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

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 3-16-2014



Welcome back to the Mass Notes for 3-16-2014. This week we return to Genesis, the first Book in the Bible to see God's unconditional promise of blessing on Abram, whose name God later changed to the more familiar Abraham. Then we will study Saint Paul's Second Letter to Timothy and conclude with the Gospel lesson from Matthew 17 in which we will see Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain.

Let's step back for a moment and talk about how we go about studying the readings each week in order to give you some insights into our method. When we study the readings we use the following procedure counting down from the letter "C" in the alphabet: **C**ontext, **B**ig Idea, and **A**pplication. First, we examine the context of the passage in light of the surrounding passages (the textual context) along with the historical information (the historical context). Second, we determine the theological big idea that emerged from the study of the text. What was God saying to the people in the original context, and what theological principles can we extract from the text? Finally, we determine the contemporary application(s) – what does it mean to us today? As we move through the readings each week try and see what theological big ideas you can garner from the text and how these could then be applied to your life. As you focus upon the **A**pplication, first pray that God would reveal to you what He would have you do with what you learned. You may be amazed at how God sheds light differently on each passage as you encounter and study it again in the liturgical cycle over the years. Perhaps you will find, as my wife likes to say, that you have been ruined for the ordinary!

The first reading is from Genesis Chapter 12. The context of this section was just after Abram, who

later became Abraham the Father of all believers, left with his father Terah from his birthplace in the region called "Ur of the Chaldeans" and settled in Haran (Genesis 11:31). These were the circumstances leading up to God's call of Abram. Looking at the bigger picture, Noah's Flood was in the somewhat distant history, and he had died back in Chapter 9 (v. 28). The era of the city building had begun under Nimrod (10:8), beginning with the city of Babel (10:10). Chapter 10 contained what was called the "Table of Nations" that represented the nations that developed after Noah and his sons departed from the ark. "These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, by their nations; and out of these the nations were separated on the earth after the flood" (v. 32, emphasis added). The division (or "separated in some versions) happened at the Tower of Babel where God acted to confuse the languages of the nation states for several reasons including their idolatry and unwillingness to spread out and populate the earth (9:1, 11:4). "They said, 'Come, let **us** build for **ourselves** a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let **us** make for **ourselves** a name, otherwise **we** will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth'" (Genesis 11:4, emphasis added). Many Bible commentators agree that the tower spoken of in verse 12 was a "ziggurat," which was a tall structure associated with the worship of pagan deities. Notice that the focus of the people's efforts was upon themselves (see the five bolded words in the text), rather than upon God's commandment to spread out and populate the earth. As we will see later in the Gospel lesson, they were not setting their mind on God's interests, but on man's, something which Jesus called Satanic (Matthew 16:23). We must remember that God cautions us against building shrines, regardless of the purity of our intentions. Otherwise these shrines, or towers, ziggurats, may become stumbling stones in serving God.

With this context in mind let's read the text. Note that as you read about God's promises to Abram, who was later renamed "Abraham," see if you can uncover the theological **b**ig ideas in the text.

> *1 Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; 2 And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; 3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." 4 So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. (Genesis 12:1-4 NAS95)*

This account is the first recorded encounter of God's call to Abram, which was a call to bless him. We don't know how the LORD communicated with Abram, but it seems very clear that Abram understood and immediately obeyed (v. 4). While this call would be one of blessing, it required some sacrifice on Abram's part. He had to leave his country, his relatives and his father's house. The progression goes from more general to very specific. God did not give him the GPS coordinates of the destination; He just told him that He would show Abram the land when he got there. How's that for literally walking by faith? That is why Abram is called the father of faith, since he had the unique privilege of becoming the father of a great nation that was called to walk by faith in God, as a unique light and blessing to the other nations on earth. God's blessing included not only making him into a great nation, but also making Abram's name great. The promise was that Abram would be a blessing

to other people groups.

In verses 2 – 3 we see an unconditional blessing of Abraham and all of the future Jews as well. "And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; 3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." Notice the warning that God gave to those who won't bless the Jews. "And the one who curses you I will curse" (v.3b). It's impossible to understand all of the implications of this timeless principle. Although we may not understand how God will deal with those who have harmed the Jews, we can rest assured that God will hold true to His unconditional promises to both bless those who bless the Jews and curse those who curse them.

God called Abram to make a great sacrifice in leaving his country, his relatives and his father's house. Is God calling you to leave some area of comfort to you? Is it possible that we are drawing our personal identity from our country, our relatives or our father's house? Whatever the case may be, God calls each of us to walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). Romans 4:3 says that Abram believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. So this text helps us to understand what pleases God's heart. Our belief in who He says He is and our willingness to walk by faith is what God is looking for in each of our lives.

As we move into the second reading, ponder for a moment how God speaks to us in the present day in order to call us to take certain actions for Him. In the first reading God spoke to Abram through a clear and specific call. The author of the Book of Hebrews provided some insights into how God spoke in the past and how He speaks to us today. "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world" (Hebrews 1:1-2). God's final method of communication to His people is through the words and life of His Son Jesus. As you read from Saint Paul's Second Letter to Timothy notice how throughout this letter, and in all of his letters, Paul's central focus in on the good news of Jesus – the Gospel.

> *8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, 9 who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, 10 but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, (2 Timothy 1:8-10)*

Paul reminded us not be ashamed of suffering for the good news of the Gospel, Jesus' eternal ministry, the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8). God saved us not because of our works, said Paul, but for His divine purposes (Titus 3:5). This reminds us of Paul's teaching to the Ephesians. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Ephesians 2:8-10). We can celebrate that when we believe in God's promises

through Jesus we have obtained immortality (v. 10b). In the same way that Abram listened to God, we are to listen to Him through the Gospel. You can see why Paul was not ashamed of this good news! We, as well, can learn from Paul's example. Even though the world around us wants us to feel timid about our faith, we of all people can be assured that the free gift of eternal life is something to be excited about. There are people in your life who need to hear this good news, not only from your words, but from your transformed life.

As we move onto the Gospel lesson, we will see the importance of first listening to God, even when we feel that we need to take immediate actions. The Gospel lesson today is from Matthew Chapter 17. The context was just after Peter proclaimed to Jesus under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that Jesus was the Christ, the promised Messiah of God (Matthew 16:16). Jesus then revealed to His disciples that He would be handed over to the elders, chief priests and scribes, and be killed then raised up on the third day (v.21). Peter responded to this information by immediately and impulsively responding to Jesus by saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You" (v. 222b) to which Jesus said, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's" (v.23). Peter was a man of action, and Jesus reprimanded him for attempting to take matters into his hands rather than allowing God to accomplish His divine plan through Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection.

Read the Gospel account of what is known as the "transfiguration" of Jesus in which we see a glimpse of God's glory revealed through the Person of Jesus Christ.

> *1 Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. 2 And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. 3 And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. 4 Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" 6 When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified. 7 And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, "Get up, and do not be afraid." 8 And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone. 9 As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead" (Matthew 17:1-9).*

The central focus of the passage was the Father revealing Jesus' glory as God in the flesh. He chose to reveal Jesus' true identity to a subset of Jesus' disciples. It's significant that Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him to the mountain. Peter, formerly a fisherman named Simon, was the foremost of the disciples, since every time that he is mentioned along with a list of disciples he is always listed first. Simon Peter was a man of action, as he is the one that cut off the ear of the high priest's servant when the mob came to arrest Jesus on the evening before His crucifixion (John 18:10). Peter became a leader of the church among the Jews, as Paul became a leader of the church to the Gentiles. James and John, known as the Sons of Thunder (Mark 3:17), were also significant in

their influence in the early church. James (known as James the Greater) was the first martyr among the disciples. James, along with his brother John, were known for their zeal and energy for their ministry with the Lord. Together with Peter, James and John formed the triad of disciples who shared special privileges with the Lord Jesus. These privileged three men were chosen by God to be the first ones to experience the glory of Jesus.

As we move deeper into the text, notice that the passage centered around the Father's message to Jesus' disciples. This contains an important hint as to the theological big idea of the text. God the Father said, "**This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!** (v. 5d). Throughout Matthew's Gospel Jesus had explained to His disciples the nature of the coming kingdom. He said in the previous chapter that His kingdom would not come until after the Jewish religious authorities had Him killed and He was raised up on the third day (Matthew 16:21). What God the Father was saying boiled down to something like this:

> "Jesus is telling you about His Kingdom. You have different ideas, like setting up your own shrines and bringing in the kingdom through your own efforts, but you need to listen to Him for the truth about how it must play out according to the plan foreordained from before the beginning of time."

Which of us would not have wanted to have responded in a similar way as Peter? I remember an incident that happened between me and my wife that helps to shed some light on how Peter acted impulsively during the transfiguration incident from the Gospel lesson. Just after we got married, my wife and I had gone out to a quiet dinner at a local restaurant in a lakeshore community in a nearby town. As we settled down to eat, my wife's cell phone rang. It was bad news. After she hung up the call, I sprang into action with a five-point plan on how we would overcome this obstacle and how we should proceed. As I moved onto the next four points, the first hint that I had that she wasn't receiving my plan very well was a slight tremor that began in her upper lip. "That's strange," I thought, "was she feeling ill, was it something in the soup that was causing this shake?" Soon the small tremor advanced until her whole body began shaking and then an all-out cry began! What had I done wrong, I was only trying to help? What my wife needed at that moment was just for me to be with her, hold her, and to listen.

My story about the need for me to just shut up and listen is similar to what happened to Peter when he responded impulsively to Jesus during the transfiguration experience. God the father responded to Peter's three-point plan by saying, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him" (v.5c). Peter, though well intentioned, simply needed to listen to God. When we are confronted with the glory of our Lord Jesus and the love of the Father for Him (which by the way is the same love Jesus has for us based on John 15:9), the appropriate response is to surrender our whole lives to God. Sometimes we just need to listen to God and not feel the need to respond with our own three-point plan.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In what ways is God calling you to walk by faith? How are the examples of Abram and Paul helpful to you?
2. Does the fact that salvation comes by grace and not by works sound like good news to you? When we accept this free gift from God, we are exercising faith. How is faith necessary for salvation to be imparted to us? How are you exercising faith in God's grace and not putting your faith in your own good works to bring you eternal life?
3. Jesus' true identity as God was revealed at the transfiguration. His face was radiant, shining like the sun. How can a vision of Jesus' true identity spur you on in your everyday life? What would need to change in your life in order to obey God's voice and "listen to Him"?

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/031614.cfm

First Reading GN 12:1-4A (plus extra verses for context)

Genesis 12:1-4 NAS95 1 Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; 2 And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; 3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." 4 So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

Second Reading 2 TIM 1:8B-10

2 Timothy 1:8-10 NAS95 8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, 9 who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, 10 but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,

Gospel Reading MT 17:1-9

Matthew 17:1-9 NAS95 1 Six days later Jesus *took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and *led them up on a high mountain by themselves. 2 And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. 3 And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. 4 Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" 6 When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified. 7 And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, "Get up, and do not be afraid." 8 And lifting up their eyes,

they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone. 9 As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead."

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 3-9-2014



Welcome back to the Mass Notes for 3-9-2014. 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 temptation of the devil. Our lesson this week followed a lengthy study last week on the subject of worry. If you haven't read that we suggest you find time to review this from the Mass you attended on Sunday, March 2.

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,

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 the point at which 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 record of the entire creation, including man. Chapter 2 expands on the creation account by filling in additional details. In the opening of Chapter two 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 named Eve, tilled a perfect garden with unlimited food, and walked around perfectly naked all day. 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 or not we will break a law is generally tied to the penalty for failing to obey the law. A speed limit law is one thing, but God told Adam that if he broke this one certain law that 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.

> *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 once again casting doubt about 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 is what happened in 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 gave also 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 was appointed as the leader for 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 found out about evil.

The fall of humanity that we read about in the first reading had a gigantic impact upon the world, both on the creation itself, humankind and also the animal world. Just ask anyone that 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 both of us used to like to go running 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 in front of me and then would frequently cross into the woods to follow whatever 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 or not he was going to obey. He turned his body away from me but looked back towards me while he made up his mind. Frequently he would think it about it for maybe a half a minute while I continued calling, then he would take off running away from me down the road. 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 corrupted state of this world frustrates all of us in every layer 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).

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, which is a gift freely given to those who believe God has provided His righteousness through faith. This reading is from Saint's 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 indicates 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 Garden of Eden.

> *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 of the key points that arise 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 heart. 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 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.
- Jesus' sacrificial death resulted in the imputed righteousness of believers, the "gift of righteousness" (v.16, 18).

These foundational insights give us a sense of 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?

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 that resulted 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 temptation of the devil, and how this contrasted with how Eve interacted with him.

> *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 dealt with the devil's temptation by quoting from 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 while quoting from the word of His Father.

The temptation for Jesus was to get His rightful place of rulership without having to go 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 to ask Him for 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!

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

This week had a lot of powerful concepts for us 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 than 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 verses living in God's grace?

||Living in my sin ——————————————————————||——————————————————Living in God's grace||

Readings for the Week

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Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/030914.cfm

First Reading GN 2:7-9; 3:1-7 (Plus verses added for Context)

Genesis 2:7-9 NAS95 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.

Genesis 2:10-25 NAS95 10 Now a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden; and from there it divided and became four rivers. 11 The name of the first is Pishon; it flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. 12 The gold of that land is good; the bdellium and the onyx stone are there. 13 The name of the second river is Gihon; it flows around the whole land of Cush. 14 The name of the third river is Tigris; it flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. 15 Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. 16 The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; 17 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." 18 Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." 19 Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. 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 3:1-7 NAS95 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.

Second Reading ROM 5:12-19

Romans 5:12-19 NAS95 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.

Gospel Reading MT 4:1-11

Matthew 4:1-11 NAS95 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.

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 3-2-2014

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Welcome back to Mass Notes for 3-2-2014. This week we continue with our studies from last week on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. We will also look at a brief reading from Isaiah. In the Gospel message from the Sermon on the Mount, we will discuss the subject of worry. Has anyone in the Bible ever struggled with anxiety and what did God reveal about whether this was something that was acceptable in that person's life? Is it acceptable for a Christian to worry? We will address these things this week in Mass Notes.

For a helpful insight on the subject of worry, we can turn to the Old Testament Book of First Kings. Elijah was a mighty man of God in this dark era in Israel during the decline of the theocratic kingdom. This period followed the time of the Judges in which the Scripture said, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). There were bright spots in this age and one of them was the prophet Elijah. Elijah was perhaps best known for the incident recorded in First Kings 18 during a time of severe famine in Samaria. According to the Scripture Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal as to whether they could bring fire down on their sacrifice by calling on their god while Elijah would offer his sacrifice to God and ask Him to send fire to complete his burnt offering. The Priests of Baal failed miserably and began calling upon their god and cutting themselves in order to invoke a response. Next, Elijah was so certain the God would act upon his request that he soaked the wood with water (1 Kings 18:33). Here is how the story ended.

> *36 At the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, Elijah the prophet came near and said, "O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant and I have done all these things at Your word. 37 Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that You, O LORD, are God, and that You*

> *have turned their heart back again." 38 Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. 39 When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He is God." (1 Kings 18:36-39)*

Afterwards, Elijah had the Priests taken captive and then put them to death (v. 40). What an amazing victory Elijah had that day! After such an important victory one would think that Elijah would have continued his momentum and never suffered from any sort of worry. If God could light even wet wood on fire in front of the pagan priests Elijah could accomplish anything by calling upon the only true God in prayer. At least that is what one may think. But soon afterwards the Scripture records that Elijah fell into a period of deep anxiety because of the actions of a certain ungodly woman named Jezebel.

Jezebel was the evil wife of King Ahab, a king of Northern Israel. As a side note, I have always found it interesting that nobody I have ever come across has named his or her baby girl Jezebel. Some have branded their daughters with crazy names like Moon Unit (Zappa) or Alabama Gypsy Rose (Jennings), but not Jezebel. Anyway, immediately after Elijah's victory over the Prophets of Baal, wicked Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah saying, "So may the gods do to me and even more, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time (1 Kings 19:2b). His response was to flee for his life because of Jezebel's threat. "And he was afraid and arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, 'It is enough; now, O LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers'" (vv. 3-4). Later, Elijah fled even further into the mountains to hide in a cave (1 Kings 19:9). How could such a mighty man of God, who had just witnessed God's dynamic power in the victory over the Prophets of Baal find himself holed up and worrying in a dark cave? If a mighty man of God like Elijah could suffer with anxiety, it's no wonder that Christians can also fall into patterns of worry.

We will see in the Gospel message some specific teaching from Jesus about worry. First, let's turn to the Old Testament reading in Isaiah Chapter 49. The context of the passage was God's promises for the future restoration of Israel. The chapter opens with the restatement of both the purposes of the Prophet Isaiah as well as Israel. God said about Isaiah that "He has made My mouth like a sharp sword, In the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me; And He has also made Me a select arrow, He has hidden Me in His quiver" (Isaiah 49:2). Isaiah was God's chosen instrument to bring the message of His judgment and promise of future restoration to Israel. Next God stated His purpose for the Nation. Isaiah said, "He said to Me, 'You are My Servant, Israel, In Whom I will show My glory'" (v. 3). Isaiah was chosen to be God's message to the Jews, and the Jews were chosen to bear God's message of salvation to the world. They were to be a "called out" people who were established by God as salt and light to the surrounding nations. Isaiah continued, "And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel might be gathered to Him (For I am honored in the sight of the LORD, And My God is My strength)" (v. 5).

In this week's Old Testament passage, the people reveal something very telling, which is common when we go through hard times. They ask if the LORD has forsaken them. Read God's answer.

> *14 But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me, And the Lord has forgotten me."*
>
> *15 "Can a woman forget her nursing child And have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you. (Isaiah 49:14-15)*

God's answer was a resounding no, made even more clear by the clever use of the imagery of a woman and her nursing child. Of course it was impossible for a woman to forsake her nursing child. Therefore, it is impossible for God to forget His people.

As you think about the importance of this text for your own spiritual journey, consider the times that you have felt forsaken by God. What would it be like to hear God's answer to your feelings in such a resounding way? Well, as New Testament believers we have another clear verse that definitely says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). Our feelings do not always match the truth of the matter, just as Elijah's feelings didn't as he sat under the broom tree and wanted to die.

Saint John of the Cross coined the term the "Dark Night of the Soul" regarding times when one experienced the felt absence of the presence of God. If processed through, this God-ordained spiritual crises leads God's beloved on a journey that frees them from being dependent on their feelings and their own mixed motives in their relationship with God. This ultimately leads to a fuller relationship with God if we will let Him do this purifying work in us. What about you, have you ever experienced times in your life in which you felt forsaken by God, your own "Dark Night of the Soul?" Many people of God have experienced similar things. Mother Teresa of Calcutta reportedly experienced a decades long Dark Night of the Soul. We saw how the mighty Prophet Elijah experienced his own spiritual journey during his flight from Jezebel. It is common for God's people to have to walk by faith and not by sight. Is it possible that the moments of crises that we experience are opportunities to learn this new way of walking and living—which frees us up from the small horizons of this world?

Now let's return to our study of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. In this section, which was a continuation of the idea that began in 3:18, Paul examined the judgmental spirit that was exhibited by some within the Corinthian Church. Specifically, some were proud in their self-righteousness and questioned Paul's authenticity as a spiritual leader. Instead of defending himself, Paul points to his relationship with God, who will ultimately be the final judge of our hearts.

> "Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise" (1Corinthians 3:18).
>
> *1 Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy. 3 But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. 4 For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by*

> *this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. 5 Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God. (1 Corinthians 4:1-5)*

Paul was being scrutinized by "super-apostles" that were deceiving the minds of the Corinthian believers. Instead of worrying, or turning to his own resources to defend himself, he turned to God. This is a proper response to the inadequacy that all of us feel in a world that is not our home. If we believe that Christ is our sufficiency, then we do not need to feel threatened by the universal human feeling of inadequacy.

The Gospel message is a continuation of our study last week of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Verse 25 contained an important prepositional phrase, "For this reason," translated "therefore" in many other versions. As we said last week, we need to ask ourselves what the word "therefore" is there for. In the context of the message today it becomes clear that Jesus has made a linkage between serving the god of money and the presence of anxiety in a person's life. With this thought in mind let's read the text for today.

> *24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. 25* ***For this reason*** *I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? 27 And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? 28 And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, 29 yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! 31 Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' 32 For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. 34 So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." (Matthew 6:24-34, emphasis added)*

Jesus began with an analogy of the two masters, God, and money. By application, what Jesus said was that if you serve the god of money you worry. However, if you serve the one true God you don't have to worry because by seeking the kingdom of God first He will provide for your daily needs. Let's dig deeper into these verses.

There is a principle of Bible interpretation regarding the appearance of repeated words in the same section of a text. In this section of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, the word "worried" (Greek merimnao, "mare-im-nah-oh" or 'anxious' in some translations) is repeated no less than five times in

this short space. Jesus is saying emphatically don't worry (v.25), don't worry (v.27), don't worry (v.28), don't worry (v.31), don't worry (34). I wonder if Bob Marley's song, "Don't worry, be happy" got its inspiration from Jesus. But we all know, it's easier said than done.

How does a believer combat worry? The godly antidote to worry is prayer. Does it matter how we pray? Jesus gave us a model for prayer earlier in Matthew 6:9-13. This is the familiar Lord's prayer that you pray in Mass each week.

> *Pray, then, in this way: "Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen." (Matthew 6:9-13)*

In order for this to be an antidote to worry, we must enter into the reality of this prayer, not just recite it. The spiritual realities that Jesus invites us into experience include:

- We have a Father (that implies a relationship with someone bigger, wiser and more able to cope with this world than ourselves; we are not orphans).
- Our Father is in heaven (He is above the fray of this world and has power and resources at his command that we cannot even fathom).
- His name is holy (His name refers to his character and essence. If he is holy, then he relates in a way that is set apart from the world's way. You may want to review last week's discussion on holiness. His holiness is what creates a foundation of trust for us to surrender our will to His will, to turn to Him in our time of need.)
- He has a kingdom that is on the move. We can choose to be part of His kingdom and allow His way of heaven to infiltrate this world through my life. Instead of worrying about how I'm going to make it in this world, I am now focused on being used by God to bring His ways to bear on this world.
- He is our provider.
- He forgives us. And in His strength, we can extend forgiveness to others (again a quality of the Kingdom of God that is countercultural to the world's ways).
- He leads us out of temptation and delivers us from evil. Do I really want to be delivered from temptation and evil, or do I want only to be delivered from the negative consequences of sin?
- He has a kingdom, power and glory that will be manifested forever. Do I want to be a part of this, or do I think that doing life on my own is a better option?
- Concern for loved ones is a healthy form of expressing our bond to them in love.
- Because this world is not our home and has "thorns and thistles" due to the Fall (Gen. 3), we all have some degree of fear, inadequacy, and insecurity.
- Worry is a fallen human response to the normal human experiences of fear, inadequacy, and insecurity. Worry only calculates my resources and forgets about God's resources. We should all have a sense of healthy concern for loved ones, but to "worry" takes that concern to an unhealthy place that miscalculates God's heart and resources.

- When we feel worried (for ourselves or loved ones) God wants to use that as a prompt to turn to Him. 1 Peter 5:7 tells us to "Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you." Phil. 4:6-7 also reinforces this direction to pray in the midst of our insecurities: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."
- Instead of feeling guilty over my worry, I can allow it to turn my heart to ask for God's help. What Satan intends for evil (my worry) ends up being used for good (my reminder to connect to my Heavenly Father in prayer). I grow in my faith and I end up pleasing the Lord (Heb. 11:6).
- Unfortunately, we do not always turn our anxiety into relational dependence on our Heavenly Father, as Scripture tells us to. Instead, we internalize it, carry it and feel as if it is our burden to carry, like we are martyrs suffering for a noble cause. Underneath the experience of this martyr complex, is a false formula that believes "If it's gonna be, it's up to me," which reveals an orphan complex. This is the flesh, trying to maintain some semblance of control, which reveals a lack of understanding of God's heart for His children and His abundant provisions. No wonder God wants us to turn away from worry and turn to Him.

These are some amazing realities that Jesus understood and allowed Him to live in a countercultural way, free of worry and anxiety, because He knew who His Father was. He offers that same type of perspective to us, if we will ask Him to teach us to pray in this way.

As we said in the introduction, if a mighty man of God like Elijah could suffer with anxiety, it's no wonder that Christians can also fall into patterns of worry. Yet, for some people worry can become something almost like a ministry in which it is hard to separate their legitimate concern for people from an overarching anxiety that could be classified as worry and therefore something that we are cautioned against in the Scripture. Such was the case with my grandmother. She was a faithful Roman Catholic woman who worshiped at Mass every Sunday and was the picture of love and humility. One day something happened which revealed how she viewed the concept of worry. My brother sensed (in his opinion) her overarching concern over some family member and told her that she shouldn't worry about it. In an uncharacteristic response she shouted, "You can't take that from me!" My grandma expressed herself through showing concern for her family. Was her "ministry of concern" something that was sinful or was it her legitimate, heart-felt care for them?

Over the years I have pondered my grandma's response to my brother's comment to her about not worrying. Here are a few thoughts that help me to understand God's heart for His children as it relates to worry.

So what became of Elijah after he endured his "dark night of the soul"? During his self-imposed exile Elijah mistakenly thought that he was the only believer left in the country. But God told him that there were 7,000 people left who had not worshiped the false god Baal (1 Kings 19:18). After he came out of hiding Elijah's first action was to follow God's call to appoint Elisha as his successor (v. 19). After this he received a word from God saying, "Of Jezebel also has the LORD spoken, saying,

'The dogs will eat Jezebel in the district of Jezreel'" (1Kings 21:23). Jezebel came to her end in this gruesome way and Elijah had the great honor of being one the two men in the Bible that have not yet had to die (though they will in the future, see Revelation 11:7-8) the first of whom was Enoch (Genesis 5:24, Hebrews 11:5). Elijah, one of the two witnesses of Revelation who will return to earth (Malachi 4:5-6, Revelation 11:3), went up to heaven this way. "As they were going along and talking, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven" (2 Kings 2:11). In the presence of God, there is no reason to worry. May we live in light of God's presence so that courage born out of deep trust marks our life day by day.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. The Isaiah passage revealed that God could not forget His people. How do you respond to this truth? What experiences have you had that seem to mock you for believing this truth? You can respond like the man who came to Jesus needing healing for his son. He said, "I belief, help my unbelief."

2. The New Testament passage showed how Saint Paul responded to unwarranted scrutiny and criticism. How do you respond to false accusations and criticism? How might Paul's example give you encouragement when others point out your inadequacies and failure to measure up to their expectations?

3. The Gospel passage reiterated to us the freedom that life in Jesus can bring from the gnawing experience of worry. As you go through the week ahead, try to be conscious of your patterns of worry and anxiety. Ask the Lord to turn your worry into relational dependence on Him, further knitting your heart to His.

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/030214.cfm

First Reading IS 49:14-15

Isaiah 49:14-15 NAS95 14 But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me, And the Lord has forgotten me." 15 "Can a woman forget her nursing child And have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you.

Second Reading 1 COR 4:1-5

1 Corinthians 4:1-5 NAS95 1 Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the

mysteries of God. 2 In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy. 3 But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. 4 For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. 5 Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

Gospel Reading MT 6:24-34

Matthew 6:24-34 NAS95 24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. 25 "For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 "Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? 27 "And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? 28 "And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, 29 yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. 30 "But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! 31 "Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' 32 "For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. 34 "So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Tyler's Testimony: Discovering the all Powerful God



It looks like I have it easy. I have a good family, have plenty of money, I go to church every week, I have good friends. But they don't know what is really going on inside me. My life took a wrong turn A long time ago when I first decided to look up something bad on the internet.

It was third grade and the teachers left me in her class room alone to heat up my corndog while the rest of the class went to lunch. I saw her computer siting open and seized the opportunity. I googled "boob". I saw pictures and I liked it and I knew it was wrong. Next I did it at home. Then when I got my first ipod I could do it almost anywhere. I was looking at all kinds of porn. Then as if the lust wasn't enough I discovered masturbation. Wanna guess how? Watching a porn video. So now I could feel like I was having sex with the girlss in the videos. All the while, knowing all this was wrong, I continued to do it. Sometimes I would look up things about guys naked because I wanted to see if I was growing normally. This was not a good decision. Eventually I got bored with the porn and wanted more. I've learned that even sin gets bored and look for ways to become more exciting. I remembered looking up the guys and figured I could look up guys masturbating videos so I could learn some more exciting methods. Another bad Idea. This led to more of a porn addiction and morphed into something even worse: a gay porn addiction. Every day when I got home from school I would go "take a shower" and masturbate watching videos on my iPod until I got a phone and used it. I loved it until it was over and then I would cry and pray and ask forgiveness. But what would I do the next day? Do it all over again. To gay porn, because the straight porn was old hat. Soon I started looking at guys in a sexual way even some of my friends. I hated it so much but I knew I'd done it to myself. By the time I turned fifteen i had enough but by this time, an addiction is and addiction and you can't just stop. I really repented on December 10th 2014. It lasted a week before I lost track of the praying and reading and everything and was back to my old self. Then late January I had enough. After the nights shower I went to bed and closed the door and started my usual forgive me prayer. It went on for hours of crying and listening to gospel music and reading psalms until I just started

yelling at god. I hated him for letting me get this way. For leaving me alone through these struggles. For not answering me after I pray sometimes until the early morning hours. I told him I wished he'd kill me so I could go to hell because I thought even hell would be better than what I was going through on earth. I had to put on my mask every morning and looking like the perfect Christian kid even though I was private about my faith because I hadn't been baptized. But I still didn't feel god. I didn't think he was there. I was shaking with anger. I said some terrible things to god and finally I just told him I was going to sleep, it was past midnight by now, and that if he really cared about me he wouldn't make me wake up. I told him to kill me and send me to hell. I tried to sleep but I couldn't. I started feeling bad for what id done. I still hadn't gotten any answers but i had moved past the anger and was now just sad and guilty. I sat up in my bed and just cried until I looked onto my nightstand and saw my bible sitting there. I don't know why but I grabbed it and just flipped to random pages and something caught my eye. For some reason it opened to job 40. In previous chapters job had been angry at god similarly to the way I was and what Caught my eye was gods response. " I am the LORD All-Powerful, but you have argued that I am wrong. Now you must answer me." Here I had just screamed at God for not answering me and not being with me. And here he goes, giving me an answer. And harsh one at that. I just broke down crying and continued reading and thanking him and apologizing. I loved God more right then than any moment in my entire life. I stayed awake for almost another hour reading, and praying, and studying. I ended up meditating on Jeremiah 29:13- "you will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." I was struggling to find God and being angry at him because I couldn't and he says "listen to me and answer me now" and when I do he tells me to "seek him with all my heart". That sounds great but how do I do that. Then I figured, you can't seek God with all your heart if your heart is stained with sin and lusts. I needed to purify my heart to find God. I ended going to sleep peacefully that night. One of the worst nights of my life, turned into the greatest by the grace of God.

I wish I could say I've been a great Christian ever since but I'm still trying to break my addiction and still on my journey to purify my heart. But now I know even at my lowest points, even if I can't feel him, God is always there.

Tyler

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 2-23-2014

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



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass Notes. This week we will be opening with a story about an encounter I had with two members from a certain religious group who were making the rounds one evening while I was visiting a friend. Then we will move onto the Book of Leviticus and learn something about God's calling for the Jews to be holy. Then we will continue our study in First Corinthians and finally conclude with further study from the Sermon on the Mount from Saint Matthew. There we will see a message that Jesus gave his disciples which culminated with a statement to them that they were to be perfect. How can anyone be perfect you may ask? We will address that and other things in the Mass Notes this week.

One night I was attending a dinner party at a friend's house in a nearby city. After dinner, we were sitting around talking and the doorbell rang. My friend left to answer the door and then suddenly called out, "Jim, it's for you!" Thoughts raced through my mind, who even knew that I was there, who could it be that wanted me while I was visiting someone else's house? I left the dining room and walked over to the front door only to be met by two young Mormon missionaries. These were of course not unique and matched the "cookie cutter" pattern with their nametags and backpacks. This was going to be an interesting night! After I introduced myself to the men, I prayed silently and asked God for the approach that I should take in order to introduce these boys to the *true* Gospel. As it turned out I had just completed a study of Mormon doctrine and it came to me that I should discuss the doctrine of perfection with them. I just so happened to have a Bible with me in my jacket and I asked them if they were familiar with Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount. I don't remember their answer but I pulled out my Bible and asked them if they had time for a little Bible study because "You do believe in the Bible don't you?" Next, I asked them, "How good do you have to be to make it to heaven?"

They said something like, "We strive to be perfect." Nice boys they were.

I said that that was good because "Did you know that under the biblical Law Jesus taught that in order to be saved by being a good person you have to be perfect?" I opened up the Bible to Matthew Chapter 5 and read, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). I asked them what was their standard of perfection, just how good did they have to be to make it to heaven, and how would they know when they had reached this standard? They weren't sure about that, but said that they just had to keep on trying. The debate continued and I was able to show them God's true plan of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and not by good works. I explained to them how God emphasized the value of our good works, but that good works were not meritorious for salvation. I read to them Saint Paul's capstone statement on the matter:

> *8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)*

Paul's statement about the only way that people are saved (v.8a) is quite different from what is taught by the Mormon "church" that believes that they are saved by grace, but only *after all they can do*. This addendum is noticeably missing from the Word of God. Since salvation is a free gift from God that is obtained *only* through faith in the Lord Jesus we don't have to strive to be perfect in order to earn our salvation. Paul explained that the reason that God saved us was for the purpose of our good works. He didn't say that we were saved because of our good works. Although Christians are called to live holy lives through God's power a good Mormon is expected to triumph over sin in their own power, and this in order to earn their salvation. We can rejoice in the victory that God has given us over such a false belief system.

As we move onto the first reading, it's important for us to put our Old Testament hats back on and return to the culture of ancient Judaism. The first reading this week is from Leviticus Chapter 19. The Book of Leviticus is concerned with God's giving of the Law to Moses, and especially the ecclesiastical Law concerning sacrifices, offerings, and dietary Law. One of the overall purposes of the Law was to set the Hebrew people apart from the surrounding people. God said in the previous chapter, "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'I am the LORD your God. You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you; you shall not walk in their statutes" (Leviticus 18:2-3). However, the most significant purpose of the Law was to point people to the perfect sacrifice that would occur through the Lamb of God (Jesus) who would take away the sins of the world (John 1:29). Let's pick up with the reading today in Chapter 19.

> *1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 2 "Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, 'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. 17 You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him. 18 You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.'"(Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18)*

Several points arise from the reading. First, we see that God called the Hebrew Nation to be holy or set apart from sin and dedicated to the service of the LORD. Although we have all used and heard the word "holy" lots of times in our lives it's easy to gloss over the rich meaning of the word. In the reading God provided a simple reason why the Jews were to be holy when He said, "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy" (v.2b). This was God's appeal to His nature and a calling for the Hebrew nation to emulate his character. As we said above, one reason that God provided the Law was to set apart the Nation of Israel from the surrounding people. The word holy means to be set apart and the Jews were called to be a peculiar people, different from the idolaters in the pagan cultures that surrounded them. They were to be holy because they were God's chosen people and were to reflect His image of holiness to the world around them. As we saw two weeks ago in our study of the Sermon on the Mount, the concept of being "set apart" was to fulfil special purposes for God, not to live an ordinary existence. The Jews were set apart for the purpose to be salt and light to those around them.

Second, God set a high standard of love for one's neighbor. This standard would have been foreign to the people from the nations surrounding Israel. The Jews, and by application all believers including us, were not to hate our neighbor in their mind (v.17a), but were instead called to love their neighbors as themselves (v.18c), and were not to take vengeance against them (v.18a). He didn't mean that we had to just love our literal neighbors, but everyone. God set this high standard of loving behavior in stone, in the Law of the land for the Hebrew people. Which of us hasn't hated our neighbor at one time or another?

Third, God said that the Jews were not to take vengeance against their neighbors. This wasn't directed to soldiers in battle because God provided clear direction to the Jews regarding those matters (see for example Deuteronomy 2:34, 3:6, and especially Deuteronomy 20:16-18). This was directed to all of God's people who were given these specific examples of how to live out one's life in a status as "set apart." Saint Paul confirmed that the admonition against taking retribution in Romans and quoted the exact verse from Leviticus. "'Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:19). Although we may feel like we want to get even with someone for hurting us, God has given us a universal calling not to take action against a "neighbor" that has wronged us.

Back when I lived in a suburb in a large Midwestern city, I developed a strong dislike for the neighbor whose back yard adjoined the back of my own house. This particular neighbor, who I didn't even know, had a dog that he used to let outside to do his business. This dog would then bark endlessly until the neighbor let him back inside the house. This barking dog used to drive me absolutely crazy and as a result I developed a strong dislike of my neighbor. One day out of the blue, I came up with a novel approach to solve the problem. The next time he let the dog out to bark (I mean to let him do his business!) I walked over to the fence and called to the dog, "here boy." I kept calling and sure enough, the dog came running over to the fence, jumped up wanted to be petted. I made friends with the dog that day and as a result found that I no longer disliked my neighbor either! In fact, after I moved away I actually missed my doggy friend. Why did it take me so many years to figure that out? This was a case where love did truly conquer the conflict with my

neighbor. Now if I could just makes friends with my current neighbor's Akita!

How about you? Do you have some difficult people in your life to whom God is calling you to love, even though you don't have feelings of love for them? If you are His child, He will give you the ability to grow in loving even your enemies. Pray to God and ask Him to change your heart.

The second reading this week is a continuation of the study from last week in Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. In this reading, Saint Paul explains the concept of personal holiness. As you read try to imagine the sense that a First Century Jew would have had when Paul mentioned the phrase "temple of God" and how that would flavor their reading of this text.

> *16 Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are. 18 Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, "He is THE ONE WHO CATCHES THE WISE IN THEIR CRAFTINESS"; 20 and again, "THE LORD KNOWS THE REASONINGS of the wise, THAT THEY ARE USELESS." 21 So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, 23 and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God. (1 Corinthians 3:16-23)*

For a First Century Jew the temple in Jerusalem was the holiest and most sacred place on earth. We know from Jesus' ministry to the Jews that they had a difficult time understanding how the human body could be a temple (John 2:19). This was especially true not only because of the grandeur of the temple but also because the whole Jewish religious system revolved around the temple. But, when Jesus ushered in the church age he fulfilled the prophecy of Ezekiel. "And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 11:19). Our bodies are a holy temple, or shrine. Later in the same Letter Paul said, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?"(1 Corinthians 6:19). We are called to be holy because our bodies are a living temple of God.

In the next section, Paul prescribed humility for healing the divisions that existed in the Corinthian Church. What Paul is saying is that a person must be humble in order to learn. Paul quoted from Job Chapter 5 and Psalm 94 to make his point. Verse 10 that he quoted from Psalm 94 was sandwiched between two verses that dealt with chastening. "10 He who **chastens** the nations, will He not rebuke, Even He who teaches man knowledge? 11 The LORD knows the thoughts of man, That they are a mere breath. 12 Blessed is the man whom You **chasten**, O LORD, And whom You teach out of Your law" (Psalms 94:10-12). Chastening can be God's way to bring us to a humble position. One of Paul's intents was to bring the chastening of the Lord to bear on the sin of division in the Corinthian church.

If we really believe that our bodies house God's Spirit, that has far-reaching implications for how we treat and use our bodies, as well as how we treat others. As we move onto the Gospel lesson for today consider Paul's statement in the second reading about our bodies being a temple. Ponder this as you read the text from the Sermon on the Mount in Saint Matthew Chapter 5. "Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16).

> *You have heard that it was said, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.' 39 But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. 40 If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. 41 Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. 42 Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you. 43 You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 48 Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:38-48)*

The opening quotation was from Exodus 21:24. As an interesting side note, this quotation in Exodus followed the warning from God about neglecting to honor your parents. The Jewish Law said, "He who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death" (Exodus 21:17). Even though Jesus came to fulfill the Jewish Law, and under the New Covenant the civil and ceremonial Law are no longer binding upon Christians, the principles found in the *moral* Law are behaviors which are upheld in the New Testament. This includes honoring our parents (Ephesians 6:2), though the penalty for disobeying this law is no longer the death penalty. Notice the word "but," a transitory (conjunction) term. Jesus said in effect, "The Law prescribed this (you have heard it said), *but* I say do that." Jesus wasn't contradicting the Law but was instead calling His followers to obey a standard *higher* than the Law. We will see that this calling wasn't limited just to the Jewish Law, but to the laws of their entire society.

Jesus also called His followers to recognize a higher standard than their religious Law found in the Pentateuch (the first five Books of the Bible). His called extended to the Roman Civil law as well. This fact came out in verse 41 when Jesus spoke about being forced to go one mile. The First Century Jews were living under Roman occupation and as a result were under certain laws falling under the category of "impressment." Although they weren't under a requirement by the Romans to serve in a military function (conscription) they were required in certain circumstances to assist the Roman military. This could include being required to carry a Roman soldier's backpack 1,000 paces (a Roman mile). Jesus' outrageous call was to show the Roman soldiers generosity by going beyond the legal requirement. This principle of "going beyond the law" runs throughout the Gospel lesson for today.

Next, Jesus quoted from Leviticus 19, the text that we studied in the first reading. He said that you

should love your neighbor (v.43) but go beyond this and love your enemies and those who persecute you (v.44). Jesus' mention of "enemies and those who persecute you" could be an allusion to the Romans and the impressment laws. The Romans were the enemies of the Jews, which was a condition that came to a head with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70, then again in AD 132.

Who are the "Romans" in your life? How might you go beyond obligation and actually go the extra mile?

The culmination of Jesus' radical call to go beyond the requirements of the law to perfection was found in verse 48. Take careful note of the adverb "therefore," and ask yourself "what is it there for?" This word is "there for" because it linked Jesus call to a radical new behavior to the source of the empowerment for His people to achieve it. Jesus said, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). I asked the Mormon missionaries, how can anyone, even Jesus' own disciples be perfect? If we look further ahead in the Sermon on the Mount to Matthew Chapter 6, it seems apparent that by this point in Jesus' message the crowds had begun to rejoin Him and were hearing His message. This is evident because of the way the tone changed when He introduced practices that were typical of the Pharisees in 6:1-2. He said to "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them" (6:1a) and "So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets" (6:2a-b). Although Jesus' disciples may have had difficulties in controlling their personal behavior (as we do), they certainly didn't warrant Jesus' label of "hypocrites." No, Jesus reserved this label for His nemesis, the group known as the Pharisees. Now, with this context in mind let's read verse 48 in Chapter 5 again. How does Jesus love His "enemies" the Pharisees? Jesus said to the Pharisees and His disciples who were also listening, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." The Pharisees were hypocrites and many evidently thought that they were already perfect through their strident observance of the Law (Matthew 23:5-7). The Scripture clearly states that nobody can be made perfect under the Law, "for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). What the Pharisees didn't understand was that perfection was only possible through faith in Jesus Christ. Saint Paul said, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2Corinthians 5:21). Jesus provided the Holy Spirit to live within us as the source of our *spiritual* perfection. This spiritual perfection manifests itself in our radical obedience to God in going above the prescription of the eternal moral laws and the prevailing civil laws of our society. It's not that we won't ever sin but that our ongoing intention is to accomplish the work of God by being salt and light even to our enemies, the "Roman soldiers" in our community.

In summary, as Christians Scripture calls us to go beyond the law. Christians are called not only to observe the civil law (Romans 13:1-3) but to follow a standard above this body of law as well as a higher standard than the moral law that God has written on our hearts (Romans 2:15). God has provided us with His empowerment to follow this higher standard through the gift of the Holy Spirit Who is given to every believer who obeys (Acts 5:32).

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> *8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)*

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the Gospel lesson we said that as believers our spiritual perfection manifests itself in radical obedience to God in going above the prescription of the eternal moral laws and the prevailing civil laws of our society. Answer the following questions.

> A. Who are the "Roman soldiers" in your life? Is it your neighbor with their relentless barking dog? Has a city official ruled against you in a zoning dispute? Did a police officer nail you in a speed trap at the bottom of the hill in your village? Is your spouse eroding the feelings of love you once felt? Are you tired of changing an elderly person's diaper? Is your coworker stealing your joy in the workplace?
>
> B. How does knowing that God lives in your heart change the way that you view your enemies?

2. If holiness (being set apart) is God's vision for created human beings, then how might you cooperate more fully with God's plan?

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/022314.cfm

First Reading LV 19:1-2, 17-18 (Plus extra verses for Context)

Leviticus 19:1-18 NAS95 1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 2 "Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, 'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. 3 'Every one of you shall reverence his mother and his father, and you shall keep My sabbaths; I am the LORD your God. 4 'Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves molten gods; I am the LORD your God. 5 'Now when you offer a sacrifice of peace offerings to the LORD, you shall offer it so that you may be accepted. 6 'It shall be eaten the same day you offer it, and the next day; but what remains until the third day shall be burned with fire. 7 'So if it is eaten at all on the third day, it is an offense; it will not be accepted. 8 'Everyone who eats it will bear his iniquity, for he has profaned the holy thing of the LORD; and that person shall be cut off from his people. 9 'Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the

gleanings of your harvest. 10 'Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the LORD your God. 11 'You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another. 12 'You shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the LORD. 13 'You shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning. 14 'You shall not curse a deaf man, nor place a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall revere your God; I am the LORD. 15 'You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly. 16 'You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people, and you are not to act against the life of your neighbor; I am the LORD. 17 'You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him. 18 'You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.

Second Reading 1 COR 3:16-23

1 Corinthians 3:16-23 NAS95 16 Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are. 18 Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, "He is THE ONE WHO CATCHES THE WISE IN THEIR CRAFTINESS"; 20 and again, "THE LORD KNOWS THE REASONINGS of the wise, THAT THEY ARE USELESS." 21 So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, 23 and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God.

Gospel Reading MT 5:38-48

Matthew 5:38-48 NAS95 38 "You have heard that it was said, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.' 39 "But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. 40 "If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. 41 "Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. 42 "Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you. 43 "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.' 44 "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 "If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 48 "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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Mass Study Notes for Sunday 2-16-2014



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass Study Notes. This week we continue our study of Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians just past where we left of last week. Finally we will also continue with our study from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount from Saint Matthew's Gospel.

The first reading is from the Apocrypha and you can read that online at this link: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/021614.cfm

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.

> *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 has the deity paying for the debt of the offending party.
- 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 His redemptive role in taking our penalty for sin when He died on the cross, then 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.
- 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 with 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).

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 on-going surrender to His ways.

The counterintuitive nature of God's wisdom shows up in the Gospel passage as Jesus is teaching on the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus' premise is that those who are his disciples will be characterized by a different value system than 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 that is characterized by these things that are impossible to do outside of 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 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 the course of his employment we had made a friendly relationship with each other. 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 were going to follow up on the clients with whom we had met. During this call, he seemed tired and even paused a few times between his words. I thought that this was unusual but 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 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 that he had in place as well as the fact that he was due some a substantial sales commission check as well as reimbursement for his expenses from the previous trip. Although nobody ever know if we didn't send it, she insisted upon sending his sales commission check to his estate. She said that it was from her Christian perspective 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 "other worldly," supernatural motivation that God provides to His obedient believers.

Now we will move onto the Gospel lesson from the section of Saint Matthew's Gospel known as the Sermon on the Mount. It is helpful to keep in mind that Matthew was what I would call "the most Jewish" of the writer of the Gospels. Matthew wrote with a uniquely Jewish perspective with his overall purpose being to show 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 "other-worldly" and supernatural. Now let's read the text while we imagine a yarmulke on our heads.

> *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 "other-worldly" 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.

Life in the Kingdom of God, where Jesus rules and reigns in our hearts is very different from the dog-eat-dog world we live in. 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 that we can manufacture, but it is a noble calling to which each person has to decide to respond.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

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 be developed as you continue to grow in your relationship with God?

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/021614.cfm

First Reading SIR 15:15-20

See http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/021614.cfm

Second Reading 1 COR 2:6-10

1 Corinthians 2:6-10 NAS95 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.

Gospel Reading MT 5:17-37

Matthew 5:17-37 NAS95 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.

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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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 with a tremendous feeling of guilt because we sense that were are not doing enough for God. Scripture provides clear guidance on the right response to this teaching and we will address that in the study today. Then we will move onto 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.

The Gospel lesson is from Matthew Chapter 5, which is 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 believer that it was on hill near the west edge of Capernaum which would have provided a commanding view of the Sea of Galilee. Since this wasn't an area that was productive for growing crops it would have allowed large numbers of people to sit and listen to Jesus' teaching without doing damage to 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 in 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 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 as much about representing the hallmarks of a true Christian but rather are the blessings that follow when a person submits themselves 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 era.

> *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 elements for survival in a society where the modern conveniences of electricity and refrigeration hadn't yet been invented. Light was essential for survival, both for seeing at night as well as 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, in the same way that the crowds in the Sermon on the Mount were curious of 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 that has lost their saltiness and covered their light and one that 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 machines we both loaded our snowmobiles into our separate trucks and headed north. In my case I had borrowed my dad's Ford F150 which although was a decent running vehicle it consumed large amounts of gas. It had a second minor issue; the gas gauge wasn't accurate below about one quarter of 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 parent's 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 night, I was uncomfortable with the speed at which 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 by now about a quarter of a mile ahead of me. He evidently didn't see me and the truck 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 though process that evening. I was raised on a farm and was a member of the clan of engineers known as "MacGyvers," the name of 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 trying to tip the machine over far enough to drain out any fuel. Moving onto Plan B I tried to remove a line from the primer bulb in order to pump some fuel into the can and could not get that to work either. When this failed, I moved to Plan C. Since I had very few tools with me I attempted to remove the fuel tank from the snowmobile in order to pour the gas into the fuel tank in the truck. 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 got to the point that I had to ask someone for help. The thought cross 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 and those with whom I came in contact. In addition, I remembered the decades of my life hearing the Gospel readings in Mass, which left me feeling guilty about how much I was accomplishing for God. I served as an altar boy until I was sixteen, but didn't find fulfillment through it. Once I visited a rest home with our Catechism class and promised myself I would go back, 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, but instead 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 of empowerment. 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 also 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.

Now we will move onto the first reading that is from Isaiah Chapter 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).

> *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 does the Sermon on the Mount and Isaiah's message mean for us today? First, God provides blessings to those who are 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 of empowerment 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.

Recently 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 time she had considered him awkward and she didn't want to have any sort of romantic relationship with him. Then one day she told us that she decided to pray about that matter and she got an idea about how to proceed. She felt the need to pray that if this relationship was something that was from God, she asked 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.

Now we will move onto the second reading. Last week we completed our study in First Corinthians Chapter 1 and this week we will move onto 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.

> *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 have the ability to provide an eloquent argument for our faith but that doesn't mean that 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 is God is powerful and will provide us with a tremendous resource to use as a witnessing tool once we have hidden it in our heart (i.e. memorized key 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 our lack will be an opportunity for others to see how Jesus compensates for our weakness (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. There is a basic misunderstanding of the role of guilt in most of our lives. Guilt often leads us to a 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. Henri Nouwen said 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.

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/020914.cfm

First Reading IS 58:7-10

Isaiah 58:7-10 NAS95 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.

Second Reading 1 COR 2:1-5

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 NAS95 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.

Gospel Reading MT 5:13-16

Matthew 5:13-16 NAS95 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.

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Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 2-2-2014

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass Study Notes. This week we look at the Old Testament Prophet Malachi as well as the New Testament Book of Hebrews. We will look at the exciting provisions of the New Covenant. Then we move onto the continuing story of the early life of Jesus in the Gospel of Saint Luke.

The first reading is from Malachi Chapter 3. Malachi is the last of the Old Testament Prophets, and he wrote concerning the era just after the restoration of the temple in Jerusalem. The story of the rebuilding of the temple of God, along with the re-establishment of the people of God of God after exile is chronicled in the Prophet Nehemiah, a Prophet contemporary with Malachi. Malachi also saw near term and distant events "telescoped" together, like Isaiah who we discussed last week. As you read, see if you can determine the identity of the messenger referred to in the first verse.

> *1 "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts. 2 "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. 3 And He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness. 4 Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD, as in the days of old and as in former years." (Malachi 3:1-4)*

Malachi said that God would send His messenger in order to prepare the way for God the Messiah, designated by "Me" in verse 1. In other words, Malachi said that God would send someone to announce the coming of the Messiah Jesus Christ. No human can stand before the Messiah, because He is the ultimate in holiness. God said that the Messiah would purify the Levitical Priesthood, in the

same way that the dross was burned away during the refining process of gold and silver (v.3). The stated purpose of the refinement of the Priesthood was so that they could once again present sacrifices to the Lord (v.4). While this may seem distant to those of us reading who are not of the Levitical Priesthood, the New Testament informs us that all Christians are "a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). So the Messiah has already begun this purifying work in the hearts of his followers, as we surrender ourselves to Him and allow Him to be Lord of our lives.

It's interesting to note that in the original language the word that was translated "messenger" was "malak," meaning "angel or messenger," the root of the name of Malachi. Therefore, as a prophet, Malachi was a messenger of God. But, to whom was he referring to as the messenger in verse 1? We know from the Gospel of Saint Matthew that the "messenger" (v.1a) was John the Baptist. Jesus said, "This is the one about whom it is written, 'BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU'" (Matthew 11:10). The coming of this messenger was also predicted by the Prophet Isaiah who said, "A voice is calling, 'Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God'" (Isaiah 40:3). John the Baptist, the greatest man that ever lived until that time (Matthew 11:11), had a very important mission. John's mission was to announce the coming of yet another messenger, the Lord Himself, spoken of by Malachi as the Messenger of the Covenant (Malachi 3:1). Jesus was the Messenger of the covenant people we know as the Jews. The Messenger of the New Covenant, none other than Jesus Christ Himself, will as Malachi said, "sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness" (Malachi 3:3). What do we mean by the New Covenant, and by calling the Jews a "covenant people?" Let's explore those concepts below.

The Jews were a covenant people, meaning that God had sworn various covenants with them. There are five covenants in the Old Testament Bible. First was the Noahic Covenant spoken of in Genesis Chapter 9 in which God promised never to destroy the earth again with a flood. The New Testament records that instead the earth will be renewed by fire (2 Peter 3:7). The second covenant was the Abrahamic Covenant from Genesis Chapter 12. In this God promised that Israel would be a great nation (Genesis 12:2), that they would be led to the Promised Land (v.1), and that through Israel the entire world would be blessed (v.3). These unconditional promises will be fulfilled through the Nation of Israel, somehow, in the future. The third covenant was the Mosaic Covenant through which God introduced the Law (Exodus 19). The promises of the Covenant were conditioned upon the people's obedience to the Law, something that only Jesus could fulfill. The forth covenant was the Davidic Covenant in which God promised that David and his descendants would rule over the House of Israel forever. This covenant will be fulfilled through Jesus Christ, who is of David's kingly line of Judah. The last covenant of the Old Testament (and the entire Bible) was the New Covenant spoken of in Jeremiah 31. God promised in the New Covenant that He would forgive the sins of His people (Jeremiah 31:34b), and give them new hearts with a desire to follow Him (v.34). The New Covenant was ultimately fulfilled in the Person of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ gives all believers a new heart through sending His Holy Spirit to live inside us (John 7:38-39, 2 Corinthians 5:17).

We read in Hebrews Chapter 8, the same book we will look at in the second reading, that Jesus was the fulfillment of the New Covenant promises.

> *7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. 8 For finding fault with them, He says, "BEHOLD, DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL EFFECT A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH; 9 NOT LIKE THE COVENANT WHICH I MADE WITH THEIR FATHERS ON THE DAY WHEN I TOOK THEM BY THE HAND TO LEAD THEM OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT; FOR THEY DID NOT CONTINUE IN MY COVENANT, AND I DID NOT CARE FOR THEM, SAYS THE LORD. 10 "FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM ON THEIR HEARTS. AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. 11 AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH EVERYONE HIS FELLOW CITIZEN, AND EVERYONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, 'KNOW THE LORD,' FOR ALL WILL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST TO THE GREATEST OF THEM. 12 FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE." 13 When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear. (Hebrews 8:7-13)*

The life of Jesus is manifested in believers through the Person of the Holy Spirit Who indwells us at the moment of our spiritual birth (John 3:3). Paul said, "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you" (Romans 8:11). We celebrate our new life by being obedient to the things which Jesus calls us to accomplish. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

The second reading is from the Book of Hebrews, Chapter 2. As you read keep in mind the verses that we just read from Chapter 8, and ask yourself the question: how is Jesus able to come to our aid when *we* are tempted?

> *11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, 12 saying, "I WILL PROCLAIM THY NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING THY PRAISE." 13 And again, "I WILL PUT MY TRUST IN HIM." And again, "BEHOLD, I AND THE CHILDREN WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN ME." 14 Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; 15 and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. 16 For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. 17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 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.*
> *(Hebrews 2:11-18 Note: The second reading included verses 14 – 18, verses 11-13 were added to provide the necessary context).*

God helps us, as believers in Jesus and descendants of Abraham (v.16) to resist temptation. Jesus knows about temptation, having suffered terribly in temptations that we cannot comprehend. "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" (v.18). Saint James told how temptation comes about. "14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death" (James 1:14-15). How does God provide deliverance for us from temptation (Matthew 6:13)? 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). God helps us to endure our temptation when we turn to Him *before* we yield to the sin (James 1:15a) and stand firm in His promises that we will be delivered. Knowing that Jesus is an empathetic high priest is an important component to be able to turn to Him in the midst of temptation. Since He has experienced temptation and has conquered it, we can ask Him for strength and wisdom to also resist and conquer. While this sense of victory may not happen overnight, we will steadily grow in our ability to receive His help in our times of need. In the meantime, we are growing in our relationship of trust with Jesus when we turn to Him and not to our own strength or willpower.

Here's an illustration about counting on the promises of God to deliver us from temptation. On certain days, very bad weather arose during the times that I wanted to fly my airplane. Since my airplane was a very well equipped machine that possessed most of the bells and whistles, including weather radar, it was easy to launch into weather conditions which were overly challenging. I remember staring up at the overcast sky one day as the ragged clouds almost reached down to the tops of the trees at the airport from which I wanted to "depart," pun intended. I remember thinking of a promise that I had made to myself some years before. All I had to do was to be patient and wait and at some future date the miserable gray sky would be replaced with a perfect blue (and safe) atmosphere in which I wouldn't kill myself (at least so easily). If I would just wait a few days, the very same patch of sky that held nothing but clouds and rain would one day soon hold beautiful clear sky and sunshine. All that I had to do to keep from getting in trouble in that miserable overcast weather was to keep remembering my promise. All we have to do when we find ourselves in a position of temptation is to remember the promises of God. He will make the gray skies of temptation clear for us if we will stand on His promises and trust Him to deliver us.

The Gospel lesson today is from Luke Chapter 2. This passage tells us about when Jesus was brought to the Temple to be dedicated to the LORD as a baby. As you read, make a list of all of the different people mentioned along with the roles.

> *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).*

Joseph and Mary went to the temple to fulfill the requirements of the Law as specified in Leviticus Chapter 12. The requirements were as follows. After the circumcision on the eighth day (Leviticus 12:3) Mary was to wait thirty-three days, then present the Baby Jesus to the priests in the temple and make a sin offering. "When the days of her purification are completed, for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the doorway of the tent of meeting a one year old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering" (v.6). "But if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two young pigeons, the one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for her, and she will be clean" (v.8). Mary and Joseph fulfilled the requirements of the Law by making the offering to God through their intercessor, the priest in the temple.

After a prophetic silence of four hundred years, God revealed to Simeon and Anna the identity of the much-awaited Messiah. The identity of the Messiah was confirmed by two witnesses as was required by Old Testament Law, per the principle in Deuteronomy 19:15. Simeon knew that the Messiah would appear during his lifetime and when He did appear, he made a prophecy about His ministry. Simeon revealed more about the New Covenant prophesied by Jeremiah, that the plan of salvation would be unfolded through Jesus to include the Gentiles (v. 31). He also said to Mary that "a sword would pierce her soul" and a general prophecy about how the Messiah would be received. He said, "this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed." We

know that this was indeed the case; many of Jesus' own people rejected Him. Jesus said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! 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, emphasis added). Though God was silent for four hundred years He spoke powerfully through the birth of the Messiah Jesus.

Looking back to our discussion on the covenants it's important to note that although Jesus' parents obeyed the Jewish Law, after Jesus' death and resurrection the Levitical priesthood was set aside. This provision in the New Covenant ushered in something that many may not have expected by the Old Testament Prophets – the era of the priesthood of all believers, which was mentioned earlier. Christ our High Priest has made one sacrifice for sin for all time (Hebrews 10:12), and there is no more sacrifice for sin that can be made (Hebrews 10:26). But as priests once offered other kinds of sacrifices in the temple, so it is clear from 1 Peter 2:5,9 that God has chosen Christians "to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." "But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). We play a vital role in representing God to the world by living lives that are consistent with His holiness.

While the Levitical priesthood was set aside and the New Covenant era of the priesthood of all believers was begun, this setting aside was only temporary. Paul explained this in the following verses from Romans.

> *For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery–so that you will not be wise in your own estimation–that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB." "THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS." From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, (Romans 11:25-30)*

We can rejoice that although God used the disobedience of the Jews to bring many Christians to trust in Jesus, He has not abandoned His plan for Israel. Paul said that in the end times, "all Israel will be saved" (v.26). We can also celebrate that God was patient with us, not wanting any of us to perish and all to come to the knowledge of everlasting life (2 Peter 3:9). Jeremiah prophesied that God would give us a new heart, something that Jesus explained to Nicodemus in John Chapter 3 as being born from above (John 3:3). Paul explained that this new birth came from believing that we are sinners (Romans 3:23), accepting that our due payment for sin was eternal separation from God to pay the debt we owe (Romans 6:23), and then placing our trust in Jesus as a free gift (Ephesians 2:8-9). Praise God for His eternal provision for us!

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. How can we lean upon the promises of God if we don't know the promises of God? Read the following verses and in your journal begin memorizing these so you have them in your mental toolkit.

> *Philippians 4:19 And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*

> *Matthew 11:28-29 Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*

> *Romans 8:37-39 No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

2. To continue understanding your role as a New Testament believer and the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, look up the following Scripture to see what your proper response is to this high calling:

- 1 Peter 2:5-9
- 1 Peter 3:15
- Hebrews 13:9-17
- Ephesians 2:10
- Titus 2:11-14
- Romans 12:1-2
- 1 Cor. 6:9-12
- Rev. 1:6
- Rev. 22:3-4

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Talk to God about where you need His help prompted by the reading of any of the above passages.

Readings for the Week

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First Reading MAL 3:1-4

Malachi 3:1-4 NASB 1 "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts. 2 "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. 3 "And He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness. 4 "Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD, as in the days of old and as in former years.

Second Reading HEB 2:14-18 (Plus vv.11-13 for context)

Hebrews 2:11-18 NASB 11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, 12 saying, "I WILL PROCLAIM THY NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING THY PRAISE." 13 And again, "I WILL PUT MY TRUST IN HIM." And again, "BEHOLD, I AND THE CHILDREN WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN ME." 14 Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; 15 and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. 16 For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. 17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 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.

Gospel Reading LK 2:22-40

Luke 2:22-40 NAS95 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

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Malachi said that God would send His messenger in order to prepare the way for God the Messiah, designated by "Me" in verse 1. In other words, Malachi said that God would send someone to

announce the coming of the Messiah Jesus Christ. No human can stand before the Messiah, because He is the ultimate in holiness. God said that the Messiah would purify the Levitical Priesthood, in the same way that the dross was burned away during the refining process of gold and silver (v.3). The stated purpose of the refinement of the Priesthood was so that they could once again present sacrifices to the Lord (v.4). While this may seem distant to those of us reading who are not of the Levitical Priesthood, the New Testament informs us that all Christians are "a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). So the Messiah has already begun this purifying work in the hearts of his followers, as we surrender ourselves to Him and allow Him to be Lord of our lives.

It's interesting to note that in the original language the word that was translated "messenger" was "malak," meaning "angel or messenger," the root of the name of Malachi. Therefore, as a prophet, Malachi was a messenger of God. But, to whom was he referring to as the messenger in verse 1? We know from the Gospel of Saint Matthew that the "messenger" (v.1a) was John the Baptist. Jesus said, "This is the one about whom it is written, 'BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU'" (Matthew 11:10). The coming of this messenger was also predicted by the Prophet Isaiah who said, "A voice is calling, 'Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God'" (Isaiah 40:3). John the Baptist, the greatest man that ever lived until that time (Matthew 11:11), had a very important mission. John's mission was to announce the coming of yet another messenger, the Lord Himself, spoken of by Malachi as the Messenger of the Covenant (Malachi 3:1). Jesus was the Messenger of the covenant people we know as the Jews. The Messenger of the New Covenant, none other than Jesus Christ Himself, will as Malachi said, "sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness" (Malachi 3:3). What do we mean by the New Covenant, and by calling the Jews a "covenant people?" Let's explore those concepts below.

The Jews were a covenant people, meaning that God had sworn various covenants with them. There are five covenants in the Old Testament Bible. First was the Noahic Covenant spoken of in Genesis Chapter 9 in which God promised never to destroy the earth again with a flood. The New Testament records that instead the earth will be renewed by fire (2 Peter 3:7). The second covenant was the Abrahamic Covenant from Genesis Chapter 12. In this God promised that Israel would be a great nation (Genesis 12:2), that they would be led to the Promised Land (v.1), and that through Israel the entire world would be blessed (v.3). These unconditional promises will be fulfilled through the Nation of Israel, somehow, in the future. The third covenant was the Mosaic Covenant through which God introduced the Law (Exodus 19). The promises of the Covenant were conditioned upon the people's obedience to the Law, something that only Jesus could fulfill. The forth covenant was the Davidic Covenant in which God promised that David and his descendants would rule over the House of Israel forever. This covenant will be fulfilled through Jesus Christ, who is of David's kingly

line of Judah. The last covenant of the Old Testament (and the entire Bible) was the New Covenant spoken of in Jeremiah 31. God promised in the New Covenant that He would forgive the sins of His people (Jeremiah 31:34b), and give them new hearts with a desire to follow Him (v.34). The New Covenant was ultimately fulfilled in the Person of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ gives all believers a new heart through sending His Holy Spirit to live inside us (John 7:38-39, 2 Corinthians 5:17).

We read in Hebrews Chapter 8, the same book we will look at in the second reading, that Jesus was the fulfillment of the New Covenant promises.

> *7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. 8 For finding fault with them, He says, "BEHOLD, DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL EFFECT A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH; 9 NOT LIKE THE COVENANT WHICH I MADE WITH THEIR FATHERS ON THE DAY WHEN I TOOK THEM BY THE HAND TO LEAD THEM OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT; FOR THEY DID NOT CONTINUE IN MY COVENANT, AND I DID NOT CARE FOR THEM, SAYS THE LORD. 10 "FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM ON THEIR HEARTS. AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. 11 AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH EVERYONE HIS FELLOW CITIZEN, AND EVERYONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, 'KNOW THE LORD,' FOR ALL WILL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST TO THE GREATEST OF THEM. 12 FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE." 13 When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear. (Hebrews 8:7-13)*

The life of Jesus is manifested in believers through the Person of the Holy Spirit Who indwells us at the moment of our spiritual birth (John 3:3). Paul said, "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you" (Romans 8:11). We celebrate our new life by being obedient to the things which Jesus calls us to accomplish. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

The second reading is from the Book of Hebrews, Chapter 2. As you read keep in mind the verses that we just read from Chapter 8, and ask yourself the question: how is Jesus able to come to our aid when *we* are tempted?

> *11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, 12 saying, "I WILL PROCLAIM THY NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING THY PRAISE." 13 And again, "I WILL PUT MY TRUST IN HIM." And again, "BEHOLD, I AND THE CHILDREN WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN ME." 14 Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; 15 and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. 16 For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. 17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 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.*
> *(Hebrews 2:11-18 Note: The second reading included verses 14 – 18, verses 11-13 were added to provide the necessary context).*

God helps us, as believers in Jesus and descendants of Abraham (v.16) to resist temptation. Jesus knows about temptation, having suffered terribly in temptations that we cannot comprehend. "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" (v.18). Saint James told how temptation comes about. "14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death" (James 1:14-15). How does God provide deliverance for us from temptation (Matthew 6:13)? 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). God helps us to endure our temptation when we turn to Him *before* we yield to the sin (James 1:15a) and stand firm in His promises that we will be delivered. Knowing that Jesus is an empathetic high priest is an important component to be able to turn to Him in the midst of temptation. Since He has experienced temptation and has conquered it, we can ask Him for strength and wisdom to also resist and conquer. While this sense of victory may not happen overnight, we will steadily grow in our ability to receive His help in our times of need. In the meantime, we are growing in our relationship of trust with Jesus when we turn to Him and not to our own strength or willpower.

Here's an illustration about counting on the promises of God to deliver us from temptation. On certain days, very bad weather arose during the times that I wanted to fly my airplane. Since my airplane was a very well equipped machine that possessed most of the bells and whistles, including

weather radar, it was easy to launch into weather conditions which were overly challenging. I remember staring up at the overcast sky one day as the ragged clouds almost reached down to the tops of the trees at the airport from which I wanted to "depart," pun intended. I remember thinking of a promise that I had made to myself some years before. All I had to do was to be patient and wait and at some future date the miserable gray sky would be replaced with a perfect blue (and safe) atmosphere in which I wouldn't kill myself (at least so easily). If I would just wait a few days, the very same patch of sky that held nothing but clouds and rain would one day soon hold beautiful clear sky and sunshine. All that I had to do to keep from getting in trouble in that miserable overcast weather was to keep remembering my promise. All we have to do when we find ourselves in a position of temptation is to remember the promises of God. He will make the gray skies of temptation clear for us if we will stand on His promises and trust Him to deliver us.

The Gospel lesson today is from Luke Chapter 2. This passage tells us about when Jesus was brought to the Temple to be dedicated to the LORD as a baby. As you read, make a list of all of the different people mentioned along with the roles.

> *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).*

Joseph and Mary went to the temple to fulfill the requirements of the Law as specified in Leviticus Chapter 12. The requirements were as follows. After the circumcision on the eighth day (Leviticus 12:3) Mary was to wait thirty-three days, then present the Baby Jesus to the priests in the temple and make a sin offering. "When the days of her purification are completed, for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the doorway of the tent of meeting a one year old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering" (v.6). "But if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two young pigeons, the one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for her, and she will be clean" (v.8). Mary and Joseph fulfilled the requirements of the Law by making the offering to God through their intercessor, the priest in the temple.

After a prophetic silence of four hundred years, God revealed to Simeon and Anna the identity of the much-awaited Messiah. The identity of the Messiah was confirmed by two witnesses as was required by Old Testament Law, per the principle in Deuteronomy 19:15. Simeon knew that the Messiah would appear during his lifetime and when He did appear, he made a prophecy about His ministry. Simeon revealed more about the New Covenant prophesied by Jeremiah, that the plan of salvation would be unfolded through Jesus to include the Gentiles (v. 31). He also said to Mary that "a sword would pierce her soul" and a general prophecy about how the Messiah would be received. He said, "this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed." We know that this was indeed the case; many of Jesus' own people rejected Him. Jesus said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! 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, emphasis added). Though God was silent for four hundred years He spoke powerfully through the birth of the Messiah Jesus.

Looking back to our discussion on the covenants it's important to note that although Jesus' parents obeyed the Jewish Law, after Jesus' death and resurrection the Levitical priesthood was set aside. This provision in the New Covenant ushered in something that many may not have expected by the Old Testament Prophets – the era of the priesthood of all believers, which was mentioned earlier. Christ our High Priest has made one sacrifice for sin for all time (Hebrews 10:12), and there is no more sacrifice for sin that can be made (Hebrews 10:26). But as priests once offered other kinds of sacrifices in the temple, so it is clear from 1 Peter 2:5,9 that God has chosen Christians "to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." "But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may

proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). We play a vital role in representing God to the world by living lives that are consistent with His holiness.

While the Levitical priesthood was set aside and the New Covenant era of the priesthood of all believers was begun, this setting aside was only temporary. Paul explained this in the following verses from Romans.

> *For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery–so that you will not be wise in your own estimation–that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB." "THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS." From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, (Romans 11:25-30)*

We can rejoice that although God used the disobedience of the Jews to bring many Christians to trust in Jesus, He has not abandoned His plan for Israel. Paul said that in the end times, "all Israel will be saved" (v.26). We can also celebrate that God was patient with us, not wanting any of us to perish and all to come to the knowledge of everlasting life (2 Peter 3:9). Jeremiah prophesied that God would give us a new heart, something that Jesus explained to Nicodemus in John Chapter 3 as being born from above (John 3:3). Paul explained that this new birth came from believing that we are sinners (Romans 3:23), accepting that our due payment for sin was eternal separation from God to pay the debt we owe (Romans 6:23), and then placing our trust in Jesus as a free gift (Ephesians 2:8-9). Praise God for His eternal provision for us!

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. How can we lean upon the promises of God if we don't know the promises of God? Read the

following verses and in your journal begin memorizing these so you have them in your mental toolkit.

> *Philippians 4:19 And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*

> *Matthew 11:28-29 Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*

> *Romans 8:37-39 No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

2. To continue understanding your role as a New Testament believer and the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, look up the following Scripture to see what your proper response is to this high calling:

· 1 Peter 2:5-9

· 1 Peter 3:15

· Hebrews 13:9-17

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- Ephesians 2:10

- Titus 2:11-14

- Romans 12:1-2

- 1 Cor. 6:9-12

- Rev. 1:6

- Rev. 22:3-4

Talk to God about where you need His help prompted by the reading of any of the above passages.

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/020214.cfm

First Reading MAL 3:1-4

Malachi 3:1-4 NASB 1 "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts. 2 "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. 3 "And He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness. 4 "Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be

pleasing to the LORD, as in the days of old and as in former years.

Second Reading HEB 2:14-18 (Plus vv.11-13 for context)

Hebrews 2:11-18 NASB 11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, 12 saying, "I WILL PROCLAIM THY NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING THY PRAISE." 13 And again, "I WILL PUT MY TRUST IN HIM." And again, "BEHOLD, I AND THE CHILDREN WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN ME." 14 Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; 15 and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. 16 For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. 17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 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.

Gospel Reading LK 2:22-40

Luke 2:22-40 NAS95 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.

Source(s):

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

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Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 1-26-2014



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), similar to what 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 Gospel lesson last since the content on those two are closely related. The first reading is from Saint

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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 of the Letter 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, what is one word that best summarizes Paul's concern for the Corinthians in this section?

> *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 which best summarized Paul's concern? For me it was "disunity." Paul was calling the local church in Corinth to unite for the purpose of proclaiming 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 such that they recognized 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 happening in the church through the practice of baptism of family members in the house churches of the region. 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 that 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 into 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 a calling for the church of God be unified in their proclamation of the Gospel so that the entire world may believe (John 17:21f).

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.

> *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 through which he recorded 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 that 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 yet future (v.3a).

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.

> *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 witness (Deuteronomy 19:15, Isaiah 8:2), God satisfied this requirement through the testimony of both the Holy Spirit and the proclamation of the Father 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 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 the ministry of Jesus in our daily lives.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

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.

> *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? How does this come about?

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/012614.cfm

First Reading IS 8:23-9:3 (verse markings different in the NASB Version)

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 NAS95)

Second Reading 1 COR 1:10-13, 17

1 Corinthians 1:10-17 NAS95 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 NAS95)

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Gospel Reading MT 4:12-23

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 NAS95)

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 1-19-2014

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This week we will open with another of Isaiah's "Servant Songs." Last week we looked at the first of these prophetic messages contained in the first reading from Isaiah 42, and the fourth of the Servant Songs in the study question from Isaiah 53. We will look at the introduction to Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians them move onto the Gospel lesson in which we will see the event when John the Baptist announced the promised Messiah.

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 that whom we know as Jesus.

> *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, in order that Israel might be gathered to Him" (v.5b-ff). Though Israel was the 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 the role of Israel as a light to the nations, a condition which 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. In spite of 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).

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 very important 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.

> *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 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 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). It's significant that 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 very important in order for Paul to be able to speak with God's power to the Corinthians who were struggling with a variety of difficult 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 truly 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 in order to function, the Church of God must also be unified in their purpose.

As we move onto 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 the lesson today from Saint John Chapter 1, John the Baptist, whom Jesus called the greatest man that ever lived (Matthew 11:11), announced the beginning of the ministry and purpose of Jesus Christ. 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.

> *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 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 save us. Have you recognized Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away your sin?

John announced that although he was baptizing with water (as a sign of the people's repentance from sin), Jesus would baptize in a different way, 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 means that the even the greatest man that ever lived didn't immediately recognize the Messiah? He certainly knew Jesus as a person, but not as the Messiah, until it was revealed to him explicitly by God through the fulfillment of the prophecy concerning the way in which 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 that 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 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 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 of 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 to see with fresh awareness the glory of Jesus as the Messiah and what a difference He can make in our lives even today.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. What about us, what has God raised us up to be watching for? What are the purposes that God has placed upon *our* hearts as servants of the Lord?

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?

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/011914.cfm

First Reading IS 49:3, 5-6 (plus skipped verses)

Isaiah 49:3-6 NASB 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."

Second Reading 1 COR 1:1-3

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1 Corinthians 1:1-3 NASB 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.

Gospel Reading JN 1:29-34

John 1:29-34 NASB 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."

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