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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 22: 02/22/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass Notes. This week, we will examine the creation of man in the Book of Genesis and then the fall of humankind into sin through the temptation of the devil that brought about God's curse upon the earth. Then, in the second reading, we will examine God's plan of redemption that He brought about by sending Jesus to die for our sins. Finally, we will study in the Gospel lesson how Jesus successfully resisted the devil's temptation. Our lesson this week followed a lengthy study last week on worry. If you haven't read that, we suggest you find time to review it on the website.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Genesis and covers the sections of creation and the fall of humanity. This text, together with the second reading from Romans, constitutes the great bookends of human history. On one hand, Genesis records the creation of the universe, including the earth, the animal kingdom, and humankind. This is closely followed by the ugly record of the day when man

sinned against God, which invoked His curse upon the world. On the other hand, the Book of Romans that we will see in the second reading records in detail God's plan of redemption through Jesus Christ. This is a critically important study this week because we will cover a summary of all of human history, which can be summed up in just four short words: creation, fall, redemption, and glory.

As we move to the first reading, let me point out some helpful context since the reading skipped the ending of Chapter 2 in Genesis. The context of the reading from Genesis is that it occurred just after God created Adam and before He made Eve, the first woman, though she wasn't officially named until Chapter 3 (Genesis 3:20). Chapter 1 recorded the creation of the entire universe, including man. Chapter 2 expands on the creation account by filling in additional details. In the opening of Chapter 2, God had finished his creation of the universe and had placed Adam on earth in the Garden of Eden with the commandment to cultivate it (Genesis 2:15). He provided clear direction to Adam by saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely, but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die" (2:16b – 17). Subsequently, God formed the entirety of the animal kingdom and appointed Adam with the task of naming every animal and bird (v. 19). The creation story continues:

> *20 The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. 21 So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. 22 The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. 23 The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." 24 For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. (Genesis 2:20-25).*

At this point in history, man was in the perfect company of God, had the perfect wife, Eve, tilled a perfect garden with unlimited food, and walked around all day perfectly naked. What more could anyone ask for? However, it was just too good to last. Think back to the single commandment that God gave to Adam. He said not to eat of the "tree of knowledge of good and evil" (v. 17). It is easy to look back on Adam and wonder why, if he had so much, he had to concentrate upon the one thing that he couldn't have. But don't we do the very same thing? If we know that the speed limit is 55, why do we feel the need to drive 60 or 70? Just the fact that we have a law almost compels us to break it. Our consideration of whether to break a law is generally tied to the penalty for failing to obey it. A speed limit law is one thing, but God told Adam that if he broke this one certain law, the penalty would be death (v. 17). Adam had no frame of reference for the devastating effects of death

upon his life here on earth.

Now, with this context in mind, let's jump back to verse seven where the first reading begins. As you read, notice the mention of another special tree growing in the Garden.

First Reading:

> *2:7 Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. 8 The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed. 9 Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*
> *3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?" 2 The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; 3 but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.'" 4 The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! 5 For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6 When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. (Genesis 2:7-9, 3:1-7)*

With the job of creation completed, God placed man in the Garden of Eden with trees that were already fully grown (3:6). Adam's wife was then confronted by a talking serpent, which probably wasn't too unusual to her because of her complete lack of history – everything would have been new to her. The first thing the talking serpent told her was to question the word of God. "Indeed, **has** God said," spoke the serpent to the woman (3:1). The woman restated the warning from God, but added a prohibition about touching the tree, something which wasn't recorded in the warning given to Adam. The text doesn't say whether Adam told his wife not to touch the tree as a protective measure, or whether Eve added to God's prohibition not to eat from the tree. Regardless, had she not touched the tree, this whole affair wouldn't have played out the way it did, at least not at this stage of history. [It's almost a foregone conclusion that the Fall was going to happen; it was just a matter of time.]

Next, the serpent tempted the woman a second time by casting doubt on the word of God. He said, "You surely will not die! 5 For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (v. 6). There is a nugget of truth in what the serpent said, as is usually the case, since he was a master deceiver and he evidently understood that the woman wouldn't believe an outright lie. What we mean by saying that there was some truth in the statement about not dying is that after both Adam and Eve sinned, they did not die physically (3:7), but they certainly did die spiritually. God defines death as separation from Him, which occurred through their disobedience (Ephesians 4:17-18). God just delayed Adam's physical death for some 930 years. "So all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years, and he died" (Genesis 5:5). We are not told when Eve died. The second element of truth in the serpent's subterfuge was that their eyes *were* opened, as was told clearly in the text (3:7a).

The sin that Eve committed was great, but she at least had the excuse that she was deceived by the serpent. Adam, however, could not plead that the devil made him do it. No, the text said, "she also gave to her husband with her, and he ate" (v. 6e). Adam sinned without having the excuse that he was deceived; he sinned with his eyes wide open and willfully disobeyed God's law regarding not eating from the tree. God held Adam responsible for his sin and the subsequent curse that He poured out onto His perfect creation, something that must have grieved our Lord to no end. Adam was created first and appointed as the leader in the stewardship of God's creation, including the woman. Eve was created as the helper (2:18). If we look forward in Chapter 3, we will see that God questioned Adam first about what happened in the Garden. "Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?'" (3:9). In the New Testament, God verified that He held Adam responsible for the sin, even though Eve sinned first. We will read about this when we study the second reading from Romans Chapter 5.

The other special tree in the garden was the "tree of life" (v. 9b). It's important to note that although Adam did eat from the "tree of knowledge of good and evil," he didn't eat from the tree of life. Had he done so, he would have remained in his fallen state in the cursed creation forever. God said later in Chapter 3, "Then the LORD God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever'" (3:22). Instead, what happened was that Adam ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil and as a result, his eyes were opened (v. 7), just as the devil had said they would be (v. 4), such that he knew both good and evil. He knew about goodness before he sinned, and after his sin, he discovered evil.

The fall of humanity that we read about in the first reading had a gigantic impact on the world, on creation itself, on humankind, and on the animal world. Just ask anyone who has raised a two-year-old. Although I haven't had that privilege, I do have a story about how the fall has affected even the

animal kingdom. My family used to have a golden retriever named Rusty. I remember our beloved dog very well, as we both used to like going for runs together. Whenever I went jogging around the country roads in the neighborhood, Rusty used to like to come along with me. He used to run ahead of me, then frequently cross into the woods to follow any animal scent he could find there. Rusty just loved running around the woods in the neighborhood. I remember that when Rusty was young, he would follow me outside, thinking that I was going to take him running. Rusty would then take off down the road, and I would call him back. There was an awkward moment when I would call to him while he decided whether to obey. He turned his body away from me but looked back towards me while he made up his mind. Frequently, he would think about it for maybe half a minute while I continued calling, then he would take off running down the road from me. What a little stinker. He knew that he was being bad, but he ran away anyway. This sin wasn't something that we taught him; it was instinctive. The corruption of this world frustrates us at every level of life.

The fall of humanity resulted in God's pronouncement of a curse upon His creation. This curse affected men's relationship with women (Genesis 3:15), men and women's relationship with their work (Genesis 3:19), and the ground itself (Genesis 3:17-18). God predicted the ultimate physical death for Adam. "By the sweat of your face, you will eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; For you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

We need to let the depth of the bad news provide a backdrop to the message of hope delivered in the second reading. God sent the Second Adam to redeem mankind from their sin, a gift freely given to those who believe that God has provided His righteousness through faith. This reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans. The context of the reading is that Paul had just explained the crucial concept of justification by faith. "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). The word "therefore" is present to provide a linkage to what Paul discussed in the previous chapter. Here, Paul explained how Father Abraham's faith was the reason that he was found righteous before the Lord, not his good works. Paul said, "For what does the Scripture say? ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Romans 4:3, the capital letters in this NASB version indicate a quotation from the Old Testament). Abraham's good works were laudable, but they didn't merit his salvation from the curse of Adam's sin. Paul said, "For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God" (4:2).

As you read the second reading from Romans 5, you will recognize the story we read about in the

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Garden of Eden.

Second Reading:

> *12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned– 13 for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. 14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. 15 But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. 16 The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. 17 For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. 18 So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. 19 For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:12-19)*

Paul said a mouthful in this text, enough that entire books could be written on just one of these verses alone. Here are some key points from the reading.

- Salvation, meaning forgiveness of the penalty of sin, is provided as a free gift (v. 15) only through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

- God held Adam ("one man"), not Eve, accountable for the Fall of Mankind (v. 12). All people from Adam onwards are sinners (v. 14), except for Jesus (v. 18).

- Though everyone, even before the Jewish Law, was a sinner, those before the Law couldn't be held accountable for the Law which hadn't yet been given (v. 13). Nevertheless, humans are accountable to God for the laws that are written on their hearts. Paul said, "For when Gentiles

> who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law is written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them" (Romans 2:14-15).

- The sinful state of Adam was imparted to all of humankind from that moment forward. "For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners" (v. 19a).

- Death didn't exist before the Fall and came into the world only after sin (v. 12b). This negates the possibility of theistic evolution to explain God's creative process, as any form of evolution requires a cycle of death. Theistic evolution requires a million birth-and-death cycles and is also based on the idea that favorable mutations occurred within the gene pool. How many favorable mutations do we see today?

- Jesus' sacrificial death resulted in the imputed righteousness of believers, the "gift of righteousness" (v. 16, 18).

These foundational insights give us hope in our day-to-day lives if we have turned to Jesus as our righteousness. We no longer have to pay the penalty for our own sins, but we are declared righteous by God if we will live under His provision of grace. The idea of grace is unmerited favor, which means we have been given a gift. A gift that has been given needs to be received if it is to be useful to the recipient. Have you opened the gift of God's grace in your life by trusting in Jesus Christ as your only source of salvation?

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson from today is from Matthew Chapter 4. As we read in the first reading, Adam and Eve were tempted by the devil and succumbed to his temptation, resulting in the Fall of Humanity. In the Gospel reading, we will see how Jesus was also tempted by the devil and how he persisted in his obedience to God the Father. As you read, pay special attention to how Jesus dealt with the devil's temptation and how this contrasted with how Eve interacted with him.

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Gospel Reading:

> *1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. 3 And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." 4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'" 5 Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU'; and 'ON their HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.'" 7 Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.'" 8 Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; 9 and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'" 11 Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him. (Matthew 4:1-11)*

We saw that Jesus resisted the devil's temptation by quoting the word of God. Notice in the NASB version how easily it is to spot the quotations from the Old Testament since they are shown in all capital letters. Three times the devil tempted Jesus, and three times Jesus resisted, quoting the word of His Father.

The temptation for Jesus was to secure His rightful place of rulership without going through the cross. In some ways, all of our temptations have this sense of" shortcutting" the process in order to attain the glory without the upfront cost. What the devil doesn't tell people is the price tag, which will be paid in full by the person who purchases his shortcut. Jesus saw through his scheme and was not pushed around by the devil's slick talk or even deceived by the twisting of Scripture. By standing in the midst of temptation, Jesus becomes our strong advocate in our own times of temptation. Hebrews 2:18 says, "For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted." He wants us to call on Him and ask for His help. Let's take Him at His word.

How should we go about resisting temptation? Saint Paul provided us with some guidance, and along with what we learned from the readings, it should be obvious that we, too, need to rely upon the word of God to deliver us from temptation. Paul said, "No temptation has overtaken you but

such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it" (1Corinthians 10:13). In times of temptation, instead of looking for a loophole, look for the way of escape!

Reflection Questions

This week brought us many powerful concepts to consider in our daily lives. Here are some questions to prompt further reflection:

1. Compare the two temptation accounts again and list the ways that Jesus dealt differently from Adam and Eve. What do you learn from His example?

2. The bookends of history are encompassed in this week's reading, starting with the bad news (sin's price tag is death) and moving to the good news (Jesus' payment for our sin). If you were to analyze where you are at today in your relationship with God, where would you place yourself on the continuum of living in your sin versus living in God's grace?

Living in my sin
Living in God's grace

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 76:

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02/15/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we examine the deep truths found in 1 Corinthians and more truths about the kingdom of God and its characteristics as found in Matthew's Gospel in the section known as the Sermon on the Mount.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Apocryphal book of Sirach, chapter 15. This section deals with the topic of sin.

First Reading:

> *If you choose you can keep the commandments, they will save you;*
> *if you trust in God, you too shall live;*

> *he has set before you fire and water*
> *to whichever you choose, stretch forth your hand.*
> *Before man are life and death, good and evil,*
> *whichever he chooses shall be given him.*
> *Immense is the wisdom of the Lord;*
> *he is mighty in power, and all-seeing.*
> *The eyes of God are on those who fear him;*
> *he understands man's every deed.*
> *No one does he command to act unjustly,*
> *to none does he give license to sin. Sir 15:15;*

The reading reminds us of the power and effects of our choices. A friend of mine refers to this as a fabric of cloth in which our decisions and those made by others affect everyone, not just ourselves. Chief among the choices we make is the one to follow the ways of God, which during the times of the Old Testament was the Jewish Law. In light of the New Testament, we see how obedience paved the way for the revelation of Jesus Christ. Obeying the Law pointed to the one and only way to God, through His Savior.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

In the second reading, St. Paul is contrasting the wisdom of this world with God's wisdom. The Greeks were concerned with human philosophies and persuasive words. The wisdom of God that Paul is referring to is His plan to bring fallen human beings back into right relationship with Himself through the sacrifice of His Son on the cross.

Second Reading:

> *6 Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; 7 but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; 8 the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; 9 but just as it is written, "THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL*

> *THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM." 10 For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. (1 Corinthians 2:6-10)*

Here are some of the points that Paul uses to help us see the superiority of God's way that lies in sharp contrast to the world's way of doing things. God's wisdom:

- Is a mystery. No human philosophy or religious system holds that the deity pays the offending party's debt.

- Was hidden for many years. While it was hinted at in the Old Testament, it was finally revealed in the Person and work of Jesus Christ—specifically, in His redemptive role in bearing our penalty for sin when He died on the cross, and in His living His life through our surrendered lives with His resurrection power (Eph. 1:18-23).

- Was predestined—God the Father sovereignly orchestrated the events that would reveal His wise plan of sending His Son to live and die in our place. Jesus' death was ordained by God the Father for our benefit ("our glory"). We will eventually share in God's glory because of Christ's willingness to pay our penalty.

- Is different than the world's ways. Those in power (rulers of this age) do not operate according to God's wisdom, which is based on love, sacrifice, relationship, and trust. Instead, they operate according to the enemy's philosophy—which is based on deception, brute force and coercion. If the rulers had understood God's way, they would not have crucified Jesus.

- Goes beyond what any human could have devised or dreamed of. We have just touched the tip of the iceberg of all that a relationship with God entails. There's so much more to His love and provision than we are able to experience in this life.

- Is revealed through His Spirit. The Spirit opens our hearts to the depths of God, helping us to understand the goodness of God's ways.

As we think about God's wisdom, we may wonder what difference this makes in our daily lives. If God was wise enough to devise a plan for redemption through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus, we can trust Him to be wise enough to work all things in our lives together for good in the lives of those who love Him (Rom. 8:28). When we don't understand God's ways, we can rest in the fact that He is wise, he knows what He is doing and He will accomplish something good. As one preacher said, "It's Friday, but Sunday's coming!" So the fact that God could bring something good (our redemption) out of the death of His Son, gives us faith to walk in trust and ongoing surrender to His ways.

The counterintuitive nature of God's wisdom is evident in the Gospel passage, as Jesus teaches on the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus' premise is that his disciples will be characterized by a different value system than that of those who live apart from God. Because Christians are now aware that we live in a God-saturated world, our lives will reflect heaven's realities. We must be careful not to reduce this perspective to a list of rules to follow. Instead, we need to see this as a new way of life characterized by these things that are impossible outside a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Before we return to our study from last week of the Sermon on the Mount, I would like to share a story about how circumstances can drive critical choices in the life of the believer who has been given a new heart from God (Romans 18:8-9). I was employed by (and am) one of the owners of a computer software and consulting company. One of my coworkers was responsible for sales, and during his employment, we had developed a friendly relationship. One afternoon, a day or two after he had returned from a tiring business trip, I called him at his home office to discuss how we would follow up with the clients we had met. During this call, he seemed tired and even paused a few times while speaking. I thought that this was unusual, but I brushed it off by thinking he was probably still tired from the trip. Two days later, I received an urgent call from his girlfriend that he had had a heart attack and was in the hospital in a coma. Because he was in the intensive care unit, I wasn't allowed to visit him right away. After a few days, I made the three-and-a-half-hour journey to the hospital and was able to visit him and his family and say my goodbyes. He never regained consciousness and passed away the following morning. After our CFO found out about his passing, we discussed the insurance provisions he had in place, as well as the fact that he was due a substantial sales commission check and reimbursement for his expenses from the previous trip. Although nobody would ever know if she didn't send it, she insisted upon sending his sales commission check to his estate. She said that, from her Christian perspective, it was the right thing to do. Although this man had considerable investments, and the checks our company sent were small in comparison, our company officer was compelled by her sense of responsibility in the Kingdom of God to settle the amounts. As the years have passed, I have wondered how many employers would have taken advantage of this situation and simply "forgot" to send the funds that were due. Such is the nature of the "otherworldly," supernatural motivation that God provides to His obedient believers.

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Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Now we will move on to the Gospel lesson from Saint Matthew in the Sermon on the Mount. It is helpful to keep in mind that Matthew was what I would call "the most Jewish" of the Gospel writers. Matthew wrote with a uniquely Jewish perspective, with the overall purpose of showing that Jesus was Israel's promised Messiah. Matthew assumed that his audience was well-grounded in the Jewish culture and belief system. The Jews were well-grounded in the belief that the Kingdom of Heaven was to be "otherworldly" and supernatural. Now let's read the text while we imagine a yarmulke on our heads.

Gospel Reading:

> *17 Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. 21 You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. 23 Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. 25 Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. 26 Truly I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent. 27 You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY'; 28 but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell. 31 It was said, 'WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE'; 32 but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced*

> *woman commits adultery. 33 Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.' 34 But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING. 36 Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil. (Matthew 5:17-37)*

As you can see, this new way of life is "otherworldly" and "supernatural." This is not how the world operates, so it must come from above (John 3:3). As we encounter God's grace as shown in Christ's sacrifice, we are transformed into people who love Him and obey from the heart. Kingdom living is predicated upon surrendering the old way of life to Jesus in order to be tutored in a new way of life that is God-infused. This passage highlights what life in Jesus' Kingdom (when Jesus rules in our hearts) should look like.

- Honoring God by honoring the whole counsel of Scripture. His law will be written on our hearts (Jeremiah 31:33), and we will obey because God has given us a new heart (2 Cor. 5:17). As we have seen in past readings, the scribes and Pharisees tried to have an appearance of righteousness (outwardly), but were not fully surrendered to God. Their motives were still selfish and evil.

- Instead of the grace and love of God giving us a license to sin, it motivates us to follow His commands and teach others God's ways.

- Life in the Kingdom is characterized by:
    - Love, not disgust and disregard for human life (verses 21-22)
    - Being enthusiastic and proactive about peace-making (verses 23-26)
    - Treating the opposite sex as a treasure, not an object to be used for our selfish pleasure and thrown away when no longer useful (verses 27-32)

    - Having integrity and following through one's commitments, even if it means personal sacrifice. Instead of looking for loopholes, we look for how to honor our word (verses 33-37).

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Life in the Kingdom of God, where Jesus rules and reigns in our hearts, is very different from the dog-eat-dog world in which we live. God is going to have to restructure our interpretive framework for life in order to transform us from low levels of living to His higher levels of living. This is not something we can manufacture, but it is a noble calling to which each person must respond. Instead, Life in the Kingdom is characterized by:

- Love, not disgust and disregard for human life (verses 21-22)
- Being enthusiastic and proactive about peace-making (verses 23-26)
- Treating the opposite sex as a treasure, not an object to be used for our selfish pleasure and thrown away when no longer useful (verses 27-32)
- Having integrity and following through on one's commitments, even at personal sacrifice. Instead of looking for loopholes, we look for how to honor our word (verses 33-37).

May the peace of God that comes only from God guard our hearts this week.

Reflection Questions

1. Spend some time taking an inventory of your life by reflecting on the contrast between the world's wisdom and God's wisdom (as seen in the New Testament reading and the Gospel reading). Which way of thinking most characterizes your life? Which way of thinking would you like to most characterize your life?

2. The above list of Kingdom values characterizes people who are living a God-saturated life. How do you see these traits being lived out in your life? What traits would you like to see developed as you

continue to grow in your relationship with God?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 73: 02/08/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass Study Notes. This week, we will begin with the Gospel reading, where we will study a portion of Jesus' famous "Sermon on the Mount." Jesus' teaching in that portion of Saint Matthew's Gospel has led many people, including me, to leave the Sunday Mass

feeling tremendous guilt because we sense that we are not doing enough for God. Scripture provides clear guidance on the appropriate response to this teaching, and we will address it in today's study. Then we will move on to the first reading from the Old Testament, and then conclude with a continuation of our study in Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson is from Matthew 5, a portion of the Sermon on the Mount that includes Chapters 5 through 7. It is important to understand the context of Jesus' message to His disciples. Jesus' sermon was given on a mountain somewhere in Galilee (v.1). Most commentators believe that it was on a hill near the west edge of Capernaum, which would have provided a commanding view of the Sea of Galilee. Since this wasn't a productive area for growing crops, it would have allowed large numbers of people to sit and listen to Jesus' teaching without damaging the area. Jesus gave at least the first portion of the address directly to the disciples away from the crowds. In verse 1 Saint Matthew said that Jesus went up to the mountain with His disciples, then, "he opened his mouth and taught 'them.'" (v. 2, emphasis added). This was, then, at least during the beginning portion of the message, a private discipleship training session by Jesus to his handpicked team. However, at the end of the Sermon, the crowds seem to have rejoined Him because at 7:28 "the crowds were amazed at His teaching." In summary, at the beginning, Jesus addressed His disciples with the crowds in view, but in the later section, He addressed the crowds with the disciples in view.

The message today was just after the portion of the Sermon on the Mount known as the "Beatitudes." The Beatitudes are pronouncements of blessings for those waiting for the promises of the Messiah, and curses for those who were trying to obtain God's blessing through their own effort. They begin with Chapter 5, verse 3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." They continue, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (v. 4). This pattern continues with blessings for the gentle (v. 5), those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (v. 6), the merciful (v. 7), the pure in heart (v. 8), the peacemakers (v. 9), and finally the persecuted (vv. 10-11). These blessings aren't so much about representing the hallmarks of a true Christian as about the blessings that follow when a person submits to God and receives the gifts of His empowerment through the Holy Spirit in community with other believers. Instead of the motto, "If it's going to be it's up to me" the Spirit indwelled believer says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3) and "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (v.4). The nature of the blessed person is the essence of life in the "kingdom of heaven" (John 3:3). It's with this God-directed empowerment that we must approach the interpretation of the

verses about salt and light being covered in the message today.

As you read the message, think about the importance of salt and light to the people of the first century.

Gospel Reading:

> *13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. 14 You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; 15 nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16 Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:13-16)*

Salt and light were essential to survival in a society without the modern conveniences of electricity and refrigeration. Light was essential for survival, both for seeing at night and for cooking and food preservation. Just as I struggled to find fuel in the dark when my truck ran out of gas, the First Century people were dependent upon their own source of fuel. Salt and light were essential staples of First Century life. However, what does Jesus mean by asking the rhetorical question about hiding the light and salt losing its saltiness?

Our Christian lives as salt and light are important to the world. Regardless of our career or status in life, our Holy Spirit-empowered lives are important to seasoning and lighting our relationships with people in the world. In the same way that Jesus first directed His message in the Sermon on the Mount to His disciples, our place of training and fellowship is in the Church. However, we are not to remain inside the Church to the point of becoming a part of "churchianity." Instead, just as the crowds in the Sermon on the Mount were curious about Jesus' teaching, we too must go out and teach the world. We will not only carry the light of the Gospel to the lost, but we ***are*** the light to the lost world. The crucial difference between someone who has lost their saltiness and covered their light and one who spreads salt and light is that the latter has accepted the free gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, who then empowers this person to accomplish those goals. This Holy Spirit-directed life is the hallmark of a true believer. The ultimate goal of every believer should be sharing your faith with others, in words and deeds. "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (v. 16).

I would like to share an illustration with you to help you understand the importance of leaning upon God and others for the empowerment to serve God. I remember back sometime around the late 1980's when my friend and I decided to pack up our snowmobiles and drive from southwestern Michigan to the great white north country of northern Michigan for a one-day trip to ride our snowmobiles. Because we didn't have any means of carrying two snow machines, we both loaded our snowmobiles into our separate trucks and headed north. In my case, I had borrowed my dad's Ford F-150, which, although it ran well, consumed large amounts of gas. It had a second minor issue; the gas gauge wasn't accurate below about one-quarter of a tank. We had an excellent day of riding on the trails around Kalkaska and Bellaire, Michigan. At the end of the day, we even stopped for refreshments at the Schuss Mountain Ski resort. All that was left was to make the two-and-a-half-hour trip back to my parents' home back south. This was shaping up to be an easy and relaxing end to a very fulfilling day of riding. As we made our way south in the dark, I was uncomfortable with the speed my friend was driving, so just north of Grand Rapids I lagged behind him a bit. Right after that, the truck began losing power, so I blinked my headlights furiously to attract the attention of my friend, who was now about a quarter of a mile ahead of me. He evidently didn't see me. The truck soon ground to a halt as I pulled onto the shoulder of the highway. I knew what had happened; I had run the truck out of gas!

Here's a bit of background about me to help you understand my thought process that evening. I was raised on a farm and was a member of the clan of engineers known as "MacGyvers," named after the television character who could construct something out of almost nothing. If you gave me some bits of wire and a few hand tools, I have been known to fix almost anything. My motto was something like, "If it's going to be, it's up to me."

Back to what happened that night. I considered my options and came up with a plan to drain some fuel from the snowmobile into a soda pop can. Since the truck had a cap on the bed, I had a difficult-to-impossible time tipping the machine over far enough to drain any fuel. Moving on to Plan B, I tried to remove a line from the primer bulb to pump some fuel into the can, but couldn't get it to work either. When this failed, I moved to Plan C. Since I had very few tools with me, I attempted to remove the snowmobile's fuel tank to pour the gas into the truck's fuel tank. I couldn't get the tank off without the necessary tools. The cars continued to zoom past me on the highway. I was furious at my friend for leaving me in this mess! Since I was near civilization, I started walking. I had to cross a small creek, navigate dense underbrush, and finally cross a very tall barbed wire fence that led me to the parking lot of a movie theatre. I finally reached the point where I had to ask someone for help. The thought crossed my mind to pray, so I asked God to help me. I don't know why it was so hard for me to turn to someone else for help, but I guess I hoped that I could just get myself out of this situation! Next, I flagged down a security guard who, as it turned out, had seen me scale the barbed wire fence. He kindly drove me across the street to a gas station where I was able to borrow a gas can and buy some fuel. This kind man then drove me back to a better location from which I

could walk back to my vehicle, although I had to cross the creek again – at night, in the middle of winter, through briars, and without a flashlight. Over the years, I never forgot about that evening!

What did I learn from all of the events that night? One of the areas in which I struggled spiritually was whether I was doing enough for God. I didn't feel that I was salt and light to my nonbelieving friends or to those with whom I came into contact. In addition, I remembered the decades of my life hearing the Gospel readings at Mass, which left me feeling guilty about how little I was accomplishing for God. I served as an altar boy until I was sixteen, but didn't find much fulfillment through it. Once, I visited a rest home with our Catechism class and promised myself I would go back there, but never did. Years later, after I began studying the Bible on my own, I began to understand that I had to come to the end of my own means and turn to others for help, both in practical and spiritual matters. I reached a major turning point with this revelation. I couldn't "MacGyver" my way through the Christian life; instead, I needed to humbly turn to God for help.

God doesn't expect us to accomplish great things for Him without providing us with the means to do so. The Holy Spirit is our spiritual fuel. If we have truly repented of our sins and trusted only in the finished work of Jesus Christ, He has empowered us through the gift of the Holy Spirit and by our relationships with other believers. As you think through the Sermon on the Mount, ask yourself if you have come to the end of yourself and turned to the one and only Source, Jesus Christ. Do you feel guilty that you aren't accomplishing enough for God? As always, we will continue each week in the Mass Notes to reveal what it means to be a true follower of Jesus Christ.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Now we will move on to the first reading, from Isaiah 58. Since you have already studied an example of what a God-directed life looks like in the Sermon on the Mount, you will likely understand Isaiah's text quite differently. As you read, praise God for how He has empowered His children as salt and light in our generation through their generous Holy Spirit-directed actions. Second, contrast the behavior of the former person with someone like King Saul, who was motivated by self-centered thinking (1 Samuel 13).

First Reading:

> *6 "Is this not the fast which I choose, To loosen the bonds of wickedness, To undo the bands of the yoke, And to let the oppressed go free And break every yoke? 7 Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry And bring the homeless poor into the house; When you see the naked, to cover him; And not to hide yourself from your own flesh? 8 Then your light will break out like the dawn, And your recovery will speedily spring forth; And your righteousness will go before you; The glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. 9 Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; You will cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.' If you remove the yoke from your midst, The pointing of the finger and speaking wickedness, 10 And if you give yourself to the hungry And satisfy the desire of the afflicted, Then your light will rise in darkness And your gloom will become like midday. (Isaiah 58:7-10)*

Notice the amazing similarity with the Sermon on the Mount. The Holy Spirit-directed believer "divides bread with the hungry" (v. 7a), houses the homeless (v. 7b), and provides clothing to those without it (v. 7c). As a result, these believers shine light like the dawn (v. 8), and God hears and answers their prayers (v. 9). They respond in physical ways by filling the needs of those less fortunate, but more importantly, they are spiritual salt and light to a lost, sin-stained, dying world. Isaiah's message was given to a generation of people who had neglected what Saint James in the New Testament called "basic religion." "Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world" (James 1:27). His message is equally relevant to the people in our generation.

What do the Sermon on the Mount and Isaiah's message mean for us today? First, God bestows blessings on those in spiritual communion with Him. This communion comes only through a personal relationship and saving faith in Jesus Christ. Second, God provides us with the means to empower us to live the Christian life, to be salt and light to a dying world. Jesus said, "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever" (John 14:16). He has given us this Comforter Who is God living inside of us (John 14:17c). What should you do if you feel that you aren't doing enough for God? Ask Jesus to be your sufficiency and allow God to change your heart from being motivated by guilt to being motivated by grace.

A few years ago, my wife and I had dinner with our neighbors and their three daughters. During dinner, we found out that one of the young ladies had recently taken a special interest in a certain young man at her church. She explained that this was a recent development because, prior to this, she had considered him awkward and didn't want any sort of romantic relationship with him. Then one day she told us she had decided to pray about that matter and had an idea about how to proceed. She felt the need to pray that, if this relationship was from God, she should ask God to change her heart towards him; and if not, that God should change his heart away from her. So, she prayed this prayer, and God did indeed change her heart. The message is that if you don't feel you

are doing enough for God, you should ask God to change your heart.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Now we will move on to the second reading. Last week we completed our study in First Corinthians Chapter 1, and this week we will move on to Chapter 2. As you read, remember what Paul discussed in Chapter 1 about how the Corinthian Church was being torn by sexual immorality and division.

Second Reading:

> *1 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, 4 and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. (1 Corinthians 2:1-5)*

Paul claimed God's authority for his message (v. 1c), saying that his message was directly from God. Next, he explained how he humbly proclaimed this message from God "in fear and in much trembling" (v. 3a); not through the use of the Grecian persuasive techniques of the day, but rather through a "demonstration of the Spirit and power" (v. 4). The reason he did that, said Paul, was so that the Corinthians' faith would be based upon the Word of God and not on Paul's rhetorical argument (v. 5).

What does Paul's message mean for us today? First, we may not be able to provide an eloquent argument for our faith, but that doesn't mean we should remain silent. Saint Peter said, "but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence" (1Pe 3:15). This is one way in which we bring salt and light to a world that is dying without the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Second, we are to rely on the Word of God, not our own persuasive strategies, as we share our faith with others. The Word of God is powerful and will provide us with a tremendous resource for witnessing once we have hidden it in our hearts (i.e., memorizing key Bible verses). "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the

division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). Third, it is okay to not have all the answers, since we lack will be an opportunity for others to see how Jesus compensates for our weakness (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

Reflection Questions

1. There is a basic misunderstanding of the role of guilt in most of our lives. Guilt often leads us to think: "I'll work on that and get better." Instead, guilt is supposed to lead us to think: "I need You, Lord." Think about a time that you felt guilty about not doing enough for God. What was the circumstance that brought this about? In light of what you learned from the Sermon on the Mount, what would be a better way of responding to this feeling?

2. The Catholic priest Henri Nouwen, who died several years ago, said the following in Wil Hernandez's book "A Spirituality of Imperfection" (Paulist Press, 2006). "God has deliberately chosen to break through human history in the person of Christ, manifesting total weakness in birth and dying on the cross in voluntary powerlessness" (p. 79). How does Christ's example of humility and weakness help you to act as salt and light to those people whom God has placed in your life? Consider this in light of what you learned from the reading in First Corinthians.

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 70: 02/01/2026

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with a reading from Zephaniah, one of the so-called "Minor Prophets," largely because their 12 prophecies are shorter than the Major Prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah. We will also read from 1 Corinthians and then the section of the Gospels known as the Beatitudes.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Zephaniah has been called "the Royal Prophet," probably because he was the great-great-grandson of King Hezekiah of Judah. He was the last of the prophets before the captivity of Judah and ministered during the reign of Josiah, who sought to restore the proper worship practices that had been largely abandoned in Judah. His message centers on "the Day of the LORD," which is seen from two perspectives: 1) a time of judgment against sinners, and 2) a time of blessing for those who follow God.

Today's reading, however, is in a concluding portion of the book that looks forward—beyond the captivity—to a time, yet future, when Israel will rejoice in the promised Kingdom blessing (chapter 3:9-20). Such a blessed future will be an occasion to "shout for joy… shout in triumph… rejoice and exult." Why? Because God has "taken away His judgments against you" and "He has cleared away

your enemies." What causes joy and rejoicing? But, even more astounding, the promise is that God Himself will be among them. The phrase is repeated: "The LORD is in your midst" (vv. 15, 17).

First Reading:

> *Zephaniah 2:3 NAS95 3 Seek the LORD, All you humble of the earth Who have carried out His ordinances; Seek righteousness, seek humility. Perhaps you will be hidden In the day of the LORD'S anger.*

> *Zephaniah 3:12-13 NAS95 12 "But I will leave among you A humble and lowly people, And they will take refuge in the name of the LORD. 13 "The remnant of Israel will do no wrong And tell no lies, Nor will a deceitful tongue Be found in their mouths; For they will feed and lie down With no one to make them tremble."*

As in other Old Testament prophecies, Zephaniah warns his people that judgment is certain; it will come on the Day of the Lord's wrath. In chapter 2, verses 1 – 3, the latter of which is included in today's reading, he admonishes them to "Seek the Lord … seek righteousness; seek humility." As today's reading continues in chapter 3, we see that there will be a restoration, with a remnant saved. This remnant left by God's sovereign actions among the people will be a godly people who "do no wrong and tell no lies" (v. 13).

God has always preserved a remnant of believers among His people. We saw this during the time of Elijah, when even though this mightiest of all the prophets thought that all of God's people were dead, however, a remnant of 7,000 people remained (1 Kings 19:18). In a future age before the Lord Jesus returns, a remnant of Israel will arise and herald God's righteousness through the world. God will seal these "12,000 from each of the 12 tribes" and divinely protect them from the plagues coming upon the earth and the wrath of the Antichrist (Revelation 7:4, we leave it to our readers to determine whether this is a literal or symbolic number of people or just the fullness of Israel). Interestingly, the Christian believers alive during this time of trouble won't be so fortunate during their physical lives, for we see how John describes "a great multitude that no one could number" in heaven who were martyred for their faith (Revelation 7:9-17).

God calls each of us, as Christians, to function as His faithful remnant in a dead and dying world. As

we will see in the second reading, God's divine hand is upon this relatively small group of humble people to live as "called out ones," the "ekklesia," the word used in the original Greek language. Peter says in 1 Peter 2:9, "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light." One day, these two groups, those on the narrow road of the ekklesia in the Christian church and the others in the ekklesia of Jewish Israel, will be joined together as one people of God.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

This reading from the opening chapter of Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians focuses upon the necessary attribute of humility found among the true believers of God in the church. These "called out" people

Second Reading:

> *1 Corinthians 1:26-31 NAS95 26 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; 27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, 28 and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, 29 so that no man may boast before God. 30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, 31 so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."*

Paul told of how "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise." God's true believers on earth have always been considered ignored and foolish by the worldly people around them. These "walkers on the narrow road of salvation" through their faith in Jesus Christ shun the proud ways of the world surrounding them. In the same way that the people in Noah's day shunned the safety and salvation offered by God in the ark as the only means of survival, the proud in our day shun the only means of salvation offered by Jesus Christ.

Paul sums up the reading by quoting the prophet Jeremiah, who spoke in that Old Testament context

about the imminent destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians. During that time, Jeremiah said "The corpses of men will fall like dung on the open field, And like the sheaf after the reaper, But no one will gather them" (Jeremiah 9:22b). During this time of tremendous trouble that came upon the people of Jerusalem, God calling was, "but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things" (Jeremiah 9:24).

God calls us in our day to focus upon Him by boasting only in the Lord (v. 31). Faith in Jesus Christ is the only means of our rescue from a sinful and dying generation and world. Today's reading reveals that the attribute believers share is a sense of spiritual humility. True believers trust only in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross and not in their "good" works as a means of earning their salvation (see Ephesians 2:8-9). *"LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD"* ***(v. 31b).***

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The message today is from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount known and contains the "Beatitudes." The Beatitudes are pronouncements of blessings for those waiting for the promises of the Messiah, and curses for those who were trying to obtain God's blessing through their own effort.

Gospel Reading:

> *Matthew 5:1-12 NAS95 1 When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. 2 He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying, 3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. 5 "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. 6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. 7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. 8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. 9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. 10 "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. 12 "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

In this reading, Jesus announced a total of nine blessings, each opening with "Blessed are." Jesus is fulfilling the role of Prophet by providing a series of blessings, a word which means "happy." This contrasts with the usual words of the Old Testament prophets, who announced a series of curses and woes against those who refused to follow God. Jesus came to announce that the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and this is what the kingdom looks like. Therefore, it is important to recognize that the Sermon on the Mount is not a list of new things people have to do to be right with God, but rather a list of the defining qualities of people who have been transformed by God.

Jesus is redefining the blessed life. Think about how these traits contrast with the world's definition of blessing. Someone living the blessed life:

1. Is poor in spirit, meaning humble, which leads a person to recognize their spiritual need for God.

2. Mourns, meaning they recognize that this world is not their home and look to God for comfort.

3. Exhibits gentleness, meaning they don't have to be aggressive to get things done because their heart is established in Christ's power.

4. Hungers and thirsts for righteousness, meaning they prioritize eternal things over finite satisfaction in the world.

5. Shows mercy, because they were offered mercy themselves through the forgiveness given to them by God, and can extend it to others.

6. Is pure in heart, meaning they are not entangled with the evil ways of the world, including lying, deceiving, and manipulating people in order to get their own way.

7. Is a peacemaker, not just someone who tries to keep the peace at all costs. They actively seek peaceful solutions even in difficult situations, which forces them to rely more deeply on God.

8. Endures persecution with a vision toward eternity, knowing that it is better to suffer than to succumb to temptation to compromise.

9. Endures insult because of their proclamation of truth (the Word of God), just like happened to the prophets.

In summary, Jesus raised the bar of understanding to show the people that righteousness was not a bunch of behaviors that came by trying harder, but rather were qualities of the heart that were only possible through God's transforming power. These nine traits are the result of being born from above (John 3:3). Instead of being depressed that we can never be this good, Jesus delivered this sermon in order to invite us into a new way of life. This new way of life recognizes that our self-righteousness is as filthy rags before the LORD (Isaiah 64:6). We must come to the place where we receive Christ's righteousness into our hearts as a substitute for our former way of life (Romans 3:21-22). Jesus went before us as the extreme example of divine forgiveness. Jesus not only forgave those who sinned against Him, but also bore the penalty for their sins. Through His example, we can persevere in our Christian lives to forgive those who sin against us.

Reflection Questions

1. How do you respond internally when you read the Sermon on the Mount? Does it feel like another list of impossible feats that you must accomplish in order to win God's favor? Or, have you responded to Jesus' invitation to live in the kingdom (where He is the King of your heart), and the Sermon on the Mount is a reflection of the work that He is doing in your life? If your response is more of the former, that this is another list of impossible feats, you can turn to God in prayer and ask Him to give you His life from above, and so be born anew.

2. What does it look like in your life to live as a chosen remnant of God among a spiritually dead and physically dying generation? What are two or three actions you can take each week to set yourself as a beacon of God's hope to the people around you?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 67: 01/25/2026



Welcome back to the Study Note for the Sunday Mass. This week, we will again return to Isaiah and see in the Gospel lesson how the prophecy was fulfilled through Jesus. As in Isaiah's day, we too are living in a land of deep spiritual darkness, one in which we need both spiritual and physical healing through our Savior, Jesus. After Jesus' First Advent, Scripture says that the best is yet to come when He returns to set up His Kingdom rule on earth. During this time, there will no longer be any darkness because the Lord our God will be our Light (Revelation 22:5). As the believers during Isaiah's time celebrated because of his prophetic message of hope, we too can celebrate because of his prophecy of the coming Light through the return of the Lord Jesus. As we see evil men grow worse and worse (2 Timothy 3:13), as was happening in Isaiah's time, we can look forward to the coming King, who will reverse the curse placed upon the world through the sin of Adam (Genesis 3:17).

This week, we are going to begin with the second reading and then cover the first reading and the

Gospel lesson last, since the content of those two is closely related.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The first reading is from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. Last week, we looked at the introduction to this Letter that Paul wrote to the crossroads city, a place entrenched in immorality and worship of a plurality of gods. To review, Paul's overall purposes in writing the Letter were to address divisions in the church, address serious moral issues, defend his apostolic authority, and specifically answer several questions from a letter they sent him (1 Corinthians 7:1).

As you read, what is one word that best summarizes Paul's concern for the Corinthians in this section?

Second Reading:

> *10 Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11 For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. 12 Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." 13 Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so that no one would say you were baptized in my name. 16 Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. (1 Corinthians 1:10-17)*

What word came to your mind that best summarizes Paul's concern? For me, it was "disunity." Paul was calling the local church in Corinth to unite to proclaim the Gospel. Look at verses 17 and 18, just past where the reading stopped. Here, we see an insight into why unity was important in the church. Paul said, "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1

Corinthians 17-18). In other words, Jesus sent him to preach the good news so that the minds of the unbelievers would be transformed, enabling them to recognize the power of God. Later in First Corinthians, Paul said, "Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of the many, **so that they may be saved**" (1 Corinthians 10:32-33, emphasis added).

Second, Paul was warning the local church in Corinth *not to unite* along the lines of a "cult of personality" (as has happened in so many churches since then). Paul provided specific examples of how this disunity was occurring in the church through the practice of baptizing family members in the region's house churches. Someone may have said something like, "I am more spiritual than you because I was baptized by Paul, but you were only baptized by Apollos."

Paul stood in good company with those who called the local church to unity. Jesus said in His prayer about the church, "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me" (John 17:20-21). Jesus prayed on behalf of His disciples who had believed by firsthand knowledge and for those who believed through the testimony of His disciples (v. 20b, "through their word"). Unity is important in the church because it's through this unified message that God's power is revealed. All of the believers after the era of the disciples have come to faith in Jesus through the testimony of "the word" and "their word." "The word" is the testimony of the disciples through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, written in what we call the New Testament Bible. "Their word" is both the testimony of the disciples and the testimony of all believers. Jesus' purpose in this message was to call the church of God to be unified in their proclamation of the Gospel so that the entire world may believe (John 17:21f).

Introduction to the First Reading:

As we leave the second reading, we will move to the Old Testament reading and the Gospel message. The first reading is from Isaiah, the prophet whom we have studied extensively over the past several months. The context of this section of Isaiah was just after his warning to the Northern Kingdoms that they would be overtaken by Assyria. This was a time of gloom and anguish for the Nation of Israel. He wrote the prophecy and delivered it to Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah so that there would be two witnesses as required by the Law, such that when the event was fulfilled, his authority as God's spokesman would be confirmed (Isaiah 8:2).

Let's read the Scripture, and as you do it will become apparent who the Galilean is about whom Isaiah is speaking.

First Reading:

> *1 But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. 2 The people who walk in darkness Will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them. 3 You shall multiply the nation, You shall increase their gladness; They will be glad in Your presence As with the gladness of harvest, As men rejoice when they divide the spoil. 4 For You shall break the yoke of their burden and the staff on their shoulders, The rod of their oppressor, as at the battle of Midian. (Isaiah 9:1-4 – Verse markings differ in this NASB version.)*

Clearly, Isaiah spoke about Jesus of Galilee (Mark 1:9). He said that people "will see a great light" (v. 2b) in the future sense, yet he saw through a telescopic lens of prophecy, recording near-term and distant events together. In this case, he saw both the First and the Second Advent of Jesus together as the accomplishment of God's deliverance from their oppressor. Those who are in a state of spiritual darkness will rejoice when their oppressors have been broken (v. 4). The lands of Zebulun and Naphtali were distant areas just to the west of the Jordan in Galilee that were easily subject to invasion from the foreign enemies. It was in this area that the Lord Jesus called His first disciples, as we will see next in the Gospel message. The Battle of Midian referred to Gideon's victorious battle with his small army of just 300 men waged against the Midianites in Judges 7:22-21:25. It's also important to note that the prophecy of the multiplication of the Nation of Israel (Genesis 22:17) will be fulfilled in the future (v. 3a).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

In the Gospel message, Jesus began assembling his first disciples after John the Baptist had been arrested. You will see how Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy from the Old Testament reading.

Gospel Reading:

> *12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; 13 and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. 14 This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: 15 "THE LAND OF ZEBULUN AND THE LAND OF NAPHTALI, BY THE WAY OF THE SEA, BEYOND THE JORDAN, GALILEE OF THE GENTILES– 16 THE PEOPLE WHO WERE SITTING IN DARKNESS SAW A GREAT LIGHT, AND THOSE WHO WERE SITTING IN THE LAND AND SHADOW OF DEATH, UPON THEM A LIGHT DAWNED." 17 From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." 18 Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. 19 And He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." 20 Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. 21 Going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. 22 Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him. 23 Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. (Matthew 4:12-23)*

In this message, Saint Matthew confirmed that Jesus did, in fact, fulfill Isaiah's prophecy and quoted it directly as proof. Since the Law required two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15, Isaiah 8:2), God met this requirement through the testimony of the Holy Spirit and the Father's proclamation at Jesus' Baptism (Matthew 3:16-17). Jesus took up where John the Baptist left off, saying the same thing as John, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2, Matthew 4:17). Then he settled in the same region that Isaiah prophesied would see a great light (v. 16). Here Jesus called the four men into discipleship and ministry: Simon Peter, Andrew, and finally James and John, called the "Sons of Thunder" (Mark 3:17). As He began his ministry he went about teaching, proclaiming the Good News, and healing (v. 23). How wonderful would it be to have Jesus with us in his human presence so that we could avail ourselves of His powerful ministry? The truth of the New Covenant is that He does live with us each day through the Holy Spirit – teaching us, proclaiming the Good News, and healing us of our destructive ways. May we learn to listen and receive Jesus' ministry in our daily lives.

Reflection Questions

1. In the second reading from 1 Corinthians, we mentioned the "transformation of the mind" for the purpose of spreading the Gospel message to the world through the power of God. Read the following verses and then answer the question below.

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And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2).

> *Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3)*

> *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. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. 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. (John 3:16-18)*

What are the prerequisites for someone to have his or her mind be transformed in order to be able to recognize the power of God? According to the Scriptures, what role does a person's active, actual calling upon the name of the Lord play?

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This week, we will open with another of Isaiah's "Servant Songs. We will look at the introduction to Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, then move on to the Gospel lesson, in which we will see the event in which John the Baptist announced the promised Messiah.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Isaiah 49, the second of the Servant Songs in which God the Father addressed the Nation of Israel as a personification of His Servant, and secondly, He spoke to His Son, the Messiah. As you read, take note of the purposes of the servants, the servant Israel and the Messiah Servant, whom we know as Jesus.

First Reading:

> *3 And He said to Me, "You are My Servant, Israel, In Whom I will show My glory." 4 But I said, "I have toiled in vain, I have spent My strength for nothing and vanity; Yet surely the justice due to Me is with the LORD, And My reward with My God." 5 And now says the LORD, who*

> *formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, in order that Israel might be gathered to Him (For I am honored in the sight of the LORD, And My God is My strength), 6 He says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth." (Isaiah 49:3-6)*

The first purpose of the servants was to restore the Jews to God. The LORD said to His Servant Son that He "formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel might be gathered to Him" (v.5b-ff). Though Israel was God's servant (v. 3, "My Servant Israel,"), this Servant Son was born with the express purpose of restoring the people of God to true communion with Him. Jesus said in the Gospel of Saint Matthew, "How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling" (Matthew 23:37).

The second purpose of the servants was to be a light to the Gentiles, so that "My salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (v. 6d). The mechanism through which the restoration came wasn't through Israel, but through Jesus. As we will see later in the second reading, the Church temporarily usurped Israel's role as a light to the nations, a condition that will be restored during the Great Tribulation. Jesus said to His disciples, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20b). We see that the Church is yet the third servant of God. Despite the temporary unbelief of some of the Jews, Israel's disobedience was used by God to bring light to the Gentiles through the ministry of this third servant, the Church of Jesus Christ. Saint Paul said that, "a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in (Romans 11:25c). The Church hasn't replaced Israel, because once God has completed his divine plan through the refining fire of the tribulation period, all of Israel will be obedient to Him. Paul said, "[A]nd so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB" (Romans 11:26).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The discussion of the Church as the servant of God brings us to the second reading from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. Paul, a servant of God for the Gentiles (Romans 15:16) brought his message to this ungodly and carnal city of Corinth. The reading is from the opening section of Paul's first message to them. In this vital message his overall purposes were to deal with some divisions in the church, address some serious moral issues, defend his apostolic authority, and to specifically

answer several questions from a letter they sent to him (1 Corinthians 7:1). As you read, try to keep in mind the purposes of the servant Paul in the same manner we did in the first reading from the Servant Song in Isaiah.

Second Reading:

> *1 Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, 2 to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 1:1-3)*

Here is some background about Sosthenes mentioned in verse 1. This man, whose name means "safe in strength" and is pronounced "sose then ace," was likely the amanuensis who wrote the Book for Paul, meaning the one to whom Paul dictated it through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It's likely that this scholar was a man of high standing in the church, and also the converted synagogue ruler who is mentioned in Acts 18:17. If this is the same man, then he is the one who likely replaced the former ruler Crispus (Acts 18:8), who also became a believer in the Lord Jesus. Though Sosthenes probably wrote down the Letter, Paul added a greeting "in his own hand" at the end (Corinthians 16:21).

Just as we did when we studied the Servant Song of Isaiah in the first reading, we will cover the purposes of the servant Paul in the opening of First Corinthians. The first purpose of the servant Paul was to speak to the church with the authority of God. He said he was "an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God" (v. 1a). Later in Chapter 3 he said, "What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave [opportunity] to each one" (3:5). Significantly, Paul opened the letter with a statement of authority which stated that his role was ordained by God (v. 1a). He made the same statement in the openings of Second Corinthians (2 Corinthians 2:1), Ephesians (Ephesians 1:1), and Colossians (Colossians 1:1). This stamp of authority was vital for Paul to be able to speak with God's power to the Corinthians who were struggling with a variety of complex issues in their church. In fact, there was open immorality in the church with a man who was having a sexual relationship with his stepmother (5:1).

The second purpose of the servant Paul was to affirm the holiness (or sainthood) of all true believers (v. 2c). Paul affirmed this in the Letter to the Romans when he said, "to all who are beloved of God in

Rome, called as saints" (Romans 1:7). The idea behind the usage of this particular word translated as "saint" from the original is holiness, meaning to be set apart. This means that one should be morally pure or blameless, unique from the ordinary culture that does not view human beings as much different than animals. Some Bible versions have used the word "holy" instead of "saint." Either way, the people of God are both called to *be* holy and are affirmed *as being* holy in Paul's opening statement. This "already, not yet" call to holy living is echoed throughout the Epistles. Through belief in Jesus, the righteousness of God has been imparted to a believer (Romans 3:21-22). However, God calls believers to live righteously on an ongoing basis. Paul said in Romans, "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship (Romans 12:1, emphasis added). So we may remark that someone is a "saint" when they display unusual patience or kindness, but honestly, each child of God is a saint. Let's live up to this glorious calling in our moment-by-moment choices, attitudes, and lives.

The third purpose of God's servant Paul was to affirm and call for the unity of the church. Paul said, "with **all who in every place** call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, **their Lord and ours**" (2d, emphasis added). Unity in the church was one of Paul's most important purposes, as later in Chapter 1, he launched into this critical topic for the Corinthians. He said, "Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Corinthians 1:10). He continued, saying, "For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's [people], that there are quarrels among you" (v. 11). Later in the Letter Paul explained the importance of unity in the Church. He said, "For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ" (12:12). Then, he extended this analogy to a theoretical conversation between parts of the human body. "If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,' it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body" (12:15). Since the human body has to be united to function, the Church of God must also be unified in its purpose.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

As we move on to the Gospel lesson, keep in mind how Paul spoke with the mind of God when he announced his purposes in the opening of the Letter to the Corinthians. In the opening verse of today's lesson from Saint John Chapter 1, John the Baptist, whom Jesus called the greatest man that ever lived (Matthew 11:11), announced the beginning of Jesus Christ's ministry and purpose. He also affirmed his authority as one who was appointed as the forerunner and witness of Jesus' baptism by both water and the Holy Spirit.

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Gospel Reading:

> *29 The next day he saw Jesus coming to him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.' 31 And I did not recognize Him, but in order that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water." 32 And John bore witness saying, "I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. 33 And I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' 34 And I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the Son of God." (John 1:29-34)*

John the Baptist affirmed Jesus' mission to the world when he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (v. 29b). The use of the word picture "Lamb of God" would have alerted those familiar with the sacrificial system to the nature of Jesus' mission. By His death on the cross, He made the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. But we must accept this sacrifice on our behalf for it to actually save us.

John announced that although he was baptizing with water (as a sign of the people's repentance from sin), Jesus would baptize differently, with the Holy Spirit of God (v. 33d). This baptism of the Holy Spirit is the gift that Jesus left the Church. Jesus said, "And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; [that is] the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, [but] you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you (John 14:16-17).

A second purpose of John was that he affirmed his personal humility and faith in God's announcement concerning the Messiah. He said, "And I did not recognize Him" (v. 33a). Does this mean that even the greatest man who ever lived didn't immediately recognize the Messiah? He certainly knew Jesus as a person, but not as the Messiah, until it was explicitly revealed to him by God through the fulfillment of the prophecy concerning how the Holy Spirit would come upon the Promised One. Imagine the life of John the Baptist. From the day he was born, he was told by his parents and then through divine messages from God in the form of the Old Testament Scriptures that he was to be the one who announced the long-awaited Messiah. Then, when Jesus actually arrived on the scene to begin his public ministry, he stated that he didn't recognize Him as the Messiah until God granted him a divine revelation that this was indeed the One whom he was expecting.

How about us, are we willing to humbly admit our inability to see Jesus? Do we trust in God's word concerning Him, as John the Baptist did? It's like the little boy Johnny, who always wanted to be a fireman, in a region that hadn't had a fire in hundreds of years. His parents told him he would be a firefighter. His friends told him he would be a firefighter. When he graduated from high school, he enrolled in training to be a firefighter. One day, the alarm bell rang in the training center, and he knew that he was going to see a real fire. When he got there, he said, "Boy, I have never actually seen a fire before; that doesn't look like a fire." At that, the fire chief said, "Johnny, that's a fire," which quickly settled the matter. Johnny may have looked a bit silly in front of his classmates, but he truly spoke what was on his mind. John the Baptist, whose whole short life was dedicated to the express purpose as the forerunner of the Messiah, the one to announce His ministry, was in a similar spot. When he saw Jesus, he didn't recognize Him right away as the Messiah. But when God spoke, the matter was confirmed once and forever.

Let's be humble like John the Baptist and admit we need eyes to see the reality of the Messiah as we read Scripture and we live our lives. Since God wants to reveal the Messiah, He will help us see the glory of Jesus as the Messiah and the difference He can make in our lives even today.

Reflection Questions

1. What about us? What has God raised us to be watching for? What are the purposes that God has placed upon *our* hearts as servants of the Lord? Consider taking the following action. Pray right now for God to reveal one or two things, write them down, and reflect upon them this week.

2. If all true Christians are "saints," how does that change your view of your life's purpose and meaning? How can you live into the identity of being set apart for special use?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 21: 01/11/2026



This week, we will again examine Isaiah and a prophecy concerning Jesus. Then, we will move on to a study of Jesus' baptism and discuss His nature as both God and Man, along with his radical obedience to the Father's plan for His life. Because of the concepts covered in the readings, we are going to change the analysis order so that we cover the first reading, the Gospel reading, and finally the second reading.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Isaiah 42, the alternate is from chapter 40 and won't be covered today. This is the first of what is known as Isaiah's "Servant Songs." This first song continues past the end of today's reading in verse 7 to verse 10. The Servant Songs prove in a powerful way that Jesus of Nazareth is God's Righteous Servant, the long-awaited Messiah. The preceding context is the preparation for Judah's return from captivity in Babylon, which we know happened during the time of Nehemiah. As you read, take careful note of the characteristics of the Servant.

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First Reading:

> *Isaiah 42:1-7 NAS95 1 "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. 2 "He will not cry out or raise His voice, Nor make His voice heard in the street. 3 "A bruised reed He will not break And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice. 4 "He will not be disheartened or crushed Until He has established justice in the earth; And the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law." 5 Thus says God the LORD, Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread out the earth and its offspring, Who gives breath to the people on it And spirit to those who walk in it, 6 "I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, And I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations, 7 To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the dungeon And those who dwell in darkness from the prison.*

Isaiah said in verse six that God's Servant would be a light to the nations, which means to the Gentiles. Last week, we discussed the revealing of this marvelous mystery, that the Messiah would bring salvation not only to the Jews but also to the Gentiles. Here, God reaffirms that message and states that the Messiah would be appointed "as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations (Gentiles), To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the dungeon, And those who dwell in darkness from the prison" (vv. 6e-7). God compared the spiritual darkness of the Gentiles with blind people (7a), and with those in prison living in darkness (v. 7b-ff). Note that the only person in that society who would have had the authority to free an entire people group from prison was the King. Also, remember that the prisons were gruesome, dark places in those days. Isaiah said that the future Servant, whom we know as Jesus, would exercise kingly authority to free prisoners from darkness. Saint Paul confirms this by saying, "For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Col 1:13).

You may wonder what Isaiah meant in verse 3 when he said, "A bruised reed He will not break, And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish." A lack of social justice was one of the primary themes of Isaiah, with widows and orphans especially oppressed (Isaiah 1:17). The reed referred to the weak people of the world, those wounded souls who genuinely need and seek the Messiah to save them. The "dimly burning wick" was symbolic of something that would have to be nurtured to keep going, a tiny flame that required kindling to make enough of a fire for a person to use. The Messiah won't stamp out the flame; He will enliven it! In fact, Jesus quoted the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) version of this text to prove that His coming fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy. Jesus said, "A BATTERED REED HE WILL NOT BREAK OFF, AND A SMOLDERING WICK HE WILL NOT PUT OUT, UNTIL HE LEADS JUSTICE TO VICTORY" (Matthew 12:20).

What does this Servant Song mean for us today? First, we can be sure that Jesus fulfilled this prophecy and came as the servant Messiah. The delight of the Father was on Him, and the Spirit of the Lord was in Him. This same Messiah, the Righteous One, is the One in whom we put our trust to bring us salvation. He is worthy of our worship, our faith, and our surrender. Second, as we surrender, we can trust that He will not take advantage of our weakened condition. In fact, on the contrary, He will nurture us and bring us to a place of fuller relationship with the Father. He will enliven what little faith we have as we open our hearts up to Him to do His good work in us. Lastly, the message of salvation is not just a theoretical freedom from the stranglehold of sin, but an experiential reality that Jesus wants us to grow up into. He has set us free from the tyranny of sin, and we no longer need to live in the dark prison that Satan had us in. Unfortunately, many of us do not know of this freedom and continue to live in the dungeon of guilt, worry, and fear. "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

As we move on to the second reading and the Gospel message, I would like to share some background on the key figures in Church history to better understand the occasion of Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist. One of my hobbies has been the study of Church history, especially the main characters who played a role in shaping the doctrines held by Christian believers in the times that would become their future. In some cases, these characters postulated theological theories that, with adequate biblical support, became accepted by the early Church. Yet others proposed heretical ideas that, during their opposition by the Church, led to the unexpected result of calcifying the Church's true beliefs. In essence, when incorrect theological ideas arose, the church was forced to examine its presuppositions and beliefs more closely, clarifying what it believed. For example, Marcion of Sinope, who was the son of an early bishop, proposed an early and incorrect canon of the Bible that ultimately led the Church to respond with one that the early Church leaders accepted. Another in this latter category was Nestorius, Archbishop of Constantinople, who later denied the teaching for which he was accused and proposed that the human Jesus and the divine Christ were two different persons. He was condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431. This brings us to a fellow named Eutyches, whose teachings are essential for understanding today's Gospel message.

Eutyches was a presbyter of Constantinople and opposed Nestorius at the Council of Ephesus. He founded the teaching known as Monophysitism which said that Jesus had only one nature, rather than maintaining His divine nature and adding a human nature after his birth through Blessed Mary (Luke 1:48). Eutyches said that Jesus' human and divine natures were combined into the single nature of Christ "without any alteration, absorption or confusion: that of the incarnate Word." While some may maintain that this is theological hair-splitting, similar to asking "How many angels can fit on the head of a pin," it is extremely important that we understand the nature of Jesus. If Jesus

wasn't fully man, then how could he have fulfilled the Law? He also wouldn't have understood what it was like to live in our fallen world. If Jesus wasn't fully divine, He couldn't have atoned for the sin of the entire world. Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish them, but to fulfill" (Mt 5:17). And the author of Hebrews said, "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" (Heb 4:15). Somehow, Jesus was both fully man and fully God. The response of the Church to Eutyches was to formulate doctrine along the lines that Jesus was a unified whole being Who consisted fully of both human and divine natures without defining some magical quotient of the degree of mixing of the two. Jesus was 100% human and 100% divine! To say anything less would violate the clear teaching of Scripture.

Jesus emptied Himself of the independent use of His divine attributes during His earthly ministry. We see this in Paul's Letter to the Philippians.

> *6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:6-8)*

Let's step back and summarize, since we are juggling many balls in the study today. We spoke about Isaiah's prophecy that Jesus would be God's Righteous Servant, acting as light to Gentiles, all people, and One who would free the poor and oppressed people from spiritual darkness. In our overview of some important historical figures of Church history, we discussed the controversy over the nature of Jesus brought about by Eutyches, which led the Church to formulate a theology about Jesus' nature, consisting of both human and divine as a unified whole Being without a formula to the degree of mixing between the two natures. As we move to the Gospel reading, we will see that since Jesus was 100% human (and 100% divine, how can that be?), as God's Righteous Servant, He would have to submit Himself to the full measure of the Law. This meant living in submission to the plan of salvation predicated by His Father, which included the program of John the Baptist as the forerunner in the spirit of Elijah. As we will see, Jesus submitted to John's baptism of repentance to demonstrate his full compliance with the Father's divine plan.

Gospel Reading:

> Matthew 3:13-17 NASB: [3] *Then Jesus *arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him.* [14] *But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?"* [15] *But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit it at this time; for in this*

> *way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he *permitted Him. [16] After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and [a]he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and [b]lighting on Him, [17] and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is [c]My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."*

Jesus had to fulfill all righteousness, and part of that was submitting to John's baptism of repentance. The Jews of that era were used to *repeated* ceremonial washings. However, John's baptism represented a person's *one-time* public confession of repentance, a willingness to turn from their sin and to the plan of God for their lives. Even though Jesus was sinless in His essence as God, He had to live a perfect, sinless life as a man, and this meant submitting to the Father's will through the ministry of John the Baptist. Otherwise, when King Herod came to kill all of the infants, as we saw last week, Jesus' death would have atoned for the sin of the world, and that would have been the end of His ministry. "But God" had other ideas, and Jesus submitted to the Father's wishes. "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" (Hebrews 4:15). We can celebrate that Jesus was willing to submit to the Father's plan.

As we make the sign of the cross, we can remember Jesus' baptism and how it demonstrated the reality of the Holy Trinity. We saw during the baptism that the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus the Son like a dove (v. 16e). The Father announced, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased" (v. 17b). God said through Isaiah in the first reading, "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him" (Isaiah 42:1). God is delighted in His Righteous Servant. He delights in us as servants of the Lord Jesus.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

This reading is from Acts 10; the alternate reading from Titus 2 won't be covered. As we finish the second reading, note what we said earlier about Isaiah's prophecy of the freedom of the Gentiles living in darkness, and how Jesus was obedient to God as a Servant, even submitting to baptism by John the Baptist.

Second Reading:

> *Acts 10:34-38 NAS95 34 Opening his mouth, Peter said: "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, 35 but in every nation the man who fears Him*

> *and does what is right is welcome to Him. 36 "The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all) — 37 you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. 38 "You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.*

Peter said that God's offer of salvation through faith in Jesus was available to everyone, Jews and Gentiles alike. He said that God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and power (38b). Read verse one from the first reading in Isaiah again. "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations" (Isaiah 42:1). Do you see how precisely the prophecy was fulfilled through Jesus? This is the One in whom we trust.

Reflection Questions

1. When Jesus went to John to be baptized, he publicly stated his willingness to submit to the Father's plan through whatever form it would take. Though the Scriptures didn't seem to foretell the event of Jesus' baptism, there was plenty of prophecy regarding the obedient nature that God's Servant Messiah would take. Reflect upon the following verses from Isaiah regarding our Suffering Servant, the Lord Jesus.

> *1 Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? 2 For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. 3 He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face, He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. 4 Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. 5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. 6 All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him. 7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth. 8 By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off out of the land of the living, For the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due? 9 His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a*

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> *rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth. 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. (Isaiah 53:1-11)*

How does understanding the radical obedience of Jesus empower you to answer the calling that God has placed upon your life?

2. In what ways have you made a public profession of your faith? As the New Year dawns, in what ways could you accomplish this during the upcoming year?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 20: 01/04/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes**.** The gift-giving season of Christmas has just passed from

our radar screens. However, the tradition of gift-giving is found in each of the Mass readings this week. In the Old Testament reading, we see that people will give gifts to Jesus, the King, who will reign on earth during His second advent. The New Testament reading shows us how St. Paul was God's gift to the Gentiles. In addition, the Gospel reading recounts the story of the Wise Men who came from the East to give gifts to Jesus during His first advent.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

This week, we will first examine the second reading from Saint Paul, since the first reading from Isaiah and the Gospel lesson from Saint Matthew must be studied together in light of Paul's insights. The second reading is Ephesians Chapter Three, where Paul unveiled a mystery hidden throughout the ages until after Jesus' First Advent, which we just celebrated at Christmas. As you read this section of Ephesians (without all of the skipped verses), try to select the single verse that Saint Paul provided that summarizes this mystery.

Second Reading:

> *1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles– 2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; 3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. 4 And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; 6 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel, (Ephesians 3:1-6)*

Even though Saint Paul did minister to the Jews (see, for example, Acts 13:14), his *primary* ministry was to the Gentiles. In contrast, Peter's primary ministry was to the Jews. Paul, through the providence of the Holy Spirit, said that God placed him into the position of stewardship over the Gentile believers in the Church (verses 1–2). He said elsewhere in Galatians, "But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the Gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised" (Galatians 2:7). God determined that the primary focus of his ministry was to give the Gospel to the Gentiles, the same way that He sent Saint Peter to bring the message to the Jews. Though God set Paul apart to concentrate his ministry on the Gentiles, his background was that of a

devout Jew (Philippians 3:5), and his heart was set on winning the Jews to the Kingdom of God.

In this week's reading, the mystery was that the Gentiles would be gloriously grafted into the people of God through the Church (Romans 11:17). It is essential to understand, at least at a high level, Paul's background as we discuss this mystery revealed to him. He was formerly a member of the Jewish group known as the Pharisees, a cult which we have discussed extensively in the context of Jesus' interactions with them. The Pharisees were a group of devout Jews who, from all accounts, would have abhorred the concept of unconverted Gentiles joining their strict Jewish sect. A modern analogy would be the children's game in which the goal is to hammer round and square wooden pegs into their respective holes. One could never hammer a square peg into a round hole, regardless of how forcefully a person went about it, their talent, or their background. In the same way, the Pharisees could never have in their wildest imaginations envisioned a time when large populations of Gentiles would be invited and subsequently accepted into the family of God. They should have envisioned this as the Old Testament Scriptures predicted it would happen. Isaiah said, "Then it will come about in that day that the nations will resort to the root of Jesse, who will stand as a signal for the peoples, and His resting place will be glorious" (Isaiah 11:10, emphasis added). The concept of the Gentiles coming to God appeared throughout the Old Testament. We see this again in Isaiah, in the section covered in today's first reading, which, with the benefit of history, we find was in the context of Jesus' Second Advent. "And nations will come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising" (Isaiah 60:3, emphasis added). The square pegs of the Gentiles will then fit nicely into round holes through God's mysterious unveiling of His divine plan of the Church. If you are not of Jewish heritage but consider yourself a part of God's family through faith in Jesus Christ, then you can thank God for using the life of St. Paul to bring about this paradigm shift. Yes, even the Gentiles are fellow heirs, fellow members, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The quotation above from Isaiah brings us to the first reading, found in Chapter 60. As we said before, with the benefit of history and hindsight, we understand that this section of Isaiah refers to the Second Advent of Jesus Christ, namely when He returns in glory. With this context in mind, study the reading and take special note of the gifts that the Gentile believers will bring to the LORD.

First Reading:

> *1 "Arise, shine; for your light has come, And the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. 2 For*

> *behold, darkness will cover the earth, And deep darkness the peoples; But the LORD will rise upon you, And His glory will appear upon you. 3 And nations will come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising. 4 Lift up your eyes round about, and see; They all gather together, they come to you. Your sons will come from afar, And your daughters will be carried in the arms. 5 Then you will see and be radiant, And your heart will thrill and rejoice; Because the abundance of the sea will be turned to you, The wealth of the nations will come to you. 6 A multitude of camels will cover you, The young camels of Midian and Ephah; All those from Sheba will come; They will bring gold and frankincense, And will bear good news of the praises of the LORD. (Isaiah 60:1-6)*

Isaiah said that God would use "deep darkness" (v. 2a) to bring Gentiles (the nations, v. 3a) to Him. The Old Testament Prophets referred to this time of deep darkness as the "Day of the Lord," something which we discussed at length in this previous study. The timing of the Day of the Lord was hidden from the Prophets, but we know it occurs just before Jesus' Second Coming and in the context of the Great Tribulation described in the Book of Revelation, Chapters 6–18. During this period, God will accomplish two objectives. First, He will complete His disciplining of the Nation of Israel, bringing them to return to Him, and second, He will judge the godless, unbelieving Gentiles remaining on the earth. After this time, Jerusalem will become the capital city of the universe. The Prophet Ezekiel said, "Thus says the Lord GOD, 'This is Jerusalem; I have set her at the center of the nations, with lands around her'" (Ezekiel 5:5) and about the Jews "who live at the center of the world" (Ezekiel 38:12e). God will use the tribulation of the end-time period to bring believers from all nations to Him. At the same time, the unbelievers will be permanently excluded from God's eternal Kingdom (Revelation 22:15).

Note the types of gifts that the future Gentile leaders will bring to King Jesus. "They will bring gold and frankincense, and will bear good news of the praises of the LORD" (Isaiah 60:6d). Throughout history, gold has been the most valuable of all metals. It's a rare and valuable treasure, a perfect gift that never degrades, making it an excellent offering to Jesus, who reigns as LORD. Frankincense is very familiar to any Catholic, as this material produces a most pleasant aroma when burned and smells of perfume in its native form.

I was an altar boy for most of my younger years and was frequently in proximity to the priest burning this sweet-smelling material. The burning of incense symbolizes the prayers of the faithful rising to heaven (Revelation 5:8). Future world leaders will present their gifts of gold and incense directly to the Source of their salvation, the Lord Himself! What a joyous occasion this will be!

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

This brings us to the Gospel lesson from Matthew Chapter Two, in which the Magi present their gifts to the King of the Universe. Please read the text and take particular note of their **three** gifts.

Gospel Reading:

> *1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, 2 "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him." 3 And when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he began to inquire of them where the Christ was to be born. 5 And they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet, 6 'AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER, WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.'" 7 Then Herod secretly called the magi, and ascertained from them the time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, "Go and make careful search for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, that I too may come and worship Him." 9 And having heard the king, they went their way; and lo, the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them, until it came and stood over where the Child was. 10 And when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 11 And they came into the house and saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell down and worshiped Him; and opening their treasures they presented to Him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. 12 And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their own country by another way. (Matthew 2:1-12)*

The context of this section is that Jesus had already been born in Bethlehem, and his parents had moved him out of the stable into a house. He was an infant, probably less than two years old, as we see from Herod, who later in Matthew made a plan to kill all infants two years old or younger. The Magi were likely people from the Babylonian region along the Euphrates River in present-day Iraq, south of Baghdad. These mysterious scholars were highly educated people who were part pagan priest, magician, and scribe. They were also interested in astrology, which was woven into their mystical religious beliefs. Nowhere in the text does it say that there were three of them, as in the famous song about the three wise men. This designation comes from the three gifts they brought with them to present to the King. There was likely a small group of them, but many guards and servants would have accompanied them. Thus, this would have made their arrival that much more disturbing to King Herod.

The Jewish priests and scribes told the Magi the prophecy from the Prophet Micah, which they evidently weren't aware of, that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). This must be

the case, or they would have gone directly to Bethlehem in the first place and avoided King Herod. Verse 9 said, "And having heard the king, they went their way; and lo, the star, which they **had seen** in the east, went on before them, until it came and stood over where the Child was" (emphasis added). Then, the star reappeared! So, what did they do? Did they stop and ask for further directions? No, followed it and went to Bethlehem! Now they had both the prophecy from the Jews and the star to guide them. Therefore, they continued on their journey but had to BELIEVE God's revelation and follow it.

Finally, when they arrived in Bethlehem and located Jesus, they presented their *three* gifts to him. The Magi's gift of gold would have been beneficial to the holy family during their subsequent flight to Egypt, which was necessary to flee King Herod. Notice the similarity of their gifts mentioned in the first reading from Isaiah 60, but with one glaring addition: myrrh. Myrrh was something used throughout the eastern world as an embalming agent. These kings of the east presented Mary and Joseph with a precious gift for the future burial of their Son. Look at it this way. One day, you attended the baptism of an infant in the church, and afterwards, one of the guests presented the happy couple with a beautiful new coffin for the child. Yes, the coffin could be sold, and the money could be used to raise the child, but what kind of message would the gift's presentation give the parents? The magi, unbeknownst to themselves, predicted the death of the Messiah. Little did they know that His death was a necessary part of the redemptive story so that you and I might have eternal life. In a future age, Gentile believers will present gifts of gold and incense to Jesus; the need for myrrh has been done away with because Jesus rose from the dead and conquered death for you and me.

The chain of ideas that emerged from the text is as follows: First, God gives revelation to find Jesus. Second, God calls us to believe and follow his revelation. Finally, when we truly meet with God, our response is joy, worship, and giving! The bottom line is this: God calls us to believe and follow His revelation about Jesus, and when we do, our response is joy, worship, and giving.

Reflection Questions

1. Think about the message that you send implicitly when you send someone a gift. A child gives his father a pair of gloves for Christmas. Another child gives his mother a box of candy. In light of the New Year and the idea of making resolutions for the next twelve months, what single gift could you present to Jesus this year?

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2. It is easy to criticize the Pharisees for judging the Gentiles and for considering them "unworthy" of being saved. The definition of grace is that no one is worthy of it. It is God's unmerited favor. Think about your own attitude towards those who seem unlikely to become Christians. Is there someone whom you can identify as unlikely to be a fellow heir, a fellow member of the body, and a fellow partaker in the promise of Christ Jesus through the Gospel? Commit to pray for this person and look for ways to be like St. Paul by loving them and speaking the truth of the Gospel to them.

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 17: 12/28/2025



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we open with the first reading from Genesis 21. Next, we look at two readings for the second reading: one from Hebrews and the second from Colossians. Finally, we conclude with the Gospel lesson from Luke.

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Introduction to the First Reading:

We have two first readings: one from the Apocrypha and one from the Book of Genesis; we will cover the one from Genesis, chapters 15 and 21.

The context of the reading is God's promise to Abram (later called Abraham) and its fulfillment: the birth of a son. This firstborn son of Sarai (later called Sarah) was the son of promise through whom all of God's blessings would flow. Although God also blessed Abram's first son, born through his servant Hagar, God told Sarai that this son, Ishmael, would be a "wild donkey of a man" (Genesis 16:12). The future Arab nation came through Ishmael, whereas the Hebrew people came through Isaac. The conflict between the two sons and two people groups continued later with the birth of Jacob and Esau as recorded in Genesis 25. Here God told Rebekah (Isaac's wife), "Two nations are in your womb; And two peoples will be separated from your body; And one people shall be stronger than the other; And the older shall serve the younger" (Genesis 25:23). God made promises regarding both the godly line of Isaac / Jacob as well as the carnal line of Ishmael / Esau.

First Reading:

> *1 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great." 2 Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 And Abram said, "Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir." 4 Then behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir." 5 And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." 6 Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:1-6)*

> *1 Then the LORD took note of Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He*

> *had promised. 2 So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him. 3 Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac. (Genesis 21:1-3)*

In the first passage, we see that Abram was concerned that he did not have an heir. However, God comforted him by telling him he would not remain childless. God promised to give him a son who would eventually start the line of descendants that would outnumber the stars (v. 5). The key verse is "Abraham believed in the Lord, and He reckoned it to him as righteousness" (v. 6). This is an essential point that Paul brings out in the Book of Romans: salvation is by faith and not by works (Romans 4:3). This story is important to us because it clarifies the foundation of a people saved by faith in God. We are part of Abraham's offspring when we walk by faith, as Abraham is the father of all who believe (Romans 4:16).

In the second passage, we see God's promise to Abram fulfilled, now called Abraham. Sarah bore Isaac in her old age, which was impossible but not too difficult for God. You can imagine how hard it would be to believe God's promises when they seem impossible. But now they experienced the reality of God's blessing through the birth of Isaac, the child of promise. Likewise, God calls us to live by faith and His promises even when it feels like the odds are against us.

Looking back at the introduction, Isaac fulfilled God's will, plan, and timing for Abraham. In contrast, Ishmael was how Abraham tried to fulfill what he thought was God's plan for him, but without obedience to God's timing. As Christians, we will encounter times when we try to fulfill our desires on our own terms and timetable. Some examples of this would be engaging in premarital relations or satisfying our sexual desires by focusing on a person other than our wives or husbands. What does this mean for single people? Singles face a unique challenge, as carnal desires certainly rage against the spiritual ones to focus only upon God, in advance of God delivering a spouse to them or not.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

This week, two passages were given for the second reading; we will cover each. The second reading was from Hebrews chapter 11. Hebrews 11 is known as the "hall of faith," which records the faithful actions of godly men throughout biblical history, beginning with the father of faith, Abraham.

Note: We included the intermediate verses that were skipped in the reading.

Second Reading:

> *8 By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; 10 for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. 11 By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE. 13 All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. 14 For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. 15 And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them. 17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; 18 it was he to whom it was said, "IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED." 19 He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type. (Hebrews 11:8-19)*

This passage shows that God has commended Abraham and Sarah for their faith. At the beginning of this chapter, we read, "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6). Through these examples, including Abraham, the father of faith, we find inspiration for our own journey of faith in God. Abraham was called out of his land to go to a place God would show him. He didn't have a map of God's plan, but he walked in faith daily, based on what he knew. Then God promised him a son after Sarah was beyond childbearing age. By faith, Abraham believed that God could perform this miracle. As we read earlier, Sarah conceived and gave birth to Isaac. We live as Abraham's children when we walk by faith in God.

The other first reading was from Saint Paul's Letter to the Colossians.

> *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. (Colossians 3:12-21)*

Looking at the full context of this reading, we must understand that we first "put off" the old man because of who we are in Christ. Paul said in the opening of this chapter, "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God" (Colossians 3:1). That is a big "if." This passage depends on having a heart God has changed (John 3:3, born from above). Paul continued, "For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3). After putting off the "old man" and its practices (v. 9), we are to put on the new man, as Paul explains in the reading. Paul culminates the list of things to "put on" by describing love as the anchor for these good character qualities in this passage. He said, "Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity" (v. 14).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from Luke 2. The context is Mary and Joseph's following of God's law to have their newborn son, Jesus, circumcised on the eighth day of His life on earth.

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Gospel Reading:

> *22 And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "EVERY firstborn MALE THAT OPENS THE WOMB SHALL BE CALLED HOLY TO THE LORD"), 24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, "A PAIR OF TURTLEDOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS." 25 And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, 28 then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, 29 "Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, According to Your word; 30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation, 31 Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, And the glory of Your people Israel." 33 And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him. 34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed– 35 and a sword will pierce even your own soul–to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." 36 And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers. 38 At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. 39 When they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth. 40 The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. (Luke 2:22-40)*

In the opening verses, Mary and Joseph fulfilled the Law's requirement to present a sin offering in the temple 41 days after Jesus' birth. Next, Simeon comes into the story as a man of faith who patiently awaits God's promise through the birth of the Messiah. Four hundred years had passed since God's last revelation, during which the Jews waited for the fulfillment of the promises. This silence was suddenly broken by the miraculous events surrounding the birth of Jesus. This story tells of yet another miraculous outpouring of God's spirit of prophecy through Simeon and Anna.

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Simeon's prophecy focused on Jesus being God's salvation prepared for all people, both Jews and Gentiles. He also prophesied to Mary about her grief over the Child's destiny. Anna, a prophetess, also verified that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

What do these things mean for us this Christmas season? First, we can be confident that Jesus fulfills God's prophecies concerning the coming Messiah. He is the One who provides salvation to all people. Like Simeon, Anna, Abraham, and Sarah, who waited almost their entire lives to see God's promises fulfilled, we also need to remember to be patient and wait for God to fulfill His plan in our lives. This means that even when we encounter challenging circumstances, we can still trust that God is working behind the scenes and will finish the good work that He has begun in us (Philippians 1:6). In this Christmas season, if you are having a difficult time finding joy amongst the celebration, you can turn to Jesus, who is the "consolation of Israel" (Luke 2:25).

Reflection Questions

1. In the first reading, we read how Abraham patiently waited for the fulfillment of God's promises. In what ways do you identify with Abraham and Sarah, who waited for the fulfillment of an impossible promise? How does their story of faith give you direction and hope for your faith journey?

2. In the second reading, Paul provides a list of qualities that flow out of being set apart and loved by God that should affect how we live our lives. How does being "holy and beloved" (Colossians 3:12) change how you relate to God, yourself, and others? Re-read the list of character qualities (Colossians 3:12-21) and consider how you express each relationally in your life.

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday

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Lectionary 10: 12/21/2025



Like last week, this week, as we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ, we will be studying some important prophetic voices from the Old Testament. We will also be reading from the Gospel of Saint Matthew to hear how he confirmed that the coming birth of Jesus would fulfil these predictions made centuries earlier.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Before we turn to the first reading from Chapter 7 in Isaiah, we need to explain the personality of King Ahaz, the King of the Southern Tribe of Judah, about whom Isaiah will speak. Ahaz was King Jotham's son, the latter of whom was Judah's godly ruler. King Ahaz came into power when he was 20 years of age, and he went bad immediately at the beginning of his reign. Second Chronicles provides an essential insight into the personality of the King. "But he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel; he also made molten images for the Baals" (2 Chronicles 28:2). Not only was Ahaz an idolater who caused the circulation of idols to the god Baal, but he even burned his own children as sacrifices to false gods. The Scripture said, "But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and even made his son pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the

LORD had driven out from before the sons of Israel" (2 Kings 16:3). He went from bad to worse after the attack of the King of Assyria who had already overtaken the Northern Tribes.

> *20 So Tilgath-pilneser king of Assyria came against him and afflicted him instead of strengthening him. 21 Although Ahaz took a portion out of the house of the LORD and out of the palace of the king and of the princes, and gave it to the king of Assyria, it did not help him. 22 Now in the time of his distress this same King Ahaz became yet more unfaithful to the LORD. 23 For he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus which had defeated him, and said, "Because the gods of the kings of Aram helped them, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me." But they became the downfall of him and all Israel. (2 Chronicles 28:20-23)*

As if that wasn't bad enough, Ahaz then went on to block the entrance to the temple to prevent the true worship of God (2 Chronicles 28:25). King Ahaz started out bad and continued in his ungodly rule until the very end of his life without ever having a change of heart or repenting of his sin. It's with this understanding of the king that we turn to the text of the first reading from Isaiah.

First Reading:

> *10 Then the LORD spoke again to Ahaz, saying, 11 "Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; make it deep as Sheol or high as heaven." 12 But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!" 13 Then he said, "Listen now, O house of David! Is it too slight a thing for you to try the patience of men, that you will try the patience of my God as well? 14 "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel. Isaiah 7:10-14*

The Lord allowed King Ahaz to trust in Him by asking for a sign. Instead of asking for a sign, King Ahaz spoke out of pride and self-reliance in his heart, which displeased the Lord. God had given him an invitation, and he refused to accept it. This "tried" the patience of the Lord because he persisted in his independence and refused to trust in God's provision of a sign to assure him. God used this event of obstinate disobedience to foretell the Messiah. This prophecy was ultimately fulfilled through the birth of Jesus by the Virgin Mary.

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Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Because the Gospel reading relates to the prophecy of Isaiah from the first reading, we will consider that passage next. This reading is from the first chapter of the Gospel of Saint Matthew.

Gospel Reading:

> *18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. 19 And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her, desired to put her away secretly. 20 But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for that which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 "And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins." 22 Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, 23 "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD, AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US." 24 And Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took her as his wife, 25 and kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus. (Matthew 1:18-25)*

While many of us are already familiar with the narrative concerning the birth of Jesus, this passage highlights essential truths for our lives. First, Saint Matthew revealed that Jesus was born not through natural human relations but through the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit. This is important because, since God is without sin, this was the only way the sinless God-Man could come into the world. Second, since the virgin birth fulfilled biblical prophecy, we can trust other prophecies that speak to areas of our life and ministry. This includes things like how the Lord's second coming will play out and how the world will be eventually unified under Jesus' earthly reign. Third, Jesus was sent to save His people from their sins. This is God's special invitation to counteract the destructive nature of sin to stand before a Holy God and not be rejected at the judgment. This is not only "a" plan for salvation, it is "the" plan. Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Matthew's Gospel also brings out an essential prophetic fulfillment regarding the title of Jesus as Immanuel. This title means "God with us," a crucial relationship aspect of the Messiah's advent. The Messiah reveals the heart of God as One who lives among us. The implications of Jesus being called Immanuel are twofold. First, Jesus came so we might come to the Father through Him. Second, Jesus moved into the neighborhood to stay to show us God's love so that we might live eternally with Him. Christianity is the only belief system that purports that God became a man and died for our sins. That is the powerful implication of Immanuel, God with us.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

In the second reading from Romans, Saint Paul also confirmed the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies regarding Jesus. While these are introductory remarks and salutations, many meaningful truths are contained here.

Second Reading:

> *1 Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, 2 which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, 3 concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, 4 who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, 5 through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles, for His name's sake, 6 among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; 7 to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 1:1-7)*

It would be easy to read this passage casually and gloss over the deep insights, but Paul confirmed the following truths about Jesus and His people.

1. Jesus' birth and ministry were predicted by Old Testament Scriptures (v.2).

2. Jesus would be born in the line of King David as to his earthly genealogy (v.3).

3. He would be the Son of God and as God would have the power to be resurrected from the dead (v.4a), and be filled with the Holy Spirit (v.4a).

4. He would be perfectly holy (v.4b).

5. He would be the Lord of the Church.

6. All grace would flow through Jesus (v.5)

7. Jesus would establish the church's apostles, including Paul (v.5).

8. His Church would bring about obedience and faith (v.5).

9. Paul's ministry would extend to the Gentiles (v.5).

10. All believers would be called "saints" and, like the apostles, called out to ministry (v.7).

Saint Paul knew Jesus in a multifaceted way, which should be a model for us as followers of Him today. Most importantly, we need to recognize Jesus as the Son of God who was raised from the dead and lived a holy life through the power of the Holy Spirit so that we can receive His grace. Receiving His grace means that I am now in good favor with the Father and declared righteous.

Reflection Questions

1. Review the list above from the second reading in Romans 1 about Jesus. Choose one point and think about how this truth affects your life.

2. What difference does knowing that Jesus is Immanuel, "God with us," make to you?