the culmination of Jesus' life was at hand and apparently believing He would soon set up His kingdom, James and John make a bold request. They ask to sit with Him in glory in places of honor at His right hand and His left. Jesus knew the path to glory was through the suffering of the cross, and that all who follow Him would likely suffer, too. Rejection, persecution, and even martyrdom awaited them. Did they know what they were asking for? Could they drink the cup of sorrow He would drink?

Jesus then reminds them that whoever wishes to be great among them doesn't do it by seeking a place of honor or authority. Earthly rulers seek honor, authority, and power and lord it over their subjects. But this is not the way of God. Notice in the Gospel Reading how someone can be great in God's kingdom.

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Gospel Reading:

Mark 10:35-45 NAS95 35 James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You." 36 And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" 37 They said to Him, "Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory." 38 But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" 39 They said to Him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized. 40 But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." 41 Hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John. 42 Calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. 43 But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; 44 and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

True godly leadership requires serving. In St. John's Gospel, the apostle John recounts how Jesus demonstrated servanthood by humbly washing the disciples' feet—a job reserved for the household servants. Jesus told His disciples, "*If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you*" (St. John 13:14-15).

Serving sometimes requires not just humility but sacrifice and suffering. Jesus demonstrated His willingness to suffer by dying for our sins on the cross, the ultimate act of service. Are we willing to follow Jesus' example and serve one another, even if it results in suffering? Whoever wishes to be great among us must humbly serve. For even Jesus himself came not to be served but to serve and give his life a ransom for many (v. 45).

Reflection Questions

1. Read all of Isaiah 53 and contemplate all Jesus suffered on your behalf. How does this motivate you to serve Him more?
2. Jesus lived a life of sacrifice and service. Who is God calling you to serve today? Write down ways you can do that. Be specific and be thankful for the opportunity to follow in Jesus' steps.

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 07-15-2018



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with Amos 7: 12-15 as Amos, a simple farmer, is called by God to prophesy in Israel. Then we move to Ephesians 1:3-14 where Paul explains all the blessings that are available to those who are in Christ. Finally, we conclude with Mark 6: 7-13. Here Jesus sends out His disciples to minister and instructs them to trust God for their daily needs as they call people to repentance.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Imagine you are an ordinary farmer, minding your own business, tending your sheep and your crops. Suddenly God commands you to go to a neighboring land and pronounce judgment on its rebellious people. No one wants to be the bearer of bad news. Yet sometimes God called men to be prophets, foretelling God's plan and delivering God's words of warning and judgment. God's intention was never to simply punish people. His ultimate desire was to restore His wayward children back to Himself. Amos, however, was not a prophet, nor even the son of a prophet. He was simply a farmer trying to make a living in Judah during the time of the divided kingdom.

You may remember that the twelve tribes of Israel were divided into two kingdoms due to the sin of King Solomon. Ten tribes became the Northern Kingdom and were collectively called Israel. The

remaining two tribes made up the Southern Kingdom and were known as Judah. In a strange twist, God called this farmer from Judah to go to Israel and prophesy against them.

At first, Amos pronounced God's judgment on Israel's enemies. No one objected to that. But then he began to recite the sins of Israel. Amos first reminded them of all God had done for them. He had released them from bondage in Egypt, defeated their enemies, given them land, and raised up prophets among them. Yet Israel rebelled. It wasn't that they had completely forgotten God. They still performed their religious rituals. But while claiming to belong to God, Israel oppressed the righteous, deprived the poor of justice, worshipped idols, and commanded the prophets not to prophesy.

Religious ritual unaccompanied by love for God and concern for the oppressed does not impress God. He despised Israel's religious hypocrisy. When He used His plumb line (standard of holiness) to evaluate Israel, her crookedness was revealed. Amos warned them that God's judgment would surely come. Their king Jeroboam would die by the sword, and Israel would be taken captive by its enemy.

In the First Reading, Amaziah, a priest of Israel who should have been open to the message of the Lord, instead commanded Amos to cease prophesying and go home. Though Amos conceded he was a farmer and not a prophet, he knew God had called him to prophesy. He would prove faithful to that call despite opposition.

First Reading:

> *Amos 7:12-15 NAS95 12 Then Amaziah said to Amos, "Go, you seer, flee away to the land of Judah and there eat bread and there do your prophesying! 13 "But no longer prophesy at Bethel, for it is a sanctuary of the king and a royal residence." 14 Then Amos replied to Amaziah, "I am not a prophet, nor am I the son of a prophet; for I am a herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs. 15 "But the LORD took me from following the flock and the LORD said to me, 'Go prophesy to My people Israel.'"*

We are prophets in a sense, bringing God's message of salvation to those around us. This message is a mixture of bad news and good news. The wages of our sin is death, St. Paul tells us in Romans 6:23, and if we continue in our rebellion against God, we will surely die. That is very bad news. But the good news is in that same verse: "*…the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord*." God has called each one of us to bear this news to the whole world. Will we be faithful to the call?

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Some time ago I enjoyed visiting Moody Bible Institute in Chicago when my daughter Emily was a student there. Because Moody is located near the center of one of the largest cities in America, the security on campus is tight, especially in the areas where students live and hang out. Students carry a pass card that allows them access to all the restricted areas. I was an outsider there, but as long as I was with Emily I could enjoy free access to all the college offered: I could visit the dorms, go to

chapel, attend classes, eat in the cafeteria, and have coffee at Joe's Coffee Shop. Nothing was kept from me as long as I was with Emily. Without her, I would be on the outside separated from the rich experience Moody offers. I could claim no right to these blessings. But as long as I was with her, all the blessings that were hers were mine, too.

Abundant blessing and privilege exists in the spiritual realm, but in ourselves, we have no right to it. Without Christ, we are on the outside and without hope. In the Second Reading Paul tells the church in Ephesus that God's plan from the foundation of the world was to include them (and us) in these great blessings.

As you read the Second Reading, notice the richness of these spiritual blessings which can be ours in abundance. Note the words *every, all, riches, lavished, fullness.* Observe the words that indicate how intentional God was to bless us—*He chose us, He predestined us, He purposed, according to the kind intention of His will*. And notice how many times the words *in Christ* are used for it is only through Christ that we have access to His abundant blessings.

Second Reading:

> *Ephesians 1:3-14 NAS95 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. 7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight 9 He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him 10 with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him 11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, 12 to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. 13 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation–having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.*

Can you fathom the blessings that are ours in Christ?

v. 5 adoption as sons – When we trust in Christ and His death on the cross for us, we become members of God's family with all the rights and privileges of adult sons.

v. 7 *redemption through His blood* – Redemption has the idea of buying someone from the slave market and setting them free. We were slaves to sin, but God paid the price for us by sending

Jesus to die in our place. He has purchased us with His blood and set us free to serve Him.

v. 7 *the forgiveness of our trespasses* – We don't deserve forgiveness, but this is evidence of His abundant grace which He lavishes upon us.

v. 11 *an inheritance* – This is ours because in Christ we have been made a child of God. This inheritance, St. Peter explains in 1 Peter 1:4, "is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you."

v. 13 *sealed with the Holy Spirit* –We are sealed in Christ by the Holy Spirit who comes to live in every believer. Our position in Christ is secure.

St. Paul explains the *pass card* that gives us access to God's abundant blessings:

"…after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation–having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory." (Ephesians 1:13-14)

We hear the message of salvation, we believe it, and are saved and sealed in Christ by the Holy Spirit. Christ's standing before God is our standing, His inheritance is our inheritance, and His riches are our riches. God lavished them on us, because we are in Christ.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

In today's reading from Matthew, Jesus sent out the 12 disciples two by two as His representatives and under His authority. Their mission was a spiritual one. They would be taking the good news of Jesus to the lost. Naturally Satan and his demons would be opposing them at every turn, but Jesus gave his disciples power over these dark spiritual forces.

Gospel Reading:

> *Mark 6:7-13 NAS95 7 And He summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits; 8 and He instructed them that they should take nothing for their journey, except a mere staff–no bread, no bag, no money in their belt– 9 but to wear sandals; and He added, "Do not put on two tunics." 10 And He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave town. 11 Any place that does not receive you or listen to you, as you go out from there, shake the dust off the soles of your feet for a testimony against them." 12 They went out and preached that men should repent. 13 And they were casting out many demons and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them.*

The disciples were to take nothing for their journey—no food, money, or extra clothing. Commentators have posed three reasons for what seems to us a strange command. First, extra possessions are an encumbrance. We have probably all experienced times when, instead of owning

our possessions, they owned us. Our possessions require care and maintenance, consuming time and money and distracting us from more important matters of life. Are my possessions being used to serve God or are they distracting me from ministry? The disciples were to take nothing extra that could encumber them.

Second, the disciples were to go out in complete dependence on God's power and provision. One of the hallmarks of Jesus' life on earth was that He lived in complete dependence upon the Father (John 5:19, 5:30, 7:16). The disciples were to do likewise, depending on God for their daily provisions.

And third, Jesus established the principle that the minister of God is to be supported by the people to whom he ministers. It was appropriate for the disciples to enjoy the hospitality and provision of the ones who were receiving the blessings of their ministry.

If a city or household rejected the disciples and their message, the disciples were to shake the dust off the soles of their feet as they left. *Jews sometimes shook the dust off their clothing when returning from Gentile lands as a sign of contempt.** When the disciples did it, it was a sign of judgment. The disciples' message of salvation was often accompanied by miracles. Rejecting the message in the face of supernatural authentication indicated an intractable heart. Those who rejected the disciples were ultimately rejecting the One who sent them. And when people reject Jesus, they are rejecting the only provision for their sin. By shaking the dust off their feet, the disciples were communicating a warning: *We offered you what you needed for salvation, but you turned it down. The responsibility for your sins remains on your shoulders. Judgment is coming. We have nothing more to offer you.*

It is a moment none of us would want to face. And we don't have to if we repent and believe.

*https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/reformation-study-bible/Matt.10.14-Matt.10.15

Reflection Questions

1. Which of the blessings listed in Ephesians 1 are you most thankful for and why?

2. If God were to send you out to minister, which of your possessions would be most difficult to leave behind? What could you do this week to decrease your attachment to things and increase your dependence upon God?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 06-17-2018



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with Ezekiel 17: 22-24. The prophet uses a metaphor to show how God sets up kings and takes them down and will eventually establish a King who will reign over all. Then we move to St. Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5: 6-10, encouraging the use of our earthly bodies for eternal purposes. Finally we conclude with St. Mark 4: 26-34, as Jesus uses parables to teach about the kingdom of God.

Introduction to the First Reading:

When an F5 tornado struck Joplin, Missouri, on May 22, 2011, 158 people died and countless others were injured. Tornado warnings had been issued and the sirens activated, but many did not seek shelter soon enough. One study found that only 10 percent of the population respond immediately when a tornado warning is given. The others respond with what the researcher called, "denial." * Lives are lost when people don't believe and heed the warnings.

Ezekiel was a prophet of God sent out to warn God's people of impending destruction. God had always been their shelter in a time of storm, but they had strayed far from Him. If they didn't turn back to Him destruction would surely overtake them. Ezekiel and many of the other prophets were sent to sound the alarm, but sadly, many did not heed the prophets' warning.

The people of God were composed of twelve tribes descended from Abraham's grandson Jacob, (renamed Israel in Genesis 35:10). These descendants and the land God gave them for a home were called Israel. From them, the Messiah Jesus would come, and through the salvation He would bring, all the nations of the world would be blessed.

Despite their privileged position in God's plan for the nations, Israel rebelled against God and went after the false gods of the surrounding nations. They forgot the Lord's commands and worshiped idols. This was the fate of King Solomon when he ruled in Israel after his father David's reign. At first, he followed God, and God gave him great wisdom to rule justly. But when Solomon married foreign women, he began to follow after their gods. Because of his idolatry, God would take ten of the tribes from his rule and leave his posterity the tribes of Benjamin and Judah only. The ten tribes became known as the Northern Kingdom and were called Israel. The remaining two tribes formed the Southern Kingdom and were called Judah. It was to Judah that God sent Ezekiel with His warnings.

God had already sent an invading army from Babylon to take Judah into captivity. Ezekiel was with the first wave of captives taken to Babylon. Some of God's people, however, still remained in Jerusalem, Judah's capital. If they didn't repent and turn back to God, they would face a similar fate as their brothers. They ignored the warning, and instead of seeking God, they sought an alliance with Egypt. That failed, and Babylon conquered Jerusalem taking most of the people who resided there into captivity.

First Reading:

> ***Ezekiel 17:22-24 NAS95 22 Thus says the Lord GOD, "I will also take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and set it out; I will pluck from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one and I will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. 23 "On the high mountain of Israel I will plant it, that it may bring forth boughs and bear fruit and become a stately cedar. And birds of every kind will nest under it; they will nest in the shade of its branches. 24 "All the trees of the field will know that I am the LORD; I bring down the high tree, exalt the low tree, dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will perform it."***

In the First Reading, Ezekiel uses trees as a metaphor for rulers God sets up and takes down. When kings abandoned God and led the people far away from Him, God sent prophets like Ezekiel to call them back to God and warn them of impending destruction. When the king and his people persisted in their rebellion, God sent conquerors to come and take them captive.

Ezekiel looked forward to the time when God will set up another king. God will take a twig from the lofty top of the cedar and plant it on the mountain of Israel, and it will bear fruit and birds of all kinds will come and prosper there. This tree is a reference to Jesus who will be established in Israel and will bring salvation to all who come to Him. And someday He will reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords in a heavenly kingdom that has no end.

Another prophet sounds the warning for us. St. John tells us:

> *16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. 18 He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (Gospel of St. John 3: 16-18)*

Those who believe in Jesus have eternal life. Those that don't, stand judged already.

* http://www.mprnews.org/story/2012/05/09/storm-ready-human-reaction#gallery accessed 5/18/15

Introduction to the Second Reading:

1 and 2 Corinthians were written by St. Paul the Apostle to the church in Corinth. There were sin issues in the church, and Paul had addressed them frankly in 1 Corinthians. Now in his second letter, he wanted to reassure the Corinthians that he did this, not out of anger, but out of love. In 2 Corinthians 2, Paul encourages the Corinthian church to forgive and restore the one who had caused the problems. He goes on to discuss practical matters of Christian living such as financial giving and caution regarding relationships with unbelievers. But often his thoughts turn from earthly matters to eternal blessings.

In the proclamation of the gospel, St. Paul had undergone extreme persecution which he recounts in 2 Corinthians 4. He testified, *"We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed."* Encouragement came from knowing that these "light troubles," as he called them, were producing eternal results—people were hearing about and believing in Jesus. His focus was not on the temporary suffering but on eternal rewards. He continued this focus in chapter 5.

Second Reading:

> ***2 Corinthians 5:6-10 NAS95 6 Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord– 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight– 8 we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. 9 Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.***

In the first five verses, St. Paul compares our bodies with an earthly tent. Tents are fragile and temporary and subject to destruction. So are our earthly bodies. While we are in this "tent" we groan and are burdened, Paul tells us. We long for a heavenly body, which is like an eternal house

not a fragile tent.

In this reading (v. 6-10), Paul acknowledges that it would be much better to be away from this body and home with the Lord in heaven. But until then, Paul tells us to do what is pleasing to the Lord. God has ministry for us to do, and it would be pointless to waste this time by wishing we were in heaven. But on the other hand, knowing that we are going to heaven someday will give us courage and perseverance when we face persecution and hardship in this life.

In addition, St. Paul reminds us we will someday have to give an account to Christ for what we have done in this life as Christians. Did we serve Him well? Did we tell others about Christ? Will He someday be able to say to you and me, "*Well done, good and faithful servant*"? He will if we faithfully use these earthly bodies to accomplish his eternal purposes.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Wherever Jesus went, a crowd of the curious gathered. He often spoke to them in parables. A parable is a simple, everyday story that represents a spiritual truth or moral principle. It usually compares a spiritual concept with an earthly object or event.

Gospel Reading:

> ***Mark 4:26-34 NAS95 26 And He was saying, "The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; 27 and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows–how, he himself does not know. 28 The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. 29 But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come." 30 And He said, "How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it? 31 It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the soil, 32 yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches; so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR can NEST UNDER ITS SHADE." 33 With many such parables He was speaking the word to them, so far as they were able to hear it; 34 and He did not speak to them without a parable; but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples.***

In the Gospel Reading, two parables are given. The first one begins, "*The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil.*" Stories like these are often told to illustrate or illuminate a truth. But Jesus spoke in parables not to clarify the truth but to obscure it. It was a judgment on those whose hearts were hard. To the unbelieving, the parables were incomprehensible riddles, but to those who wanted to understand the truth, Jesus would give them understanding. He said to His disciples and His true followers, "*To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables, [12] so that while seeing, they may see and not*

*perceive, and while hearing, they may hear and not understand…."**

In the first parable, the kingdom of God is compared to a man who plants seeds. While he goes about his daily routine and without any further help from the man, the seed sprouts and matures. So it is with us. We plant the seed of the gospel in people's hearts when we teach or preach or proclaim the truth of the Bible to our friends, neighbors, and relatives. Then God causes the implanted truth to take root and grow. A mature Christian is the result.

The second parable says that the kingdom of God is like a tiny mustard seed which grows into a large plant with branches capable of providing shade for birds of the air. The church was small in the beginning–just a little band of disciples. But when those men were empowered by the Holy Spirit to be witnesses of the Gospel to the whole world, the church grew rapidly. Many have found comfort and salvation there. If we plant the seed of the Word of God in people's hearts, God will cause that seed to spout and the church to flourish.

*Information gleaned from a sermon by John MacArthur accessed 5/20/15.
http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/90-464/the-purpose-for-parables

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Reflection Questions

1. What would you need to do differently in order to live your life for eternal purposes? List two areas in which you will write down on a card or in your personal journal.

2. If we plant the seed of the Word of God in people's hearts, God will cause it to grow. What are some ways you can plant more "seeds" this week? Give at least two ways in which this could be done.

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 05-13-2018



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week Marla shares the study of the readings beginning with Acts 1 where Peter explains how God's plan unfolds just as the Scriptures said. Next, we move to 1 John 4, where the apostle John tells us that those who abide in God, love as He loved. Finally, we conclude with John 17:11-19 where St. John records Jesus' prayer for His disciples just before He sends them out to minister in His name.

Introduction to the First Reading:

If you were a fan of the 80s show *The A-Team,* you will remember the iconic phrase spoken at the end of nearly every episode, "I love it when a plan comes together." In a make-believe story the plan always comes together—the writers make it so. Real-life human plans are not so reliable and can be thwarted. God's plan, however, always comes together exactly as God says. No one is strong enough to thwart His plan.

Before Jesus was taken up into heaven, He told His apostles to wait in Jerusalem until they received the baptism of the Holy Spirit which would give them power to be Christ's witnesses to the world. (The baptism of the Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit indwelling believers, enabling them to understand the truth and empowering them to do the work God has for them.) It was during this period of waiting that Peter spoke to the apostles and over 100 believers gathered with them. Here Peter reminds them that God's plan was being fulfilled just as the Scriptures said.

First Reading:

> ***Acts 1:15-26 NAS95 15 At this time Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren (a gathering of about one hundred and twenty persons was there together), and said, 16 "Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. 17 For he was counted among us and received his share in this ministry." 18 (Now this man acquired a field with the price of his wickedness, and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his intestines gushed out. 19 And it became known to all who were living in Jerusalem; so that in their own language that field was called Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) 20 "For it is written in the book of Psalms, 'LET HIS HOMESTEAD BE MADE DESOLATE, AND LET NO ONE DWELL IN IT'; and, 'LET ANOTHER MAN TAKE HIS OFFICE.' 21 Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us– 22 beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us–one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection." 23 So they put forward two men, Joseph called Barsabbas (who was also called Justus), and Matthias. 24 And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen 25 to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." 26 And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.***

Judas, one of the original twelve apostles, walked intimately with Jesus during the three years of His ministry. He heard Jesus' powerful words, witnessed His healing touch, and participated in His miraculous acts. Yet by a decision of his own evil heart, Judas betrayed his Lord and turned Him over to the Roman authorities to be crucified. It did not catch Jesus by surprise but was, with all its tragic detail, just as the Scriptures foretold. Judas' betrayal, as sinful as it was, did not thwart God's ultimate plan for man's salvation but rather was a step in its fulfillment.

When Judas, consumed by guilt, took his own life, a new apostle had to be chosen from the men who had been with Jesus from the beginning. Only two men qualified, Joseph and Matthias. The apostles prayed for God guidance and cast lots to discover God's choice. In that day, lots were cast by writing each eligible person's name on a piece of stone or wood, putting the pieces in an urn, and drawing out a name. * God's plan was fulfilled when Matthias' name was chosen.

We can be confident that God has a plan for us, too, and He will make it come together for our ultimate good and His glory. I love it when His plan comes together!

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from First John. A theme of the overall Book could be suggested as something like "tests for salvation" since so many times throughout John uses phrases which follow a pattern of if / then. In the context of today's reading, chapter 4 opens with his admonition, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). He then provides a test by which believers may know whether a spirit is of God or of the enemy. "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God" (v. 2). Since God is love (v. 8) we share in the love of God as believers that the Lord Jesus has indeed come in the flesh. The reading expands upon this common love that we share as believers.

Second Reading:

> ***1 John 4:11-16 NAS95 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. 13 By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. 14 We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 16 We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.***

In the six verses of our reading, the word *love* and its derivatives are used eight times. God is the author and source of true love. If God did not exist, love would not exist for God is love. He powerfully demonstrated it by sending Jesus to fulfill the greatest act of love known to mankind—a substitutionary death on a cross. Romans 5:8 says, *"God demonstrated his own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."* Jesus didn't die for a good cause or a good man. He died for you and me, not after we cleaned up our life, but while we were still lost in our sin. His death for us was the Innocent dying for the guilty, the Perfect dying for the broken, the Holy dying for the sinful. Can there be any greater demonstration of love?

Is it any wonder then, that love is a hallmark of one who abides in God? *Abide* is a word that means "to stay in a given place, continue, dwell, remain" (Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, # 3306). St. John tells us we come to abide in God by confessing Jesus is the Son of God and believing the love God has for us as demonstrated through Christ's death. And when we abide in Him we will love as He loved. It is important to understand, however, that we don't love *in order* to abide. We love *because* we abide in Him. When we receive God's love and extend it to others, we prove that we abide in the One who is love.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

When I left my son at college for the first time, I knew I would not see him again for six months. On the 12-hour ride, his father and I reminded him of the important precepts we had taught him about God and living the Christian life. We were hoping he would continue to walk the path of faith and not

stray from the truth of the Scriptures. After settling him into his dorm and expressing our love through hugs and tears, we prayed and released him into the Father's care.

For three years, Jesus had lived and ministered with the ones he chose to be his disciples. He loved them, revealed himself to them, and taught them what was to come. Though they heard him and were witnesses of His miraculous works, they didn't fully understand that He would die for sin, rise from the dead, and return to God the Father. It was now time for Jesus to fulfill His Father's will and to set in motion all the prophesies spoken about Him in the Old Testament. And it was time to say goodbye. The disciples would have to face a world of opposition and persecution without him, and they were understandably bewildered and sad.

In Ch. 13 of the Gospel of St. John, Jesus begins an extended, heart-felt goodbye. He would shortly send them out to serve others so He gave them a powerful demonstration of servanthood by washing the disciples' feet, an act typically done by the servants of the household. Jesus said, *"… I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you* (John 13: 15). In Ch. 14, He comforts them by explaining that He is building a home for them in heaven and someday will come again to take them there. In the meantime, they are to get their nourishment and power by abiding (remaining) in Him as branches get their life by remaining in the vine (Ch. 15). In Ch. 16, He promises the Holy Spirit will empower them (and every believer) to carry on His ministry and to lead them into all truth. Now in Ch. 17, on the night He was betrayed, Jesus prays for the disciples as he sends them out to minister in His name.

Gospel Reading:

> ***John 17:11-19 NAS95 11 "I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are. 12 "While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled. 13 "But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves. 14 "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 15 "I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. 16 "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 17 "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. 18 "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. 19 "For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.***

In the Gospel Reading, Jesus makes three requests of the Father:

1). Jesus prays that the Father would keep the disciples in His name.

What is Jesus asking for when He says to the Father, *keep them in your name*? His *name* refers to all

that God is and all that Jesus revealed Him to be. Jesus and the Father are one. As Christians, we are united to them and carry the same name. To live in God's name is to live in a way that reflects his character. While Jesus was with His disciples, He kept them in God's name and none of them were lost except Judas. Did Jesus fail to keep Judas in God's name? D.A. Carson in his commentary on The Gospel of John explains, "The defection of Judas is foreseen in Scripture [Ps. 41:10], and therefore no evidence of failure on Jesus' part." Jesus had kept His disciples and now that He was leaving, He asks the Father to keep His disciples faithful to His name.

2). Jesus prays that the Father would keep them from the evil one.

The forces of evil are real and oppose all God wants to accomplish in the world. Satan himself prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). God could have taken His disciples out of the world, but left them here as ministers of the good news of Jesus Christ. It is also why we are here. Jesus doesn't ask for them to be removed from the world but that they might be protected from the evil one while they do His work.

3). Jesus prays that the Father would sanctify them by truth.

Sanctify means *to make holy* and has the idea of being set apart for holy use or a holy purpose. (Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, # 37, 40). Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, is holy in his being but was also set apart for a holy purpose—to be the sacrifice for sin. As God the Son, He is separate from the evil world system, but He willingly entered into the world to save it through His death on a cross. As the disciples came to believe in Jesus, they also were sanctified for a holy work—to take the truth of the gospel to a lost world. Everyone who believed the disciples message would also be sanctified in truth for the words they bring are God's words. And we also are sanctified when we believe the Bible, God's written word of truth.

Reflection Questions

1. If we abide in God we will love others as God loved us. What can you do this week to demonstrate God's love to those around you?

2. Like the disciples, you have been sanctified (set apart) by God for a holy purpose—to take the truth of the gospel to a lost world. What can you do this week to begin fulfilling God's purpose for your life?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 04-15-2018



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week Marla shares the study of the readings beginning with Acts 3 where Saint Peter explains the meaning of the death of resurrection of Jesus. The second reading in First John also clarifies the importance of our relationship to Jesus Who is our Advocate in the face of our sin. Finally, the Gospel lesson from Saint Luke relates one of the stories of Jesus' appearance to the disciples after His resurrection.

Introduction to the First Reading:

When my son Cole was a little boy, he was often oblivious to what was going on around him. I remember one time we were anticipating the visit of a beloved aunt and uncle. My husband and I spoke of it for weeks ahead of time around the dinner table. But when the day came and his aunt and uncle arrived, Cole was surprised to see them and more than a little perturbed with us. "Why didn't anyone tell me they were coming?" he wanted to know. We assured him we had spoken of it numerous times in various ways in his presence. But somehow, he didn't get the message.

Turns out the Jews were a little like Cole. They had heard of the Messiah for generations. Moses and all the prophets from Samuel on had spoken of Him saying the Messiah would come and would suffer for their sins. Yet when Jesus came on the scene, they didn't recognize Him. And when a

miracle was performed in front of their eyes in the power of Jesus name, the people were astonished.

A man lame from birth was well known by the Jews who came to the temple. For as long as they could remember this man sat at the temple gate begging for money. This day, though, Peter and John, disciples of Jesus and filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, healed the man (see Acts 2: 36-47). His walking and leaping and praising God caused quite a stir in the temple that day, and the people came running to the men they thought responsible for the miracle. In the first reading, Peter denies being responsible and points the people to Jesus instead. In addition, he points out that though the Jews heard the prophets, they somehow didn't understand the message. Instead of receiving the Messiah, they had disowned Him and killed Him. Devastating words! Yet it was not too late to respond. They could repent and turn to God and their sins would be wiped away and times of refreshing would come from the Lord (v. 19).

First Reading:

> ***Acts 3:12-19 NAS95 12 But when Peter saw this, he replied to the people, "Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk? 13 The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. 14 But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, 15 but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses. 16 And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all. 17 And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also. 18 But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. 19 Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord;***

It is important to note that in this passage Peter is speaking to "men of Israel," i.e. Jewish people (v. 12). He appeals to their heritage of "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers" (v. 13). Then he uses multiple terms to identify Jesus including:

- [God's] servant (v. 13
- The Holy and Righteous One (v. 14)
- The Prince of Life (v. 15)
- The one whom God raised from the dead (v. 15)

These are some strong statements about who Jesus is. When we believe in Jesus, it is because we are convicted of our need for a Savior. This leads us to repent of (or turn away from) our sins. Peter invited them to turn from their sin and return (to the Lord) so that their sins would be wiped away.

This same invitation is extended to everyone who is willing to believe in Jesus.

It is possible to attend Mass, hear that Jesus died for your sins, but not fully understand the message. Peter says to repent of our sin and then to turn to God so that our sins will be wiped away and that times of refreshing will come to us. God has promised, and He always keeps his promises.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

I know shopping on line is popular, fast, and convenient. However, how many of us have purchased something on line and ended up with an inferior product? Sometimes I prefer to go into a store, see the product with my own eyes, and handle it and try it out with my own hands. Only then can I be sure that what I am purchasing is the real deal.

St. John the apostle testified that Jesus was who He claimed to be—the Son of God and Savior of the world. And how did John know that? Because he was an eyewitness to the life and ministry of Jesus and with Peter and James was part of Jesus' inner circle. Here is how St. John spoke of his relationship with Jesus:

> *1 John 1:1-4 NAS95 1 What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life– 2 and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us– 3 what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. 4 These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.*

St. John had seen Jesus with his own eyes, heard Him with his own ears, and touched Him with his own hands. He knew from firsthand experience the real Jesus and wanted others to know Him, too. However, false teachers—the Gnostics—were teaching error, calling the body evil, denying the true humanity of Jesus, and living immoral lives. St. John reminded his readers that those who claim to be real followers of Jesus would live as Jesus lived not like the Gnostics, indulging in immorality. He explains:

> *1 John 1:5-8 NAS95 5 This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; 7 but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.*

This idea is expanded in the second reading.

Second Reading:

> ***"1 John 2:1-5 NAS95 1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2 and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. 3 By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4 The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; 5 but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him:"***

The big idea in this reading is the importance of having a personal relationship with Jesus, rather than living hypocritically by claiming knowledge of Him with no fruit. If we claim to know Jesus and do not follow His commands we are liars and His truth is not in us (v. 4). Anyone can claim to be a Christian but John gives a clear guideline to assess ourselves. Keeping Christ's commands shows the sincerity of our claim to be a Christian. Obedience from the heart is a byproduct of coming "to know Him" and an outward manifestation of an inward reality.

Even while we are in Christ, we recognize the ongoing struggle we have with sin. The good news is that when we sin we have an advocate—an advocate is someone who has authority and uses that position on our behalf. God hates sin and as a good judge must punish sin. The Bible says the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23A). But Jesus is the propitiation for our sins (v. 2). Propitiation means "satisfaction." God is propitiated—satisfied—with Jesus' sacrifice. Jesus pleads our case before the Father. He died and shed His blood for our sins so we don't have to. And when we truly believe in Jesus, we will walk in His ways, demonstrating that our faith is real.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

My son Cole was not the only one who failed to fully comprehend what was going on right before his eyes. The disciples, too, often heard and saw things that they did not fully understand until later. When Jesus said, "Destroy this temple and I will raise it up the third day, some thought He was talking about a building. It wasn't until after Jesus was raised from the dead that the disciples understood He was referring to his death and resurrection.

Maybe that's why two disciples on the road to Emmaus didn't recognize the resurrected Jesus when He joined them along the way. The disciples told their fellow traveler about the Nazarene who was crucified three days prior and how puzzled they were at the report from eyewitnesses that His tomb was empty. What could it mean? Then Jesus said to them:

> "*O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures*." (St. Luke 24: 25-27)

Their hearts burned within them when He spoke, but it wasn't until later, when the three of them broke bread together, that the disciples recognized Jesus. A moment later, He vanished from their sight. They hurried to Jerusalem to find the apostles and to testify that they had seen the risen Lord. As they spoke, Jesus appeared in their midst.

Gospel Reading:

> ***Gospel Luke 24:35-48 NAS95 35 They began to relate their experiences on the road and how He was recognized by them in the breaking of the bread. 36 While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst. 37 But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. 38 And He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." 40 And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. 41 While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" 42 They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; 43 and He took it and ate it before them. 44 Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." 45 Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, 47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things."***

Notice what great effort Jesus made to demonstrate that the One who stood before them was not a spirit or a conjuring of their grieving imagination. It was the real flesh and bone person of Jesus. They could actually see and touch the nail prints in His hands and feet. And in a final convincing proof, Jesus ate a piece of fish, something no dead person or disembodied spirit could do. It was really Jesus, raised bodily from the dead.

Because He was raised from the dead, we have the hope of a new life also, not just in heaven someday but here and now (Romans 6:1-8). The disciples were to proclaim to the whole world the message of repentance, forgiveness, and resurrection to new life. And now it's our turn to proclaim this life-giving news to our generation.

Reflection Questions

1. Even when we read the Bible we sometimes miss the message. What message about Jesus did you

learn from the reading today that you hadn't noticed before? How can understanding that message change how you live today?

2. Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we have the hope of new life also, both now and for eternity. What is one way you can begin to share that message with those around you?

Mass-Study-Notes-for-Sunday_04-15-2018.pdfDownload

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 03-18-2018



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week Marla shares the study of the readings beginning with Jeremiah 31 in which we see God's promise of a new covenant with Israel. Then she moves onto the second reading from the Book of Hebrews and then closes with the Gospel lesson from John 12. As we come nearer to the celebration of Good Friday and Easter Sunday the focus of the Bible passages continues to point us towards the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and His resurrection in glory.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading from the prophet Jeremiah is about love, promises, and a special family relationship, broken and restored. I love my family and express my love with affectionate names. I call my husband "Hon," my daughter "Sweets," and my son "Sonnybun." I speak of them with endearing words because we are family, and they mean the world to me.

In the Old Testament God speaks of the nation of Israel in intimate terms. He made a covenant (promise) with Abraham that his offspring would be God's chosen people and the whole world would be blessed through them. God and Israel were bound together much like a husband and wife, and God spoke of her in tender and loving terms as a husband speaks of his bride. But when Israel rebelled and turned away from God, her sin was likened to adultery or whoredom. God had been faithful, but Israel had broken her promise.

The book of Jeremiah records the coming judgment. God's judgment on his people was not intended to destroy them but to restore them to himself. Though they would be taken away into captivity by a foreign power, God would keep his promise, bring them back, and make a new covenant with them. That covenant is still in effect today, and here is the good news—that covenant includes us! The first reading explains it as follows.

First Reading:

> *31 "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. 33 "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 34 They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."*
> *Jeremiah 31:31-34*

The Old Covenant had a law written on tablets of stone. When Israel disobeyed that law they sinned. The Bible says that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin (Hebrews 9:22). In the days of Israel, sins were covered but not taken away by the blood of repeated animal sacrifices in an earthly temple. But the New Covenant is far superior to that (see Hebrews 10: 1- 25). God gave Jesus his Son as the perfect sacrifice for sin. He is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (St. John 1: 29). His death on the cross is the final sacrifice for sin and cleanses the sinner (and we are all sinners, Romans 3:23) completely.

Now we have the law of God not on stones but in our hearts. Each of us can receive Jesus by faith and know him in a personal way. When we accept what Jesus has done for us and believe in Him, our restoration to God is complete, and He can once more call us by His affectionate names—child, friend, and bride (St. John 1:12; 15:15; Rev. 19:7, 22:17).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading takes us to a set of verses in a larger passage that speaks of Jesus as our high priest. In the Old Testament sacrificial system, when someone sinned, he would bring an animal to the priest and the priest would sacrifice it (shed its blood) on the altar in the tabernacle/temple. Behind a heavy curtain was the Holy of Holies (or Holy Place) where God would appear in a pillar of cloud or fire. No one could go in there except the high priest, and he could go in only once a year on the Day of Atonement. On that day the high priest would make a sacrifice for himself (for he is a sinner, too) and for the sins of all the people and carry the blood inside the curtain and present it to God. The sacrifice had to be repeated year after year.
Before we read the second reading, first we want to look at Hebrews Ch. 7 and 9 which tell us that Jesus is a high priest, but one far superior to the human ones we read about in the Old Testament. Moreover, here's why:

> Hebrews 7:26-27 "*For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself."*

> Hebrews 9:11-12, 24-26 *"But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; [12] and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption".*
> *24 "For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; [25] nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own. [26] Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself."*

Jesus himself was both the high priest and the sacrifice for sin. His sacrifice was perfect and total, and God accepted it as final. That's why he is the source of eternal salvation to all those who obey him. With that background we come to the second reading. It reveals the anguish Jesus experienced as he faced his impending death for sin.

Second Reading:

> *7 "In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save* Him *from death, and He was heard because of His piety. 8 Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. 9 And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation," Hebrews 5:7-9 NAS95*

The day has arrived that Jeremiah spoke about in our first reading: God would "*forgive their iniquity, and …remember [their sin] no more"* (Jer. 31:34). Jesus was going to inaugurate the New Covenant, but to do so would cost Him his life. If we had been walking past the garden on that evening, we would have heard loud cries of anguish coming from deep within the garden. Why was Jesus crying? After all, He knew all along that He had come to die. The Bible says His life was not taken from Him; He willingly laid it down for us. It was in God's good plan before the world began. But the path to accomplishing that plan was so horrible to contemplate that it caused Jesus to cry out with loud cries and tears (Hebrews 5:7). Jesus knew what the prophet Isaiah foretold—that He would be *"pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins" (Isaiah 53: 5 NLT).* And so Jesus prayed, "*Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done"* (Luke 22:42). In this time of suffering and submission, Jesus' obedience was completed, made perfect. By perfect we don't at all mean there were flaws or sins or defects in Jesus that needed to be corrected. No, He was perfect in His being. P*erfect* in this verse has the idea of *being made complete.* You see, it wasn't until God the Son took on a human body that He experienced suffering in the flesh. In His suffering He learned obedience and, in doing so, was made complete.

Enduring the pain of rejection, loss, temptation, and suffering in a body like ours, Jesus became One who can sympathize with each of us in our weakness and suffering. We see this in another section of the Book of Hebrews:

> Hebrews 4:15-16 15 "*For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.* [16] *Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."*

What a comfort to know that the One who saves us from our sins is also the One Who has walked the path we are walking and will give grace and help in our time of need. We can draw near to Him with complete confidence.

Moving onto the Gospel reading, we see Jesus himself acknowledging that the time has come to fulfill God's plan foretold in our first reading in Jer. 31.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Gospel Reading:

> *20 Now there were some Greeks among those who were going up to worship at the feast; 21 these then came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and began to ask him, saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." 22 Philip came and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip came and told Jesus. 23 And Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25 He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. 26 If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him. 27 Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. 28 Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came out of heaven: "I have both*

> *glorified it, and will glorify it again." 29 So the crowd of people who stood by and heard it were saying that it had thundered; others were saying, "An angel has spoken to Him." 30 Jesus answered and said, "This voice has not come for My sake, but for your sakes. 31 Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out." : John 12:20-33 NAS95*

Just prior to the events of this passage, Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. People were flocking to Jesus because they had heard of this miracle, and many, including Jews, were believing in Him. This upset the religious leaders, and they plotted to kill Lazarus and Jesus. They had tried to capture Jesus before, but each time He escaped because "*his time had not yet come"* (John 7:30).
But in this Gospel reading, we see Jesus acknowledging that the time has come to fulfill His purpose and glorify His Father. A grain of wheat fulfills its purpose of producing grain when it falls to the earth and dies. Likewise, Jesus must die in order to accomplish His purpose of providing eternal salvation for all who believe. Though His soul was troubled, He would not hold back His life but would give it as a sacrifice for others. Because of His sacrifice we have been offered eternal life. We can love this life with its worldly pleasures and sin or we can turn from this life and follow Him. One is the wide road that leads to destruction, and one is the narrow road that leads to eternal life (St. Matthew 7:13-14).

Reflection Questions

1. List the primary aspects of the New Covenant and prayerfully thank God for Christ's provision. Jesus came to fulfil the New Covenant that Jeremiah predicted. What aspects of the New Covenant resonate with you and sound like Good News as opposed to the Old Covenant?

2. How does it encourage you to be faithful to Jesus this week knowing that He learned obedience in His life through suffering? In what ways can you see God working through your own suffering? It might be helpful to list one particular issue that keeps coming into your mind. How can you surrender this to God and look beyond these circumstances to see God's sovereign hand?

Mass-Study-Notes-for-Sunday_03-18-2018.pdfDownload

Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 12-27-2015

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **12-27-2015**. This week we open with 1 Samuel 1 where God gives a barren woman a son, whom she dedicates back to the Lord and His service. Then we move to Colossians 3 where we are told to live out the virtues of Christ in response to all He has done in and for us. Finally, we conclude with the Gospel of St. Luke 2 where Jesus begins to reveal His deity and many around him are amazed.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Gender reveal parties have become a popular way for expecting couples to reveal the gender of their baby to family and friends. It is a fun excuse for a party but the truth is, in our society, most people are thrilled and thankful no matter what the gender is.

If the technology had been available, a gender reveal party would have made more sense in Old Testament times. It was important among the Hebrew people to have children. Barrenness was seen as a curse and children as a blessing from the Lord. It was an even greater blessing to have a boy because the family name, inheritance, and headship were passed down through the son.

Elkanah, a man who lived during the time of the Old Testament judges, had two wives—Peninnah and Hannah. There was a rivalry between the two, and Peninnah, who had several sons and daughters, would regularly provoke Hannah because she was barren. This caused Hannah great sorrow.

Yearly, Elkanah would go up to the temple in Shiloh to worship the Lord there. On one of these trips, Hannah poured out her sorrow in the form of a prayer and vow to God. She promised that if God would give her a son, she would in turn give him back to the Lord to serve Him all the days of his life. God heard her prayer and gave her a son whom she named Samuel.

In the First Reading, we see Hannah fulfilling her vow to God. How hard it must have been for her to relinquish her only son to the Lord. Once the child was weaned, she took him to Eli, the priest at Shiloh, and presented him for service to God. What a great demonstration of faith this was.

Sometime later, but while Samuel was still a young boy, God called him to be a prophet in Israel and used him in a powerful way to reveal God's direction and will to God's people. Samuel faithfully spoke the word of the Lord concerning Israel all the days of his life. At God's direction, he anointed David to rule as king over Israel. Eventually another king would come from the house and line of David who would save His people from their sins and reign in righteousness. This king is Jesus.

First Reading:

1 Samuel 1:20-28 NAS95 20 It came about in due time, after Hannah had conceived, that she gave birth to a son; and she named him Samuel, saying, "Because I have asked him of the LORD." 21 Then the man Elkanah went up with all his household to offer to the LORD the yearly sacrifice and pay his vow. 22 But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, "I will not go up until the child is weaned; then I will bring him, that he may appear before the LORD and stay there forever." 23 Elkanah her husband said to her, "Do what seems best to you. Remain until you have weaned him; only may the LORD confirm His word." So the woman remained and nursed her son until she weaned him. 24 Now when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with a three-year-old bull and one ephah of flour and a jug of wine, and brought him to the house of the LORD in Shiloh, although the child was young. 25 Then they slaughtered the bull, and brought the boy to Eli. 26 She said, "Oh, my lord! As your soul lives, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you, praying to the LORD. 27 "For this boy I prayed, and the LORD has given me my petition which I asked of Him. 28 "So I have also dedicated him to the LORD; as long as he lives he is dedicated to the LORD." And he worshiped the LORD there.

Like Samuel, our children are a gift from God. We don't have to turn them over to full-time service in the church in order to dedicate them to Him. Teach them to serve God whole-heartedly no matter what profession they choose, knowing that God can do much with a man or woman whose heart is fully devoted to Him.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

In many of the Apostle Paul's letters, he presents a tragic picture of us in our sinful, fallen state and contrasts us with Christ in his holiness and perfection. In addition, he recounts what God has done for us in His grace, when we deserved only wrath. Once we understand the depth of our sin and the riches of His grace toward us, only then does he ask us to live a life that properly honors God and reflects His glory.

In the book of Colossians, St. Paul tells us that we were enemies of God, alienated from Him and

living in spiritual and moral darkness (Col.1:13,21). Jesus on the other hand, is the perfect image of the invisible God and supreme over all creation (1: 15-18). By His death He rescued us from the dominion of darkness and reconciled us to God, presenting us free from blemish and accusation (1:13, 22). Because of this, St. Paul says we are to live a life displaying His virtues and being thankful.

Second Reading:

Colossians 3:12-21 NAS95 12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. 18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them. 20 Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.

To display these virtues, we must cooperate with God's work of transformation. If you read all of Ch. 3, you will notice how this passage is interspersed with action verbs that indicate there is something God wants us to do. Col. 3: 2 tells us to *set* our mind on things above—that is, to think about what we possess in the spiritual realm—salvation from our sin, peace with God, and eternal life, to name a few. Verse 5 tells us to *consider* ourselves dead to evil desires. Verse 9 tells us we are to *put aside* the old self and *put on* the new self. That means to actively put aside old habits and patterns of living associated with our old, sinful self and actively live out the virtues of our new life in Christ by the power of God's Spirit.

In the Second Reading, we are told to *put on* the virtues of compassion, forgiveness, peace, and love. We are to *let* the Word of Christ dwell in our hearts, living its wisdom and teaching its precepts to others. Wives are to *submit* to husbands, husbands are to *love t*heir wives, and children are to *obey* parents. God is transforming us into Christ's likeness and calling us to intentionally live out those virtues for the benefit of others and the glory of God.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The first 20 verses of the second chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke are some of the most well known of the whole New Testament. This is the story of Jesus' birth in a humble stable and the angels' glorious announcement to the shepherds that a Savior has been born.

This Savior was God the Son who took on human flesh and was born as a baby—fully God and fully man. And just like other human babies, Jesus grew from an infant to a boy to a man, increasing in

physical stature but also in wisdom and favor with God and men (Luke 2:40,52).

While much of his growth was typical, Jesus also developed in ways that astounded those around Him. This Gospel Reading recounts an occasion when Jesus, as a twelve-year-old boy, amazed the seasoned teachers in the temple with the depth of His understanding of the things of God.

Jesus had come to Jerusalem in a caravan with his parents to celebrate the Feast of the Passover. A day into the return trip, Mary and Joseph discovered their son was not with them. They quickly returned to Jerusalem, and after an anxious three-day search, found Jesus in the temple, interacting with the Jewish teachers.

Mothers everywhere can identify with Mary's response which was likely a mixture of relief and consternation: *"Why have you treated us this way? Behold, your father and I have been anxiously looking for you."* Jesus' response must have sounded impudent to those who didn't fully understand who He was. He asked, *"Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know I had to be in My Father's house?*

No, Mary didn't know. It seems neither she nor Joseph fully understood the implications of the statement their son had made to them. They didn't understand that Jesus was under the authority of another Father, a Heavenly One, and Jesus would soon follow that Father's will all the way to the cross. All would be revealed in the fullness of time. Until then, Jesus continued to live in subjection to His earthly parents, and Mary treasured all these things in her heart.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 2:41-52 NAS95 41 Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. 42 And when He became twelve, they went up there according to the custom of the Feast; 43 and as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. But His parents were unaware of it, 44 but supposed Him to be in the caravan, and went a day's journey; and they began looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances. 45 When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem looking for Him. 46 Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. 47 And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers. 48 When they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You." 49 And He said to them, "Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?" 50 But they did not understand the statement which He had made to them. 51 And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He continued in subjection to them; and His mother treasured all these things in her heart. 52 And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

Mary tried to make sense out of the events as they unfolded. We, on the other hand, have the whole written record of Jesus in the Bible. We know the rest of His story: He entered into ministry, performed miracles, claimed to be Son of God, and proclaimed that He was (and is) the way, the

truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by Him (Gospel of St John 14:6). He purchased our salvation through His death and resurrection, and someday He is coming again to rule and reign in righteousness. This Christmas season we can celebrate our Savior's birth and share the rest of this glorious story with all who come to celebrate with us.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. What can you do this week to actively put aside old habits and patterns of living associated with your old, sinful self and actively live out the virtues of your new life in Christ by the power of God's Spirit?

2. On Christmas a Savior was born. What can you do to help others around you know Jesus as their Savior?

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass, visit this web site:

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/122715.cfm

Source(s):

Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 11-8-2015

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **11-8-2015**. This week we open with a story from 1 Kings that tells how God provided food in a time of drought for a faithful prophet through a poor widow who trusted God and gave all she had. Then we move to the book of Hebrews and learn how Jesus has provided a superior and final sacrifice for our sin. We conclude with a reading from the Gospel of St. Mark where Jesus condemns religious hypocrisy and commends humble, sacrificial faith.

Read Online:http://www.christiansforchrist.org/articles/weekly-study-notes-for-the-sunday-mass/11-08-2015

Introduction to the First Reading:

In First Kings 17, the lives of a wicked king, a faithful prophet, and a poor widow converge when God sends a punishing drought upon the land. As God judges the evil, He simultaneously and miraculous preserves the faithful.

A little review of Israel's history is a necessary backdrop to this passage. The people of God were composed of twelve tribes descended from Abraham's grandson Jacob (renamed Israel in Genesis 35:10). These descendants and the land God gave them for a home were called Israel. From them, the Messiah Jesus would come, and through His salvation all the nations of the world would be blessed.

Despite their privileged position in God's plan for the nations, the people of Israel rebelled against God and went after the false gods of the surrounding nations. They forgot the Lord's commands and worshiped idols. This was the fate of King Solomon when he ruled in Israel after his father David's

reign. At first he followed God, and God gave him great wisdom to rule justly. But when Solomon married foreign women, he began to follow after their gods. Because of his idolatry, God said He would take ten of the tribes from Solomon's rule and leave only the tribes of Benjamin and Judah under the authority of his descendants. The ten tribes became known as the Northern Kingdom and were called Israel. The remaining two tribes formed the Southern Kingdom and were called Judah.

A series of kings reigned in Judah. Some followed the Lord and some did not. In Israel a different series of kings reigned, each one more evil than the previous one. Eventually King Ahab came to power, and he "*did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who were before him* (1 Kings 16:33)." He married Jezebel, a foreign woman, and created places of worship for her gods—Baal and Asherah. It was to this idolatrous, evil king that Elijah came as a prophet of God to proclaim judgment on Israel.

Elijah prophesied, "*As the LORD, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word*." In the ensuing drought, God miraculously provided food for Elijah. One of the ways He did this was through an unlikely source–a poor widow woman.

When Elijah's source of drinking water dried up, God sent him to a widow in Zarephath. Elijah arrived just as the widow was gathering wood to cook a final meal for her and her son. She had only enough flour and oil to make a little bread, and after that she believed she and her son would die. When Elijah requested bread from her, the widow explained her plight. Elijah promised her that God would not let the flour and oil run out until the day God sent rain upon the earth. Why the widow believed Elijah we do not know. But placing her trust in Elijah and Elijah's God, she did as he requested. God kept His promise, and the widow, her son, and Elijah were miraculously spared.

The story begins in 1 Kings 17:8. You will want to begin reading there and continue through the First Reading (v. 10-16).

First Reading:

1 Kings 17:10-16 NAS95 10 So he arose and went to Zarephath, and when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks; and he called to her and said, "Please get me a little water in a jar, that I may drink." 11 As she was going to get it, he called to her and said, "Please bring me a piece of bread in your hand." 12 But she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I have no bread, only a handful of flour in the bowl and a little oil in the jar; and behold, I am gathering a few sticks that I may go in and prepare for me and my son, that we may eat it and die." 13 Then Elijah said to her, "Do not fear; go, do as you have said, but make me a little bread cake from it first and bring it out to me, and afterward you may make one for yourself and for your son. 14 "For thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'The bowl of flour shall not be exhausted, nor shall the jar of oil be empty, until the day that the LORD sends rain on the face of the earth.'" 15 So she went and did according to the word of Elijah, and she and he and her household ate for many days. 16 The bowl of flour was not exhausted nor did the jar of oil become empty, according to the word of the

LORD which He spoke through Elijah.

Elijah and the widow trusted God, and God kept His promise. We will likely never go through a drought but we might experience a job loss or setback that greatly affects our ability to provide for ourselves and our family. The same God who took care of Elijah and the widow knows our needs, too. Philippians 4: 13 says, "*And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*" He is a faithful God who never changes. Like the widow of Zarephath, we can trust Him to provide.

It is rare, though, for God to provide through a direct miracle as He did when the flour and oil did not run out. More often He lays the need on the hearts of His people and moves us to give. After all, everything we have belongs to God. We are merely stewards or managers of it. Every time we pray for God to provide for someone's need, we should ask God if He wants any of our stuff (money, food, belongings) to be the provision for that need. The widow did not fear to give all she had. We don't need to fear either.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The book of Hebrews was written to Jewish believers who were experiencing persecution and, as a result, were contemplating returning to Judaism. The writer of Hebrews explains how Jesus is superior to all things under Judaism. He is greater than Moses, the Old Covenant, the Old Testament priesthood, and the earthly tabernacle with its animal sacrifices.

A reminder of the Old Testament sacrificial system would be helpful here. When an Israelite sinned, he would bring an animal (often an unblemished lamb) to the priest in the tabernacle. The priest would sacrifice the animal and shed its blood on the altar for the remission of sin. Behind a heavy curtain was the Holy of Holies where God would appear in a pillar of cloud or fire. No one could go in there except the high priest, and he could go in only once a year on the Day of Atonement. On that day the high priest would make a sacrifice for himself (for he is a sinner, too) and for the sins of all the people and carry the blood inside the curtain, presenting it to God. The sacrifices had to be repeated year after year since they were never able to perfect the worshipper. They were only a foreshadowing of the ultimate sacrifice of the Lamb of God (Jesus) who takes away the sin of the world (Gospel of St. John 1: 29).

The Second Reading shows us that Jesus, as the mediator of a new covenant, is superior in every way.

Second Reading:

Hebrews 9:24-28 NAS95 24 For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; 25 nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is

not his own. 26 Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. 27 And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, 28 so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.

Jesus Himself is the high priest who entered into the holy place, not an earthly one made by human hands, but into heaven itself. There He presented to God, not the blood of animals as a sacrifice for sin, but His own blood. Because Jesus was perfect, God accepted His sacrifice as final. There is no need for any other.

He is coming a second time to receive all believers to Himself, and we eagerly await that day! Will you be ready to meet Him when He comes?

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Many people in our parishes follow the practices of the church because they love God. Some however follow the rituals because they want to be thought of as "religious." Their concern is not so much how God sees them but how others see them. They are not so much interested in pleasing God as they are in impressing others. Some of the religious leaders of Jesus day were like that, too.

In the immediate setting of the Gospel Reading, religious leaders were pretending to be interested in Jesus, but they were actually trying to trick Him with difficult questions in order to discredit Him. Knowing their motives, Jesus confounded them with His superior wisdom until they had nothing left to say.

Jesus warned the crowd to beware of religious leaders who flaunt their religion for self-serving reasons— for personal gain or to be seen and respected by men. Instead, Jesus pointed out a poor widow and her small gift as an example of sincere faith, for she gave it quietly and sacrificially. Others gave out of their surplus, but she gave out of her poverty.

Gospel Reading:

Mark 12:38-44 NAS95 38 In His teaching He was saying: "Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes, and like respectful greetings in the market places, 39 and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, 40 who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers; these will receive greater condemnation." 41 And He sat down opposite the treasury, and began observing how the people were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums. 42 A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent. 43 Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, "Truly I say to you, this poor

widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; 44 for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on."

Our religious acts of service are to be done humbly and quietly out of love for God not as a means to impress men and earn favor with God. God already looks favorably on us not because of what we have or what we do but because of what Jesus has done for us on the cross. God is not looking for impressive external religion but sincere and sacrificial devotion from the heart.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Jesus was the perfect and final sacrifice for sin. God looks on us with favor not because of what we have or what we do but because of what Jesus has done for us on the cross. How does this truth affect your day-to-day relationship with God?

2. Do a heart check this week. Are you practicing your religion to impress people or as an expression of sincere devotion from the heart?

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass, visit this web site:

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/110815.cfm

Source(s):

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Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 10-18-2015

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **10-18-2015**. This week Marla shares by opening with Isaiah 53: 10-11, which is part of a chapter that depicts in graphic detail Jesus' suffering and death for our sin. Then she turns to a passage in Hebrews 4:14-16 that shows how Jesus has faced the same temptations we face and as a result, is not only sympathetic to us in our struggles but can give us victory over them. Finally she concludes with the Gospel of St. Mark 10: 35-45 where Jesus tells us the key to greatness is being a servant of all.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Isaiah 53 gives one of the clearest depictions in the Old Testament of Jesus as the suffering servant, as it predicts in devastating detail His rejection, humiliation, and death for our sin. Although the prophet Isaiah doesn't reveal the name of this suffering servant, later generations understood that only Jesus in His death fully corresponded to the one depicted here. This was confirmed by many New Testament writers as they quoted from Isaiah 53 in speaking of Christ. (1 Peter 2: 21-24 is a prime example.)

What Jesus suffered for our sin in order to redeem us is sobering. The 10 verses that precede the First Reading reveal the awful truth. He was despised and forsaken. Furthermore, He was smitten (struck), afflicted, pierced, crushed, chastened, scourged, and oppressed (Isaiah 53:3-7). Yet, "*He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth*" (v.9). His death was truly the just dying for the unjust that He might bring us to God (1 Peter 3:18).

Jesus did not open His mouth in protest because He knew He was fulfilling the Father's will. Referring to His life Jesus said, "*No one has taken it away from me, but I lay it down on my own initiative* (Gospel of St. John 10:18).

The next verses, which comprise the First Reading, may seem puzzling at first, for they teach us that the suffering Jesus endured was according to God's *good pleasure*. The word *pleasure* here does not mean happiness but that all would take place according to the LORD's will. As you read the First Reading note the Father's purpose for the Son's suffering.

First Reading:

Isaiah 53:10-11 NAS95 10 But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. 11 As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities.

Our iniquity (sin) separates us from God, but the LORD caused the iniquity of us all to fall on His Son (Is. 53:6). Jesus took our guilt and punishment, and by His suffering we are justified, that is, made right before God and restored to a right relationship with Him.

As we consider Christ's suffering and sacrifice on our behalf, let us seek to live out that sacrificial love for the benefit of others. One of the most important ways we can love others is to introduce them to Jesus and tell them of the One who suffered on their behalf.

The Second Reading speaks about another kind of suffering—the struggle against temptation. Jesus faced it and was victorious. When we face temptation, we don't face it alone. We have someone who understands and helps.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The Second Reading takes us to a group of verses set in a larger context that speaks of Jesus as our high priest. In the Old Testament sacrificial system, when someone sinned, he would bring an animal to the priest and the priest would sacrifice it (shed its blood) on the altar in the tabernacle/temple. Behind a heavy curtain was the Holy of Holies (or Holy Place) where God would appear in a pillar of cloud or fire. No one could go in there except the high priest, and he could go in only once a year on the Day of Atonement. On that day the high priest would make a sacrifice for himself (for he is a sinner, too) and for the sins of all the people and carry the blood inside the curtain and present it to God. The sacrifice had to be repeated year after year.

Hebrews Ch. 7 and 9 tell us that Jesus is a high priest, but one far superior to the human ones we read about in the Old Testament. And here's why:

Jesus himself was both the high priest *and* the sacrifice for sin. His sacrifice was perfect and total, and God accepted it as final. There was no need for any further sacrifice. No more work needed to

be done to procure our salvation. Jesus had done it all. He rested from His work, and now as we hear the Gospel and believe, we enter into that place of rest. We cannot work for our salvation. We can only by faith enter into the salvation and rest Jesus has provided (See Hebrews 4:1-11).

Our First Reading along with all of Isaiah 53 depict the pain of rejection and suffering Jesus endured for our salvation. We don't have a high priest far removed from our pain and struggles but One who has experienced in a body like ours the sufferings of this world. Consequently He can sympathize with each of us in our weakness and suffering. This is true also of the temptations we face each day. He has faced them, too. Notice the comfort and encouragement found in our Second Reading.

Second Reading:

Hebrews 4:14-16 NAS95 14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. 16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Because Jesus has faced the same temptations we face, we can come to Him and find mercy and grace in our time of need. He displays mercy as He sympathizes with our struggles, and He gives grace to overcome them. Because He was victorious, we can be also.

In the following Gospel Reading, the subject again turns to suffering as Jesus takes his 12 disciples aside and reveals disturbing details about his upcoming suffering and death.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

This week we return to the Gospel of Mark. While on a journey to Jerusalem, Jesus takes his 12 disciples aside and tells them of the suffering He will soon be facing. He will be delivered to the Jewish leaders who will condemn Him to death. Then He will be handed over to the Romans who will mock Him, spit on Him, scourge Him, and kill Him.

Knowing the culmination of Jesus' life was at hand and apparently believing He would soon set up His kingdom, James and John make a bold request. They ask to sit with Him in glory in places of honor at His right hand and His left. Jesus knew the path to glory was through the suffering of the cross, and that all who follow Him would likely suffer, too. Rejection, persecution, and even martyrdom awaited them. Did they know what they were asking for? Could they drink the cup of sorrow He would drink?

Jesus then reminds them that whoever wishes to be great among them doesn't do it by seeking a

place of honor or authority. Earthly rulers seek honor, authority, and power and lord it over their subjects. But this is not the way of God. Notice in the Gospel Reading how someone can be great in God's kingdom.

Gospel Reading:

Mark 10:35-45 NAS95 35 James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You." 36 And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" 37 They said to Him, "Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory." 38 But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" 39 They said to Him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized. 40 But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." 41 Hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John. 42 Calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. 43 But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; 44 and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

True godly leadership requires serving. In St. John's Gospel, the apostle John recounts how Jesus demonstrated servanthood by humbly washing the disciples' feet—a job reserved for the household servants. Jesus told His disciples, "*If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you*" (St. John 13:14-15).

Serving sometimes requires not just humility but sacrifice and suffering. Jesus demonstrated His willingness to suffer by dying for our sins on the cross, the ultimate act of service. Are we willing to follow Jesus' example and serve one another, even if it results in suffering? Whoever wishes to be great among us must humbly serve. For even Jesus himself came not to be served but to serve and give his life a ransom for many (v. 45).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Read all of Isaiah 53 and contemplate all Jesus suffered on your behalf. How does this motivate you to serve Him more?

2. Jesus lived a life of sacrifice and service. Who is God calling you to serve today? Write down ways you can do that. Be specific and be thankful for the opportunity to follow in Jesus' steps.

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