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

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 8: 12/13/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we open with the first reading from Isaiah, then move to the second reading from Saint Paul's Letter to the Thessalonians. Finally, we close with the Gospel lesson from John's Gospel concerning John the Baptist.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Isaiah 61. The first verse and part of the second are the ones Jesus read while teaching in the temple, as recorded in Luke 4:18. Jesus stopped halfway through verse two because the following verses dealt with His Second Advent. With the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to see this, although His listeners would not have been able to catch this important detail (see, for example, John 12:16). The verses in question (2b – 9) were omitted from the text of the reading covered in the Mass, although we have included them below in the section that is separated by the blank line. These intermediate verses (2b – 9) won't be fulfilled until after the church age, when God

pours out His judgment upon the earth during the tribulation period of the end times. As you read this Old Testament prophecy from the Prophet Isaiah, you can almost imagine Jesus standing in the temple proclaiming His Word.

First Reading:

> *1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners; 2 To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD*

Omitted section:

> *And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn, 3 To grant those who mourn in Zion, Giving them a garland instead of ashes, The oil of gladness instead of mourning, The mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified. 4 Then they will rebuild the ancient ruins, They will raise up the former devastations; And they will repair the ruined cities, The desolations of many generations. 5 Strangers will stand and pasture your flocks, And foreigners will be your farmers and your vinedressers. 6 But you will be called the priests of the LORD; You will be spoken of as ministers of our God. You will eat the wealth of nations, And in their riches you will boast. 7 Instead of your shame you will have a double portion, And instead of humiliation they will shout for joy over their portion. Therefore they will possess a double portion in their land, Everlasting joy will be theirs. 8 For I, the LORD, love justice, I hate robbery in the burnt offering; And I will faithfully give them their recompense And make an everlasting covenant with them. 9 Then their offspring will be known among the nations, And their descendants in the midst of the peoples. All who see them will recognize them Because they are the offspring whom the LORD has blessed. 10 I will rejoice greatly in the LORD, My soul will exult in my God; For He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me*

> *with a robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. 11 For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, And as a garden causes the things sown in it to spring up, So the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise To spring up before all the nations. (Isaiah 61:1-11)*

God revealed important truths about the ministry of the Messiah Jesus to Isaiah. First, the Spirit of the Lord would dwell upon Him (v. 1). The New Testament corroborates this truth through eyewitnesses to Jesus' baptism during His earthly ministry. The Gospels record Jesus' baptism in three of the four Gospels. In the Gospel of John, John the Baptist said this about Jesus' baptism: "I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him" (John 1:32). Jesus, as God in the flesh, was in union with both the Spirit of God and God the Father, as we find in the chronicle of Jesus' baptism. Saint Matthew detailed the event as follows. "After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased'" (Matthew 3;16-17). Here, the entire Trinity of God is present. Jesus is being baptized, the Spirit descends upon Him, and the Father announces His pleasure in the Son.

Isaiah announced a second truth from God about the Messiah (which was, of course, still future in his day) and provided details about His ministry. The Messiah would be appointed by the LORD to do the following:

- "To bring good news to the afflicted" (v. 1b). Jesus brought the "Gospel," a word which means "good news." The Gospel was the good news for those who (and are) being afflicted, or poor in spirit (Matthew 5:3).

- "He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted" (v. 1c). Jesus was the spiritual healer. When someone heals an injured person's wounds, they "bind them up." Jesus did this to the injured world's heart. "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12; we will read this in context during the Gospel lesson).

- "To proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners" (v. 1e-ff). The world has been held captive by sin; Jesus came to redeem the world and to free everyone held captive by it.

- "To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD" (v. 2a). The coming of the Messiah, Jesus, was the most "favorable year of the LORD" since the creation of the universe. Had the people accepted Jesus as their Messiah, Jesus' eternal reign would have begun. Jesus' coming would fulfill an untold number of Old Testament prophecies and open the way to the future renewal of the world through worldwide peace in the Millennial and eternal kingdoms.

Finally, if we move to the closing verses 10-11, we see some additional detail about the future ministries of Jesus as follows:

- The Messiah will give those who trust in Him a reason to rejoice: They will exalt the Name of the Lord in whose righteousness they will be adorned. "I will rejoice greatly in the LORD, My soul will exult in my God; For He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels" (v. 10).

- In the future, the world will be a place of universal righteousness and the earth's curse will be reversed. "For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes the things sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations" (v. 11).

The omitted intermediate verses explain more about Jesus' ministry, but they concern events that will happen after His Second Coming.

- After the Day of the Lord, referred to as "the day of vengeance of our God" (v. 2), Jesus will comfort all those who mourn because of the terrible series of events that unfolded on the earth

(v. 3). Part of what will happen during that time is terrible persecution of believers alive during that time. The Book of Revelation shows how God comforts those martyred for their faith during this Great Tribulation period. "When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?'" (Revelation 6:9-10).

- The war-torn world will be rebuilt after the devastation brought about by the Anti-Christ and God's vengeance on his evil rulership of the global commercial empire and false religious empire known as "Mystery Babylon" (v. 4).

- Gentiles will be grafted into the kingdom ("strangers," v. 5), as Paul foretold in Romans 11:11-17. God will use the Jews' rejection of their Messiah during the unforeseen "church age" in order to bring the Gentiles into His eternal kingdom.

- The rightful priesthood will be restored to Israel, with their honor restored with a double blessing (vv. 6-7). God said, "For I, the LORD, love justice, I hate robbery in the burnt offering; And I will faithfully give them their recompense and make an everlasting covenant with them. Then their offspring will be known among the nations, and their descendants in the midst of the peoples. All who see them will recognize them, because they are the offspring whom the LORD has blessed" (vv. 8-9).

That's a lot to digest. The key point is that the coming of the Messiah was a crucial mystery fulfilled by the miraculous birth of Jesus, which we will celebrate in just two short weeks from the date of these Sunday Mass study notes. We cannot overemphasize Jesus' importance as we transition to the second reading. Let's pause for a moment and ask God to help us to celebrate the upcoming holiday season with Jesus foremost in our minds.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians. The context is Paul's teaching on the upcoming calamity we mentioned in the first reading, the "Day of the Lord's judgment" (1 Thessalonians 5:2). Someone in Thessalonica had been teaching the false doctrine that the Lord had already returned (2 Thessalonians 2:2). Here, Paul introduced the concept that the church would be taken up into the air along with church saints who had already died (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17). Chapter 5 opens with Paul's teaching on the Lord's real return for those alive in that generation, when God will outpour His wrath upon the unbelieving earth. During that time, many will come to faith in the Lord Jesus, perhaps the greatest turning of people's hearts to God since the creation of the world. Paul addressed these future believers and told them that "God had not destined them to wrath" (1 Thessalonians 5:9) and provided a list of instructions to them (vv. 11-15), including, "See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people" (v. 15). It is in this context that Paul provided the following instructions that are applicable to believers of all ages, and especially to those undergoing terrible persecution in the last days.

Second Reading:

> *16 Rejoice always; 17 pray without ceasing; 18 in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 19 Do not quench the Spirit; 20 do not despise prophetic utterances. 21 But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; 22 abstain from every form of evil. 23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-24)*

Paul directed the believers to live in unceasing joy and thankfulness (vv. 16-18) while holding to the truths of the Gospel message (v. 20, "do not despise prophetic utterances"). Because of all the false teaching that will happen in that era (and is already happening now, 1 John 2:18), they are to "examine everything very carefully" and adhere only to what is truly good (v. 21b, "that which is good"). Finally, Paul pronounced a blessing upon them, wishing that God would find them blameless upon His return, and noted that the written prophecy regarding what would happen in these last days would indeed prove to be true (v. 24). Paul's instructions to the Thessalonians give guidance to us who would also live in the light of truth. We do not do these things in order to be saved; we live

this way because we are saved. God sanctifies us—literally, sets us apart—so our lives reflect His value system when we do not quench the Spirit of God who lives inside us. God is faithful.

Paul's message matters as we move toward celebrating the birth of Jesus through the blessed Virgin Mary. God calls us, as believers, to remember the work He has done by sending Jesus to die on the cross for our sins. During the Christmas season, we are to "set our sights upon Jesus." Although many in the world have set their sights on Jesus by directing their weapons of unbelief against Him, Paul said that regardless of the circumstance, and even in times of terrible persecution, we are to "abstain from **every** form of evil" (v. 22, emphasis added).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson focuses on what John the Baptist did to prepare people for the Messiah's coming. John was a few months older than Jesus. They were cousins, so they could have spent time together as they grew up and began to understand their unique place in God's redemptive plan. Today's reading concerns the prophecy about this John the Baptist.

Gospel Reading:

> *6 There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light.*

> *19 This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" 20 And he confessed and did not deny, but*

> *confessed, "I am not the Christ." 21 They asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." 22 Then they said to him, "Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?" 23 He said, "I am A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD,' as Isaiah the prophet said." 24 Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. 25 They asked him, and said to him, "Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" 26 John answered them saying, "I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know. 27 It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." 28 These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing. (John 1:6-8, 19-28)*

John the Baptist wasn't the Light but came as a forerunner of Jesus, the Light (v. 6-8). John the Baptist's purpose was to testify about Jesus so people could believe (v. 7b). When the Jewish leaders asked John who he was, they asked whether he was Elijah or the prophet spoken of by Moses in Deuteronomy. The Jews were aware of these two prophecies, first, that Elijah would return (Malachi 4:5) as well as the coming of a great prophet as predicted by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15. John answered them clearly by saying that he was neither the Christ (v. 20), Elijah (v. 21), or the prophet of Deuteronomy 18 (v. 22). Instead, he quoted from Isaiah 40, with which they would have been familiar, "I am A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD'" (v. 23). Isaiah's description of John the Baptist was very accurate, as he was the one proclaiming Jesus in the wilderness "beyond the Jordan" (v. 28). John told them that the Messiah was among them, but they did not know Him (v. 26) and that he was unworthy of even untying His sandal (v. 27).

The reading skipped a large section of text, including verses 9 – 18. We are covering these verses because they are not being covered during the Mass on any upcoming Sundays.

> *9 There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 11 He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh*

> *nor of the will of man, but of God. 14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. 15 John testified about Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'" 16 For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. 17 For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him. (John 1:9-18)*

Even though Jesus created the world, many of His own people rejected Him as the promised Messiah (v. 10 – 11). However, this didn't stop the plan of God to grant salvation to all who believe (v. 12). Jesus was the "Word that became flesh" that "dwelt among [the disciples]" (v. 14). He is the one about whom John the Baptist testified, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me'" (v. 15). Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament Law (v. 17), and was the fleshly manifestation of God, because God the Father exists in the form of a Spirit that cannot be seen by man (v. 18). Jesus is eternal, because He existed before John the Baptist, although He was born physically some months after this greatest of men (Matthew 11:11). These are some profound truths that we can ponder as our lives move towards the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ on Christmas Day.

Reflection Questions

1. In the Gospel lesson, we learned about John the Baptist, who came as the fulfillment of the prophecy concerning the coming of a forerunner announcing the ministry of Jesus. Later in the Gospel, we learn that John's life was cut short by King Herod in an outright persecution for the content of John's message to repent. Jesus took over where John left off and continued the call to repent (Matthew 4:17), and then His life was also cut short. What difference does knowing that **you** will be persecuted for your faith make in your life as you carry on this same message?

2. How does your understanding of the context of the second reading from Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians help you to place Christian persecution in a different context?

3. Review the list of what the Messiah was appointed for in the Old Testament passage of Isaiah. Pick one bullet point that resonates with you, and talk to God about how this truth impacts you. Let God know that you want Jesus to be that kind of Messiah for you.

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 5: 12/06/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the first reading from Isaiah, which contains a prophecy about the coming of the forerunner who would announce the Messiah. Then we move to the second reading from Second Peter and close with the Gospel lesson from Mark 1.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Isaiah chapter 40. This section of Isaiah focuses on the preaching of the Gospel as well as prophecy concerning the coming of the Messiah (Jesus). In the first verse, "Jerusalem" refers to the Nation as a whole. *Note: Verses 6-8, skipped in the reading, are included below.*

First Reading:

1 "Comfort, O comfort My people," says your God. 2 "Speak kindly to Jerusalem; And call out to her, that her warfare has ended, That her iniquity has been removed, That she has received of the LORD'S hand Double for all her sins." 3 A voice is calling, "Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. 4 Let every valley be lifted up, And every mountain and hill be made low; And let the rough ground become a plain, And the rugged terrain a broad valley; 5 Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, And all flesh will see it together; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

Omitted section:

> *6 A voice says, "Call out." Then he answered, "What shall I call out?" All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. 7 The grass withers, the flower fades, When the breath of the LORD blows upon it; Surely the people are grass. 8 The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever. 9 Get yourself up on a high mountain, O Zion, bearer of good news, Lift up your voice mightily, O Jerusalem, bearer of good news; Lift it up, do not fear. Say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" 10 Behold, the Lord GOD will come with might, With His arm ruling for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him And His recompense before Him. 11 Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, In His arm He will gather the lambs And carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes. (Isaiah 40:1-11)*

> In this passage, some timeless principles will emerge in our lives today. A key point is that while humans are finite, God and His Word stand forever. If this is the case, then it

> is wise for us to study God's Word and to orient our lives around its truth. This passage also shares the two-sided nature of the Messiah's coming: "The Lord GOD will come with might, with His arm ruling for Him" and "Like a shepherd He will tend His flock . . .He will gently lead the nursing ewes" (v. 10-11). We see that God is gentle with those who need and accept His care, but He is also authoritative with those who are not willing to bend to His ways.

Another main theme in the reading is the prophecy of Israel's future redemption through the coming of the Messiah, announced by a forerunner. Although God disciplined Israel "double for her sins (v. 2), He began the restoration process first by sending John the Baptist as the forerunner of the Messiah Jesus, as predicted in verse 3. Isaiah's message was a picture of the manner in which the Messiah Jesus would be revealed to the world through a spokesperson as a forerunner who sends a clear message:

> *Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. 4 Let every valley be lifted up, And every mountain and hill be made low; And let the rough ground become a plain, And the rugged terrain a broad valley; 5 Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, And all flesh will see it together; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken. (vv. 3b – 5)*

The forerunner, whom we now know was John the Baptist, prepared the way for the coming of the King Jesus. John "cleared the way" by preaching the good news (the Gospel) and telling people they needed to repent of their sins. John was removing the obstacles that lay in people's paths in order to receive the subsequent message from Jesus that He was the only way to God (John 3:3, John 3:16, John 14:6). John was "leveling the mountains and smoothing the ground" so the world could receive Jesus' Gospel. Like many prophetic writings, verse 5 has an "already not yet" sense: although Jesus came and His glory was revealed, He will return in a future day, and all flesh will see the glory of the Lord.

Isaiah's message also pictured the literal, eschatological (end-time) restoration of the Nation of

Israel. In the last days, God will make Jerusalem the capital city of the universe and remove both the physical and spiritual obstacles standing in the way of people coming to the Lord in Jerusalem. Verse 3 says, "Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God." We see something similar in Revelation 16:12, where God says He will make a way for the "kings of the east." Although this passage is difficult to interpret, it seems to mean that national leaders from regions east of Jerusalem will be converted to the true faith of God in the end times. Like many prophecies in the Bible, a day will come when we can look back and understand the prophecy's fulfillment in hindsight. Until then, the best we can do is to "study to show ourselves approved" (2 Timothy 2:15). We must endeavor to utilize the prophecies to the best of our ability in a way that calls the world to repent of their sin and place their faith in the one and only means of finding an eternal relationship with God, faith in Jesus Christ our Lord. Through Isaiah's message, we see God's kindness in granting us salvation by His free grace (Ephesians 2:8-9). However, we must be willing to repent of our sins and turn from our former sinful behavior. This means turning from, or agreeing with, what God says about the seriousness of our sin.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from 2 Peter. The context is Paul's teaching on the return of the Lord, which will occur at the conclusion of the period known in the biblical text as the "Day of the Lord." In this Epistle, Saint Peter described how people in the future would say that, since their daily lives continued as they had throughout previous generations, the Lord wasn't going to return. They would say, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation" (2 Peter 3:4). Paul informed his readers that Jesus would indeed return and reminded them of the flood that God unleashed upon the ungodly world during the days of Noah (2 Peter 3:4-7). He was saying that the coming Day of the Lord's judgment would unfold similarly to the days of Noah. Our Lord previously said, "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah" (Matthew 24:37). Today's reading picks up in verse 8.

Second Reading:

> *8 But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. 9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief,*

> *in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. 11 Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! 13 But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. 14 Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless (2 Peter 3:8-14)*

As we said in the introduction to the reading, Peter said that in the future, scoffers would come saying that the Lord was delaying His return (2 Peter 3:4). Peter corrected this false teaching by explaining that God, Who exists in eternity, does not count time the same way people do on earth (v. 8). Since with God "a thousand years is like one day," the return of the Lord will come in an instant in the mind of God, quickly, "like a thief" (v. 10a). The reason that God has delayed isn't because He is not returning, but because He is long-suffering ("patient" v. 9c) and "not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (v. 9d). This is the message that was preached by John the Baptist, the message that we will hear later in the Gospel lesson from Saint Mark. Peter went on to reveal some as-yet-untold prophecy about events that would happen in the universe sometime after Jesus returned. He said that the earth would be destroyed (or renewed) by fire (vv. 10b-11), and a new heaven and earth would be created "in which righteousness dwells" (v. 13b). Peter concluded the reading with the crux of the matter. "**Therefore**, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless" (v. 14, emphasis added). He told them that since the Lord would return soon, along with terrible events on the earth, and the earth would then undergo a purification process in which all unrighteousness would be removed, they needed to behave in a manner befitting this knowledge. Jesus said, "But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into" (Matthew 24:43). The reality of Jesus' soon return should encourage us to live in a manner that is consistent with His character and ways.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

As we move to the Gospel lesson, let's summarize what we have covered so far. We saw in the first reading how God, in His grace, would send a forerunner whom we know as John the Baptist to

prepare the hearts of the people to receive the message of Jesus Christ. In the second reading, we saw that Peter warned the people that scoffers would come in the future, saying that the Lord Jesus had delayed His return, and that they would go on with their ungodly business as if the Lord would never return. Peter corrected this false theology and said the Lord would return, and that we should not mark time as we do on earth, for God exists outside of time and with Him "a thousand years is as a day." No, Peter said, the Lord would return in an instant "as a thief in the night." Since He was coming quickly, people needed to act in godly ways befitting of the imminent return of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 19:16).

The Gospel reading is from the opening section of the Gospel of Saint Mark. Mark, known as John Mark (Acts 12:25), had a bit of a checkered past because he was the man who deserted Paul and Barnabas during Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 13:13). During Paul's second missionary journey, Barnabas wanted to take John Mark along, but this caused a strong disagreement with Paul (Acts 15:38-40). In spite of these events, John Mark went on to prove himself to be an extremely valuable co-worker in the Lord and was later vindicated by Paul in Colossians 4:10. Mark was evidently a close disciple of Saint Peter because the latter described him as his son (1 Peter 5:13). Mark's Gospel was written for Roman believers, primarily Gentiles, because of some nuances he used in translating certain words from the Aramaic and his use of Latin instead of Greek in some places. Mark's main theme is Jesus as the suffering servant of God, as portrayed in Isaiah 53. He emphasized Jesus' humanity much more than the other Gospel writers, including his emotions (for example, Mark 8:12) and human limitations (for example, Mark 11:12). Mark, unlike the other Gospel writers such as Luke, did not include lengthy genealogies of Jesus, likely because these are not as significant to his intended Gentile audience.

Gospel Reading:

> *1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: "BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY; 3 THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.'" 4 John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. 6 John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist, and his diet was locusts and wild honey. 7 And he was preaching, and saying, "After me One*

> *is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals. 8 I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (Mark 1:1-8)*

Mark, clearly familiar with Isaiah, quotes from his Book in the very first verse of his Gospel. The coming of John the Baptist fulfills Isaiah 40:3, which we studied in the first reading. John was described as a most unusual man "clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist" (v. 6). The key point of this verse is now that John the Baptist had come, he would point the way for the coming of Jesus Christ (v. 7). John the Baptist said, "After me One is coming who is mightier than I" (v. 7a), then humbly said, "and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals" (v. 7b). John the Baptist then foretold how Jesus would not only baptize with water, such as he was doing, but would send God's Holy Spirit (v. 8). John the Baptist was Jesus' cousin, having been born to Elizabeth (Luke 1:34-37, Jesus' disciple John, the one whom Jesus loved, was also Jesus' cousin). Note that John's diet was indicative of his reliance upon God, the same way that Elijah relied upon God when he fed him by the ravens, as told in 1 Kings 17:6. John the Baptist was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy about the coming of a "forerunner" that was seen in the first reading. His coming also fulfilled the prophecy about the return of the Prophet Elijah in the Book of Malachi. God said in that Book, "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse." (Malachi 4:5-6). This will be fulfilled when Jesus returns with His church at the end of the age, as we studied last week.

What does all of this mean for us as we live out our lives as Christians? First, like John, we are also called to "prepare the way of the Lord" by preaching the Good News to the world: that if they repent of their sin and place their faith in Jesus Christ, they will have eternal forgiveness and eternal life with God. God is "patient and not willing that any should perish" to the extent that He uses unusual people like John the Baptist and even more unusual people like you and me to do His work! Finally, since the return of the Lord Jesus is imminent, we need to accelerate our proclamation of this message and live in a way befitting His soon return.

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Reflection Questions

1. The Gospel reading said that "all of the country of Judea was going to [John the Baptist] . . . and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins" (Mark 1:5). What do you think motivated the people to confess their sins to him? As a clue, what word is repeated in verses 4 and 7?

2. As we look towards Christmas coming up in just two and a half weeks, pray and ask God if there is anything standing in the way between you and the relationship with Him that He desires with you.

Dear God, is there anything that you would have me do during this Christmas season? What mountains need ***to be flattened, and what hills need to be leveled, for me to accomplish your will this Christmas season?***

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 2: 11/29/2026

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the first reading from Isaiah 63, which includes much of the surrounding context and shows God's frustration with the Jewish people in this era. Then we move to the second reading, which is the opening verses of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. We conclude with a lengthy analysis of Mark's Gospel in the section known as the Olivet Discourse.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is in Isaiah 63-64. Israel was experiencing the consequences of turning away from God. Isaiah, who was God's spokesperson, cried out to God on behalf of the people. The people were suffering as a result of keeping God out of their lives. But this was a necessary part of the training process, for how else would they know that surrendering to God was actually for their good unless they experienced the harsh reality of living apart from God? We will examine the portion of the reading in chapter 63 first, then continue with the rest.

The bold text is what will be read at Mass; the normal text is the biblical verses that provide context.

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First Reading:

> *16 For You are our Father, though Abraham does not know us And Israel does not recognize us. You, O LORD, are our Father, Our Redeemer from of old is Your name. 17 Why, O LORD, do You cause us to stray from Your ways And harden our heart from fearing You? Return for the sake of Your servants, the tribes of Your heritage. 18 Your holy people possessed Your sanctuary for a little while, Our adversaries have trodden it down. 19 We have become like those over whom You have never ruled, Like those who were not called by Your name. (Isaiah 63:16-19)*

As a prophet, Isaiah was in a tough position. He desired to see God move in the hearts of the people, but he knew that the Israelites were unwilling. God is a "gentleman" and does not barge in where He is not wanted. And so the people's hearts grew harder and harder, to the point where God's protective presence was no longer felt in Israel. Isaiah's complaint was that they had become like the surrounding nations, which did not have a covenant relationship with God. He said, "We have become like those over whom You have never ruled, like those who were not called by Your name" (v. 19).

The reading continues below beginning in chapter 64.

> *1 Oh, that You would rend the heavens and come down, That the mountains might quake at Your presence– 2 As fire kindles the brushwood, as fire causes water to boil–To make Your name known to Your adversaries, That the nations may tremble at Your presence! 3 When You did awesome things which we did not expect, You came down, the mountains quaked at Your presence. 4 For from days of old they have not heard or perceived by ear, Nor has the eye seen a God besides You, Who acts in behalf of the one who waits for Him. 5 You meet him who rejoices in doing righteousness, Who remembers You in Your ways. Behold, You were angry, for we sinned, We continued in them a long time; And shall we be saved? 6 For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our*

> *righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. 7 There is no one who calls on Your name, Who arouses himself to take hold of You; For You have hidden Your face from us And have delivered us into the power of our iniquities. 8 But now, O LORD, You are our Father, We are the clay, and You our potter; And all of us are the work of Your hand. (Isaiah 63:16 – 64:8)*

Isaiah's response to their predicament was to call on God to hurl down His judgment on the nations attacking them (vv. 1-3). He looked back and remembered God's power when He did "awesome things [they] did not expect" (v. 3) and finally admitted their great sin. Isaiah said, "For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away" (v. 6). The connotation of the "filthy garments" here is that of a woman's menstrual rags. This is a strong word picture of how God views our "good deeds" done in our own power. This theme is echoed in the words of King David, who said in Psalm 14, "They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, not even one" (Psalm 14:3). Seven hundred years later, Saint Paul quoted these verses to explain how every person stands condemned before God because of the stain of sin. He said, "for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). He further explained that as a result of our sin, the penalty is death (Romans 6:23). This passage teaches that we cannot save ourselves. No cosmic scale weighs our good deeds against our bad deeds. All of our deeds, even the so-called "good deeds," are as filthy garments, good only for the trash heap. If this is the case, we must examine what we trust for salvation. If we trust in ourselves, we will be sorely lacking.

Isaiah points to a redemptive solution in this passage by showing the need to trust in God's righteousness. He describes God's character: "Who acts in behalf of the one who waits for Him. You meet him who rejoices in doing righteousness, who remembers You in Your ways" (vv. 4-5). Isaiah points to an implied sense of relational dependence. He continues this theme of relational dependence at the end of the section, saying: "But now, O LORD, You are our Father, we are the clay, and You are our potter; and all of us are the work of Your hand" (v. 8). The redemptive solution to the dire situation we find ourselves in as sinners is to throw ourselves on God's mercy and to trust in Him to save us. In the New Testament, we see God's redemption in Jesus even more clearly. He bore the wrath of God and forgives us of our sin and cleanses us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). As believers in the finished work of Jesus, we are forgiven of our sin and have a special relationship with God, who, at the moment we believed, sent His Holy Spirit to live within us (Ephesians 1:13).

What does this mean for us today? We must consider carefully in what/whom we are trusting for salvation. Isaiah is very clear that we cannot be good enough to be saved on our own merit. Becoming a Christian means leaning your full weight on Jesus and trusting His righteousness to save you. As believers, we have a special relationship with God, in a way that is similar but yet unique from God's chosen people, Israel. Untold blessings await all believers as they pass into eternity with God the moment they die. Saint Paul quoted from the first reading and said about believers in the Lord Jesus, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). God allowed judgment to come upon the people of Israel for the purpose of bringing them back to the Lord. As we transition to the second reading, which is also from 1 Corinthians, Paul celebrates with the believers in that region the forgiveness they received through Jesus, who "died for their sins according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3). We can celebrate that we have come to believe even without having to endure a military invasion and being carried captive into a foreign land, as happened with the Jews. Although the Jewish people Isaiah wrote about in the reading had turned away from the Lord, one day all of Israel will repent of their sin and be saved (Romans 11:26).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading opens Saint Paul's Letter to the Corinthians. Paul founded this church on his second missionary journey as recorded in Acts 18. The Corinthian church was in a major cosmopolitan city in southern Greece, immersed in the surrounding godless culture of a worldly crossroads city. This was Paul's second letter to the Corinthians; he mentioned the first letter in 1 Corinthians 5:9, which was subsequently lost.

This study includes verses 1-2, which were omitted in the mass reading.

Second Reading:

> *1 Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,*
> *2 To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on 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. 4 I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, 5 that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, 6 even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, 7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Corinthians 1:1-9)*

Paul began by affirming his apostleship, meaning he saw the resurrected Lord Jesus and was personally called by the Lord to his ministry. This happened while he journeyed on the road to Damascus, as recorded in the Book of Acts (Acts 9:3-5). Second, Paul names Sosthenes, who was most likely his secretary. This man suffered for the Lord when he was beaten for taking Paul before a Corinthian civil court (Acts 18:12-17). The mention of Sosthenes is significant because it shows that this important Jewish synagogue leader in that region (Acts 18:17) came to faith in the Lord Jesus. Third, Paul affirmed the holiness of someone who believes in the Lord Jesus. He said, "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 on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours (v. 2). Sanctification is the concept of being set apart for the purposes of God. This word comes from the Greek "hagios," meaning "separation," and is the same Greek word that is translated "holiness."

This is a one-time, forever event, but also has an ongoing, growing element, in that as the author of Hebrews stated, "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14). Finally, Paul says that in the end, believers in the Lord will be "blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 8). This is a common theme for Paul, we also see it in 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 as well as in Philippians 1:6 and 2:15. Paul said in Colossians, "yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach–if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister" (Colossians 1:22-23). Believers are blameless before the Lord, meaning they are justified as if they had never sinned. However, the ungodly behavior that Paul noted later in 1 Corinthians was not indicative of true believers, for only true believers are blameless before the Lord. Paul said in the closing verse of the reading, "God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (v. 9). Although, as we saw in the first reading, "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), continuing in the faith is a sign of a true believer.

We can celebrate that, as believers, we have been set apart from the world to serve God. Most of us don't get too excited about holiness because holiness has the connotation of being no fun. But that's the Enemy's deception, which makes us think holiness is a drag. Holiness means being set apart for special use, and who doesn't want to be "special"? That is a longing that everyone has. We see a world full of people trying to be special by the world's value system, using their looks, personality, wit, charm, money, and talents to stand out from the rest of the crowd. Wanting to feel special is a legitimate longing, but unless it's met in Christ, we will try to meet it in some illegitimate way, which is sinful (even if it is not immoral). So the moral of the story is to recognize that God's imparted holiness meets this deep longing to be set apart for special use.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Something Paul said in the second reading provides an entry point for the Gospel lesson. Paul said that the Corinthian believers were "awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:7). In the Gospel lesson from Mark Chapter 13, Jesus provides some important insight into just how that event will come about. This reading is from the portion of Scripture known as the Olivet Discourse because Jesus told it while on the Mount of Olives just across the Kidron Valley from the Jerusalem temple. The Discourse is found in the Gospels of Matthew (chapter 24), Luke (chapter 21), and Mark (chapter 13). There are slight differences between them, and understanding them helps guide the overall interpretation. Although today's reading covers only the last portion of this message, the overall message is that the Lord predicts the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. He also offers a glimpse of the distant future, when God will pour out His judgments on the world just before He returns to usher in His Millennial reign on earth.

To understand today's reading from the end of the Olivet Discourse, it is important to recognize the context and meaning of the previous section and the Discourse overall. The Discourse opens with Jesus' prediction of the temple's destruction. Although this prophecy was partially fulfilled with the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in AD 70, its final fulfillment will come in the future, when the Old Testament prophecies regarding the "Day of the Lord" are poured out upon the unbelieving world. A worldly figure known as the "Antichrist" will arise and wreak havoc upon the Jewish people worshiping in a restored temple in Jerusalem.

In the end times, a period that began when the Lord returned to heaven (Acts 1:11), some events run in parallel throughout our current age until the Lord's return; others run sequentially, as the end-time tribulation proceeds according to prophecies in the Bible. Some of the parallel events are as

follows. Quotations are provided from Mark's version of the Discourse when appropriate.

- The persecution of believers (Mark 13 4:9).

- An overall decline in morality and godly living (2 Timothy 3:13). Both conditions will worsen, and persecution of believers will intensify until the close of this age and the return of the Lord Jesus.

- An increase in natural and manmade disasters (Mark 13:6-10). In Mark 13, beginning in verse 6, Jesus provided an overall description of the age preceding His return. This period was to be marked by "wars and rumors of wars" (v. 6), earthquakes and famines (v. 8), world wars (v. 8), and the emergence of many false Messiahs (christs, v. 6). Jesus said that the Gospel must first go out to the entire world (v. 10), which we see will be fulfilled by an angel in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 14:6), in spite of the best efforts of Christian missionaries to achieve this goal.

- The coming of many antichrists (Mark 13:22). Many antichrists have arisen in our age, including figures like David Koresh, Joseph Smith (Mormons), and Charles Taze Russell (JW's). One interesting case is a man named Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson. This rabbi from New York was a highly influential Jewish leader worldwide. When he died in 1994, his followers expected him to rise from the dead in, you guessed it, three days. As of this writing, he is still in the grave.

Some events are sequential; here are a few.

- Jesus' prediction in Mark 13:1-3 of the destruction of the temple, which was fulfilled in AD 70. In examining the parallel accounts in Matthew and especially Luke, it is apparent that this event foreshadowed the ultimate destructive event heralded by the Antichrist at some future time.

- The Prophet Daniel and the Book of Revelation speak of the coming of the ultimate Antichrist. Saint John said in his day that many antichrists had already come (1 John 2:18), but the Bible predicts the coming of one known as the Man of Sin (2 Thessalonians 2:3). This is the one that will bring about the "abomination of desolation" described by Jesus in verse 14. This will mark the establishment of a global ruler known as the Antichrist (1 John 2:18, Daniel 7:8 "the little horn," Revelation 6:2 –the rider on the white horse), and the false holy spirit figure known as the false prophet (Revelation 13:11-15).

- Persecution of believers on a tremendous scale unknown throughout history (Mark 13: 9-13).

- There will be signs in the sky (Mark 13:24-25).

- God's judgments will be unveiled in the Book of Revelation, including the seven seals, trumpets, and bowls (Revelation 6, 8, 11, 15, 16). These are judgments of God as declared in Revelation: "You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve. … Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments" (Revelation 16:5-7).

- The return of the Lord Jesus at some unknown time; I call it the return, resurrection, and rapture (R-R-R). This event is a resurrection of dead believers throughout the ages, both Christians (1 Thess 4:13-18) and Jews (Ezekiel 37:12), along with a "catching up" or rapture of living believers to meet Jesus in the air. This will begin with believers who have already died, then with those alive at that time. Saint Paul clearly reveals this in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). Ezekiel describes the same event from a Jewish perspective. "*Thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel'"* (Ezekiel 37:12).

- Once the church is removed from the world because "God has not appointed us to wrath" (1 Thessalonians 5:9), the cascading series of events known as the Great Tribulation period will

commence. Scripture calls the time that follows the "Day of the Lord."

- Supernatural protection of the Nation of Israel in a special place prepared by God (Revelation 12:6).

- The "abomination of desolation" (Mark 13:14). This is when the Antichrist figure will establish himself as God and set up his own image in the temple for worship. Paul said this about the Antichrist: "who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God" (2Thessalonians 2:4). The Jews were familiar with something like this happening before when Antiochus IV Epiphanes sacked the temple and rededicated it to the god Zeus in 167 BC, and sacrificed a pig in the temple to his god. This "abomination of desolation" was a type of the one to come, a prefiguring of the time that the Antichrist would establish himself as God in the temple to be worshiped by everyone in the world, not just Jerusalem, as happened in the earlier time.

- The destruction of the Antichrist's religious and civil empire known as "Mystery Babylon" (Revelation 18:2).

- Marriage Supper of the Lamb with all believers in heaven (Revelation 19:7).

- The Lord Jesus returns to earth with his victorious church (Revelation 19:11-19).

- Antichrist and False Prophet are thrown into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 19:20).

- Satan is bound for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:3), then released for a final battle (Revelation 20:7)

- Satan is thrown into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:10).

With context in mind, read today's Gospel passage, which focuses upon the theme of being prepared for the return of the Lord Jesus.

Gospel Reading:

> *33 Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time will come. 34 It is like a man away on a journey, who upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, assigning to each one his task, also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert. 35 Therefore, be on the alert–for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning– 36 in case he should come suddenly and find you asleep. 37 What I say to you I say to all, 'Be on the alert!'" (Mark 13:33 -37)*

Jesus told His disciples, and by extension, all believers, to be prepared for His return. He did so by telling them (and us) a parable about a master who went on a journey, leaving his servants in charge. An appointed doorkeeper was to keep careful watch at the door, even during the midnight hours, to watch for the return of his master. The parable means that Jesus is the Master who went away by ascending into heaven, a foretaste of the resurrection that will happen at the R-R-R event. Jesus the Master appointed pastors to shepherd His servants (believers). Paul said, "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers" (Ephesians 4:11). Jesus commanded His doorkeepers to be alert, meaning that our pastors are to be alert for His return and to teach others to do the same. As the reading closes, Jesus repeated the principle application, "Be on the alert!" (v. 37b).

What does all of this mean for us today? First, Jesus cautioned His disciples to be aware of their future destiny so they would live rightly today. By using the parable of the fig tree earlier in the Discourse (Mark 13:28), something the people in the Mediterranean region were very familiar with, Jesus helped them see the signs of the times and live in a watchful and purposeful way. Just as Jesus cautioned His disciples to beware by watching for the signs, we can know that Jesus' return is imminent by watching for the signs ourselves. This means we should not delay in doing the work

God has placed in our hearts. 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).

Because God's prophets so accurately predicted events that have already occurred, including Jesus' (the greatest prophet of all) prediction of the destruction of the temple, we can trust that the events will play out exactly as God has described in the Scriptures. Because God has so accurately predicted the future, we can trust Him when He tells us how to enter into an eternal relationship with Him through faith in His Son, the risen Lord Jesus Christ. We can rest in the fact that everything will turn out fine for anyone who trusts in the Lord Jesus alone for salvation. Those with faith in the Lord can trust that even if they find themselves thrown into tribulation, they will forever be with the Lord in peace.

Finally, although Scripture provides phenomenal insights into how the end times will play out, we must be careful not to overestimate or underestimate the significance of current world events. Instead, we are to go about the Lord's business while being watchful for His return, since nobody knows when that will happen. Although we can know the season of Jesus' return, including the events we described in the introduction to the Gospel reading, nobody knows exactly how it will all play out. Until then, we are called to work as God's good and faithful servants (Matthew 25:23) until the day He returns. Although God tells us we will suffer tribulation, and those alive when the Lord returns will suffer even more, we can rest on God's promises for our eternal life and peace with Him. Peace with God is given to us the moment we believe (Philippians 4:7).

Reflection Questions

1. How does knowing how the Grand Story ends influence how you live today? What values do you have because you know God wins in the end? What values do you want God to develop in you based on this knowledge of the end times?

2. The first two readings dealt with humankind's lack of righteousness (Isaiah) and the Corinthians being called saints. Think about this contrast that is spoken about throughout the Bible. The worse the bad news, the better the good news. Explain why the coming of Christ to die on the cross for our sins is called "the good news." How has this become good news for your life?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 160: 11/22/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the first reading from Ezekiel, which contrasts the ungodly shepherds with God, the Good Shepherd. We include many surrounding verses to help us understand the reading in its context. Then we move to the second reading from 1 Corinthians, where we study the truth of believers' resurrection and how it gives us great hope. Finally, we conclude with the Gospel lesson from Matthew 25, where we study the coming judgment for everyone who lives in the world at the end of the tribulation period. We pray that this study gives you much more insight as you attend Mass this coming Sunday.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Prophet Ezekiel. After God told Ezekiel that the people recognized him

as a prophet and came to listen to him (Ezekiel 33:30), they did not take his words to heart or change their lives (Ezekiel 33:31d-ff). Instead, God told them that it would be afterward that they would look back and "know that a prophet has been among them" (v. 33). In Ezekiel's time, and also in the present age, God is not pleased with people going through the motions of dead religion, especially when they don't listen to God's word and let Him operate on their hearts and minds to change their behavior. Chapter 34, the section from which today's reading is taken, opens with God's scathing critique of the "shepherds of Israel," meaning the nation's ungodly leaders, including kings, priests, and prophets (except Ezekiel, Daniel, and Jeremiah, his contemporaries). We get our word "pastor" from the Latin word for "shepherd." These passages are messianic, meaning that they prefigure the revelation of the True Shepherd Jesus Christ. In those days, the people were "sheep without a shepherd," eerily reminiscent of what Jesus said some six hundred years later. "Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36-37). As usual in these study notes, it is crucially important to understand the context, as the reading provides a **contrast** between the ungodly "shepherds" of Ezekiel's time and the Godly Shepherd God and His ultimate fulfillment in the Person of Jesus Christ. This contrast matters, so we have included the first ten verses of the chapter leading up to today's reading.

First Reading:

Verses before today's reading:

> *1 Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, 2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, 'Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? 3 You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock. 4 Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them. 5 They were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered. 6 My flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill; My flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth, and there was no one to search or seek for them.' 7 Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: 8 'As I live,' declares the Lord GOD, 'surely*

> *because My flock has become a prey, My flock has even become food for all the beasts of the field for lack of a shepherd, and My shepherds did not search for My flock, but rather the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock;' 9 therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: 10 Thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will demand My sheep from them and make them cease from feeding sheep. So the shepherds will not feed themselves anymore, but I will deliver My flock from their mouth, so that they will not be food for them.'"(Ezekiel 34:1-10)*

This is today's reading, following the opening of chapter 34. *Note: Verses 13-14,* skipped in the reading, were added for *full context.*

> 11 For thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. 12 "As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day. 13 I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land. 14 I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down on good grazing ground and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. 15 I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest," declares the Lord GOD. 16 "I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick; but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with judgment. 17 As for you, My flock, thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will judge between one sheep and another, between the rams and the male goats." (Ezekiel 34:11-17).

Throughout Scripture, the Lord God pictures Himself as the "Shepherd of the Sheep," and this occurs early in the Bible. This theme in the reading from Ezekiel occurs frequently in Ezekiel's Book,

occurring some 15 times in chapter 34 alone. This concept first appears in the Book of Genesis, when Jacob prophesies about the twelve sons (and tribes) of Israel, this time about Joseph. "Joseph is a fruitful bough, A fruitful bough by a spring; Its branches run over a wall. The archers bitterly attacked him, And shot at him and harassed him; But his bow remained firm, And his arms were agile, From the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel)" (Genesis 49:22-24). The shepherd theme echoes the opening of Psalm 23: "The LORD is my Shepherd, I shall not want" (v. 1). "I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down on good grazing ground and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I will feed My flock, and I will lead them to rest," declares the Lord God" (vv. 14-16). As we examine today's reading, we find additional insight into the identity of this Shepherd of Israel. He emerges as a Shepherd-King figure who has a special relationship with the LORD. This is none other than the Lord Jesus Himself. If we look beyond today's reading to verse 34, we see this contrast between the evil shepherds and the One True Shepherd continue. "Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd" (Ezekiel 34:23). "David" in this verse prefigures the One True Shepherd that was yet to come at the time Ezekiel wrote this passage, the Person of Jesus Christ. It is also evident throughout Scripture that the resurrected King David will also play a role in governing Israel in the future Millennial reign of the Lord Jesus on earth.

As believers in Jesus, we can find great comfort from Ezekiel's writing. First, God will seek His sheep that are lost, meaning that God Himself places a calling upon our lives to come to faith in His Son Jesus Christ (v. 11). Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:44). Second, since God keeps His promises that He made to Israel, He will keep all of the promises that He has made to us. One of those promises is that He will re-gather Israel at some future time. "I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land" (v. 13a). Third, we can trust that God will care for us as a good shepherd cares for His sheep. Finally, although we may feel judged by worldly people in this age, the only real judgment that counts is that of our True Judge, the Lord Jesus Himself (v. 17). We can trust that God's judgment will be correct in that, as we enter eternity, He will judge between the evil shepherds in our land and the ones that do good in serving Him.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

As we move on to the second reading, we will see more about the Person Jesus Christ. Since He was made alive at the resurrection, we too will be made alive when our bodies are resurrected from the dead. The reading is from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. The context is Paul's vigorous explanation of believers' bodily resurrection: first the Lord Jesus, then all who put their faith in Him.

Paul opens this section with a caution: "Hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:2b, c). The main theme that runs throughout the chapter is that the risen Lord Jesus is the hope of all believers, in spite of the fact that some in the church had denied the teaching of the future resurrection of the dead (v. 12). Paul said, "But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain" (1Corinthians 15:13-14). He closes the section just before today's reading by saying, "If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied" (1Corinthians 15:19), something which denies the conventional wisdom of our age that would say that the Christian life is a noble way of living. With these concepts in mind, let's move on to today's reading. Note: We skipped verse 27 in the reading, but included it to provide full context.

Second Reading:

> *20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. 21 For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, 24 then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be abolished is death. 27 For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET. But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. 28 When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all. (1 Corinthians 15:20-28)*

Paul says that since Christ has been raised from the dead and is the first to be resurrected (v. 20), He is the one through whom life came and the precursor of the resurrection hope for all who believe (v. 22b, 23). As we saw in the first reading from Ezekiel, Jesus' rulership will be established on earth, which is one aspect of the resurrection. Jesus will "come in glory" (Matthew 25:31), which we will read about in today's Gospel lesson. Paul quoted Psalm 8 when he said Jesus would totally subdue all His enemies, "put them under His feet" (vv. 25-26). Ezekiel's evil shepherds will be subdued and

judged forever. Jesus' greatest enemy will be death, conquered through the victory of the resurrection, first over Himself and then over all believers. World history will culminate in the end of Jesus' one thousand-year (millennial) reign on earth. This will be concluded with Christ handing over His kingdom to His Father in heaven (vv. 24 -28), something that would fall into the category of what Saint Peter called "things that are hard to understand" (2 Peter 3:16). After Christ has handed His kingdom over to the Father, His eternal reign will begin (Revelation 21, 22).

Our greatest hope as believers in the Lord Jesus lies in the hope of resurrection. We can rest in the historical fact that Jesus was the first to rise from the dead, one of history's best-proven events. As our bodies wear out and grow old, we can rest in the fact that one day we will be given a new eternal body that will never grow old. Just as Paul comforted the Corinthian believers with these facts, we can find comfort and comfort others through hope in our future resurrection.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

As we transition to the Gospel lesson, we earlier mentioned in the first reading that God is the Righteous Judge, and in the second reading that one day He will come in Glory to rule and reign over the earth. One element of rulership is acting as a Judge, and at the end of His reign on earth, Jesus will judge those who survive the tribulation period at the conclusion of the Day of the Lord.

Jesus gave the big-picture context of Jesus' return earlier in Matthew 24. The world will grow worse and worse, and many false Christs will arise (Matthew 24:5). Wars and famines will ravage the world (vv. 5-8). Believers will experience great persecution to the extent that the true nature of belief of many will be revealed as false (v. 10). At some unknown time, Jesus will return, and many of the dead in the earth will arise, "some to everlasting life, and some to everlasting shame and contempt" (Daniel 12:2). It seems that the Old Testament Jews arise at this time (Ezekiel 37:12), along with all of the New Testament believers who have gone to be with Jesus (1 Thess 4:13-17). This event is marked by what Jesus said beginning in verse 40, "Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left" (Matthew 24:40). The one who is taken is a believer who is taken alive to heaven; the one left behind will then enter the Great Tribulation (or Day of the Lord). This is like what happened to the nonbelievers during Noah's flood. Jesus said, "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be (Matthew 24:37-39).

Today's reading looks beyond the Lord Jesus' return to the period after his millennial reign on earth, some 1,000 years after the end of the Great Tribulation (Day of the Lord). The reading describes the final judgment, the Great White Throne, in which Jesus separates the "wheat from the chaff."

Gospel Reading:

> *20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. 21 For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, 24 then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be abolished is death. 27 For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET. But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. 28 When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all. (1 Corinthians 15:20-28)*

In the reading, we see the Good Shepherd Jesus forcibly separating the nonbelieving "goats" from the believing sheep. During these "goats" lives, they lived amongst a mixed multitude that Jesus described in the kingdom parables earlier in Matthew 13. There, Jesus described how the wheat and the weeds would live side by side until the harvest, when the master would separate the two (Matthew 24:24-30). Today's reading is that separation, when the mixed seed is sifted, and the weeds are tossed out to be burned (Matthew 24:30c).

In today's reading, Jesus used a shepherd analogy that we saw in Ezekiel. The Good Shepherd who knows His Sheep will divide these two groups based on their heart condition. The criteria He will use is what He explained to Nicodemus in John 3: "You must be born from above (or again, Greek

"anothen") to enter the kingdom of heaven" (refer to John 3:3, with my explanation). In that same Gospel, Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:27-28). Although Jesus, as God, knows His sheep instinctively, like any shepherd, and they look the same on the outside, His sheep bear distinctive inner markings. These markings show themselves in their behavior, so even worldly people can recognize them. This becomes clear in verses 35 -40. **Some** of a believer's good works flow from a heart changed by God (John 3:3), as James said, "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:14). The sheep show a variety of "sheeplike" behaviors. They feed the hungry (v. 35a), give drink to the thirsty (v. 35c), clothe the naked (v. 36a), visit the sick (v. 36b), and visit those in prison (v. 36b-c). Jesus then explained that when you do these things for others, you are doing them directly for Him (vv. 37-40, 42-45). Jesus also made it clear that the eternal destination (v. 46) for nonbelievers is the "eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels" (v. 41). It's interesting to note that Jesus' sheep sit at His right hand, while Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father (1 Peter 3:22).

The Gospel lesson helps us to prioritize and value what God cares about. In this world, attending to the needs of those marginalized in society is an opportunity to show what's really in our hearts. Do we have the love and compassion of God or are we still living only for ourselves? Jesus describes specific needs that were common in His day, including hunger, thirst, lack of sufficient clothing, and imprisonment. You might be encountering other types of needs that God is asking you to meet (helping a child learn how to read, sacrificing some of your income to provide a home for someone, giving a friend a ride to work while their car is being repaired. The opportunities to meet other people's needs are endless. So we need wisdom to know which needs are opportunities to love Christ by serving others.

What does all of this mean in our lives? First, we can trust that the Good Shepherd who was the first to rise from the dead will also come for us one day when we enter eternity (John 14: 3). Second, even though we may be tortured by the ungodly behavior of people in the world, we can trust that God knows the intentions of our heart and those who are His. God will work it out, "Vengeance is mine says the Lord" (Romans 12:19). Third, We can rest in the fact that our good works flow out of a heart changed by God (Ephesians 2:8-9, John 3:3), and these are evident to those who are unknowingly (2 Corinthians 4:3-4) on the broad road to destruction (Matthew 7:13). Our good works will be evident to them and will shed light on their evil works (John 3:20). Finally, we can trust that since we are believers we can trust in the fact that when we sit before the Lord in judgment it will be for the basis of rewards and not to determine our eternal destination.

Reflection Questions

1. In the Bible, the word translated "faith" brings with it the idea of expecting to have the things hoped for or living in light of an unseen reality. In your life, what does faith mean? How does faith play into obedience? Are these two separate things in your mind, or are they connected?

2. The Greek word translated "obedience" (hupakoe) according to Strong's Concordance (5218, drawn from 5219) means "attentive hearkening, i.e. (by implication) compliance or submission." Read the following Scripture and answer the question that follows.

> *25 Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, 26 but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to* ***obedience of faith****; 27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen. (Romans 16:25-27, emphasis added)*

In light of what you learned today along with Paul's teaching on the obedience of faith, what does it mean for you to walk in obedience of faith? How is your faith evident to others?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 157:

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

11/15/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the first reading from Proverbs, which shows a godly woman's wise stewardship of God's resources. Then we move to the second reading from Saint Paul's Letter to the Thessalonians. Finally, we close with a kingdom parable from Saint Matthew, which also calls us to steward the resources He has given us carefully.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Proverbs. King Solomon wrote this Scripture, a book of wisdom on practical and godly living. The main theme is that a godly person carefully stewards the time, talents, and treasures God has given them. We will explore this same theme later in the Gospel lesson.

Note: We included all the skipped verses between 31:13-31 to provide full context.

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First Reading:

> *10 An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels. 11 The heart of her husband trusts in her, And he will have no lack of gain. 12 She does him good and not evil All the days of her life. 13 She looks for wool and flax And works with her hands in delight. 14 She is like merchant ships; She brings her food from afar. 15 She rises also while it is still night And gives food to her household And portions to her maidens. 16 She considers a field and buys it; From her earnings she plants a vineyard. 17 She girds herself with strength And makes her arms strong. 18 She senses that her gain is good; Her lamp does not go out at night. 19 She stretches out her hands to the distaff, And her hands grasp the spindle. 20 She extends her hand to the poor, And she stretches out her hands to the needy. 21 She is not afraid of the snow for her household, For all her household are clothed with scarlet. 22 She makes coverings for herself; Her clothing is fine linen and purple. 23 Her husband is known in the gates, When he sits among the elders of the land. 24 She makes linen garments and sells them, And supplies belts to the tradesmen. 25 Strength and dignity are her clothing, And she smiles at the future. 26 She opens her mouth in wisdom, And the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. 27 She looks well to the ways of her household, And does not eat the bread of idleness. 28 Her children rise up and bless her; Her husband also, and he praises her, saying: 29 "Many daughters have done nobly, But you excel them all." 30 Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, But a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised. 31 Give her the product of her hands, And let her works praise her in the gates. (Proverbs 31:10-31)*

Among other things that emerge from the reading, the "Proverbs 31 woman" fears the Lord (v. 30). The big idea is that a godly person is a careful steward of the gifts they receive from God.

Many points arise from the text; here are a few.

- The godly woman works willingly, not under compulsion (v. 13, "in delight"). She also goes to great lengths in order to get things done (v. 13b-ff).

- The godly woman serves others, even her own servant (v. 15). She is not a sluggard; she works hard in serving others.

- She is an entrepreneur (v. 16). In that era, her husband would have had to make the actual transaction to purchase the land, but she instigated it and took care in planting and tending the vineyard.

- She understands that what she gains is from God (v. 18).

- She is optimistic about her future, because she knows that she belongs to God (v. 35, 30b).

The bottom line is that the godly woman is like Jesus: a servant, someone who came not to be served but to serve (Matthew 20:28). She is a faithful steward of the gifts God has given her. Faithfulness and careful stewardship recur throughout both the Old and the New Testaments. We will see this theme continue later in the Gospel lesson.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Thessalonians. Paul discusses the Day of the Lord, which we covered in a previous edition of Mass Notes. This is the time at the end of the tribulation when Israel finally returns to worship their Lord. Today's reading warns people living in that era to watch for the Lord's return. Watchfulness for the return of the Lord Jesus is a continuing theme in the New Testament.

Second Reading:

> *1 Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. 2 For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. 3 While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. 4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; 5 for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; 6 so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. (1 Thessalonians 5:1-6)*

Like the parable of the virgins we will discuss in the introduction to the Gospel reading, everyone is called to watch for the Lord's return. They are to be certain that they find faith in Jesus Christ while they still have the opportunity to do so (Romans 13:11) because nobody knows the hour when the Lord will return (Matthew 24:36). As we move on to the Gospel lesson, we will see how God places a high value upon not only being watchful for His return, but also on being a good steward of the things that He has given to us.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson is from Saint Matthew. Today's reading is part of what is called the Lord's "Olivet Discourse," which encompasses Matthew 24:1–25:46. In this Sermon, Jesus describes what will happen at the close of the church age. This portion of Matthew contains "kingdom parables" that begin with our Lord saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like." Today's reading begins in Matthew 25:14. The chapter begins with Jesus saying, "Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to . . ." (Matthew 25:1a). The Lord then tells the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), which shares the same theme of watchfulness as the second reading.

Being watchful for the Lord is closely tied to being prepared for His return, meaning we must already be citizens of the kingdom before He comes. In the parable of the ten virgins, the Lord described how five virgins were prepared for the bridegroom, and five were not. In Jewish culture, the groom was expected to come at an unexpected time. The application of this parable is that half of the virgins were prepared for the Lord Jesus' return (by study of the Scriptures and coming to a saving knowledge of faith in Jesus Christ), while the other five were lost and destined for eternal

separation from God. In the context of chapter 25, the application is that at some point during the end times the Lord Jesus will return to gather His Church. Those left behind will enter God's judgment, known as the Day of the Lord. Only God knows people's true hearts, so no one should wait to receive God's plan of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, because it may be too late.

The reading today opens with another of Jesus' "kingdom parable" introductions, "For it is just like" (v. 14a). What Jesus is saying is, "The Kingdom of God is like . . ." As you read, try to determine the main theological idea that emerges from the reading.

Gospel Reading:

> *14 For it is just like a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them. 15 To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey. 16 Immediately the one who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and gained five more talents. 17 In the same manner the one who had received the two talents gained two more. 18 But he who received the one talent went away, and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. 19 Now after a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. 20 The one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, 'Master, you entrusted five talents to me. See, I have gained five more talents.' 21 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' 22 Also the one who had received the two talents came up and said, 'Master, you entrusted two talents to me. See, I have gained two more talents.' 23 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' 24 And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed. 25 'And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.' 26 But his master answered and said to him, 'You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no seed. 27 'Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my money back with interest. 28 'Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents.' 29 For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but*

> *from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. 30 Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 25:14-30)*

The big idea that emerges from the reading is that stewardship depends on knowing and trusting the Master's heart. A misguided understanding of the Master's heart leads to self-protective, ungodly use of one's talents, as with the man who buried his talent. Those who understood and trusted the Master's generous heart could take risks and multiply what was entrusted to them. Notice the misconception of the "wicked and lazy slave." He miscalculated the Master's heart when he revealed his deep distrust of him: "Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed. And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground" (verses 24-25). He was blaming his wickedness and laziness on the Master's seemingly unpredictable and untrustworthy character. But the Master smartly revealed the inconsistency in his argument. If he was truly afraid, he would at least have been wise enough to show some interest, even if only out of fear. The man made an eternal miscalculation by not trusting the Master's heart.

This kingdom parable is very relevant to our lives today. Here are some ways understanding and applying Jesus' teaching helps us accomplish the plans He has for us.

- Knowing and trusting the Master's heart is essential. We should spend our time and energy on this endeavor, so we become wise stewards. We look forward to the day when we will enter into our Master's joy. We can trust that hearing these words of affirmation will be worth it.

- Although people in this age are entrusted with different levels of abilities and worldly goods, faithful stewards are equally rewarded and entrusted with more responsibilities in heaven. Jesus said to the servant that gained five talents from the original five invested, "Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of **many** things; enter into the joy of your master" (v. 21, emphasis added). Likewise, He told the one entrusted with only two and who gained two, "Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master" (v. 23, emphasis added).

- The world is a profitable place to invest God's gifts, both for God and for the people entrusted with them. The five talents God invested in the world became ten (v. 20), and the two talents became four (v. 22). This magical doubling comes from God, even though it came through the agents to whom He entrusted it.

- Faithful servants have "gifts" to present to their masters, while unfaithful servants have only what God gave them, and He owns it all in the first place. As believers, we are called to invest our time, talents, and treasures in serving God, so we have something to present to him when we, too, stand before him in judgment. Our judgment won't be for salvation, but for rewards.

- Believers come to understand that everything they have comes from God, as we saw in the first reading about the godly woman in Proverbs 31. In contrast, unbelievers never come to this understanding, because they are carnally minded (Romans 8:6). Saint Paul said, "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

- The world's resources flow through a worldly power structure of ungodly masters (v. 24b). Although exceptions exist, the richest people in the world are almost universally nonbelievers (with the exception of John Rockefeller). Although they don't understand their responsibility for stewardship of God's resources during their lives, they will after they die.

The reading closes with Jesus' teaching that Hell is real, just as heaven is real. Unbelievers will be far worse off in Hell than they are on earth (v. 29). They will be very worried (v. 25) when they stand before the Lord, who will judge them for how they used the resources that he gave to them. Though the unfaithful servant in the parable was worried about giving his report to his master, his judgment will ultimately be far worse.

These are some sobering words from our Lord. They are far from the only time that He warned anyone who would listen about the reality of Hell. Jesus spoke about it in Matthew 11:23, where he described the place as "Hades." In Matthew 5:23, the word for hell is rendered from the Greek "Gehenna," while in today's reading the term is "outer darkness" (v. 30a). In the Bible, we count

some 38 times where this dark destination is designated as the future home of the wicked, beginning with Psalm 9:17 and ending with Revelation 21:8. Jesus implores people to take radical steps to prevent them from entering this place. In Mark chapter 9, Jesus told the people to even cut off their hands if it causes them to stumble, for "it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire" (Mark 9:43).

As believers who trust in the finished work of Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for our sins, we have no need to worry about going to hell. Saint John reminds us of this through the firm authority of God's word. God says, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God" (1 John 5:13). Jesus said in the John's Gospel, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). God testifies to us through His word that we can never suffer our way to heaven. Suffering is part of life, but we can merit heaven only through a foreign righteousness, that of Jesus Christ, which is placed on us the moment we believe (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Today's readings remind us of the urgency of spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ to those who are perishing. God calls us to bring light to the lost generation who, without faith in the Lord Jesus, will enter the place He described in the Gospel with no hope of escape. My readers may remember a story that I once told about a deeply troubling dream I had many years ago about such a place. I believe that God gave me this to remind me of the urgency in reaching people for the Lord Jesus Christ. In my dream, I was in a faraway place, and I felt deep hopelessness and doom. I felt I was in a place I would never leave, without hope. I pray nobody ever has to experience such a dream, and even more that nobody enters such a place for real at the end of their life on earth. The media may make light of hell as a place guarded by a man in a red suit with a pitchfork in his hand, but the reality of hell is all too real for those who enter there. I pray that through today's study, we may all remember our mission to reach people with the good news of the Gospel.

Reflection Questions

1. How do you view the Master's heart? Is He generous and gracious, freeing you from self-protective ways so you can take risks with what He has entrusted to you? Or do you see Him like the one-talent servant, who saw God as a harsh taskmaster and blamed God for his own laziness and wickedness?

2. The world we live in is unpredictable. We don't know what each new day will bring, but God has given us some landmarks of the end times. How does the Proverbs 31 woman face the future? How did Paul encourage the Thessalonians to face the future? What truths about the Master's heart and the future will allow you to face the near and eternal future with confidence?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 154: 11/08/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we study two readings about the second coming of the Lord. We go into some detail about the signs and events that will precede His coming.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Apocryphal book of Wisdom.

First Reading:

Wisdom 6:12-16
Resplendent and unfading is wisdom,
and she is readily perceived by those who love her,
and found by those who seek her.
She hastens to make herself known in anticipation of their desire;
Whoever watches for her at dawn shall not be disappointed,
for he shall find her sitting by his gate.
For taking thought of wisdom is the perfection of prudence,
and whoever for her sake keeps vigil
shall quickly be free from care;
because she makes her own rounds, seeking those worthy of her,
and graciously appears to them in the ways,
and meets them with all solicitude.

In the ancient writings, wisdom was often personified as a woman. Wisdom was something to be actively sought and cherished. In today's reading, we see wisdom portrayed this way: as something unfading and actively pursued. From the author's perspective, wisdom seeks out those who cherish and seek her, yet somehow comes to seekers by unmerited favor, meaning grace. The Bible closely connects wisdom with God's Spirit, and we see this in the reading: wisdom is given unmerited to those who seek it, yet God desires that we do indeed seek it. To those who seek wisdom, more will be given, as Matthew 13:12 says: "For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him." Also, James said, "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5). God calls us to seek Him, who is the ultimate form of wisdom personified in the person of Jesus Christ.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The Book of First Thessalonians concerns Paul's address to the people in this region to encourage them in light of false teachings that had entered the church and to exhort them to practice a godly lifestyle. The fourth chapter opens with an exhortation to the latter. "Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more" (1 Thess 4:1). It then moves to the former matter, confronting the false teaching that the church had experienced.

Second Reading:

> *1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 NAS95 13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.*

Paul explained to the believers that just as the Lord Jesus promised, He would return first to gather those who had already died (v. 14), then some instant later the believers who remained alive until His coming (v. 15). This second coming (or rapture) would proceed first with a shout from the Lord, the voice of an archangel, and the trumpet of God. Students of the Book of Revelation will recognize this description as following that book's pattern (Revelation 11:15). There, we see that the return of the Lord Jesus will follow a period of momentous persecution of Jews and Christians (Revelation 12:13-17; we encourage you to study it). Paul then told them to "comfort one another with these words" (v. 18). If we look a bit beyond today's reading, we will see that phrase "comfort one

another" a second time, but in the context of the promise from God that believers will not enter into the Great Tribulation (or Day of the Lord's judgment, "DOL").

To understand today's message, read ahead to 2 Thessalonians, where Paul explains why comforting words were necessary. In 2 Thess 2:1 Paul said, "Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come" (vv. 1-2). He went on to explain that the second coming of the Lord Jesus wasn't something that they could miss because Jesus' return would not happen until the worldwide revelation of the Antichrist, the man of sin (2 Thess 2:3). Before the Lord Jesus returns, a world ruler will emerge who will at some point will take his seat in the temple and proclaim himself to be God (2 Thess 2:4). In this section, Paul told them not to let anyone deceive them as these events would be patently obvious (2 Thess 2:3). When Jesus returns, believers will be unable to miss it! The world, however, will go on about their daily business (Matthew 24:38).

The Thessalonians were falling for false ideas about Jesus' return, and the same continues until today. The false religious cult of Jehovah's Witnesses has taught over the years this very same doctrine, however, with a unique twist. They teach that Jesus returned invisibly. Paul corrected this false doctrine in today's reading.
Note, if you would like to learn more about the JW's teaching regarding this matter just place the search phrase "Jesus returned invisibly" into a search engine.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson continues the theme of the Lord Jesus' second coming. Today's reading follows Jesus' famous sermon, the Olivet Discourse, where He explained to His disciples the events to come and the signs to expect before His return. He told them that the temple would be destroyed (Matthew 24:2), many false messiahs (Christs) would come and lead many astray (v. 5), the world would be filled with war (vv. 6-7), natural disasters would increase with famines (v. 7c) and then great persecution would begin against believers (vv. 9-11), and much of the world would fall away from following the true faith revealed in the Scriptures (v. 12). Jesus taught that believers were to endure all of this until the end at which point the Gospel would be preached to the entire world, an event clearly displayed in Revelation 14. "And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people" (Revelation 14:6). Interestingly, nowhere does Scripture teach that believers will be

excluded from the persecution leading up to Jesus' return. Rather, believers in the end times are presented with a message saying, "Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints" (Revelation 13:10, 14:12). The balance of the previous chapter (Chapter 24) is dedicated to Jesus' teaching about His return, how there will be signs in the sky and on the earth (Matthew 24:29-35), and how His coming will be unexpected for those not watching (Matthew 24:36-44, 50).

The key ideas leading up to today's reading call us to watchfulness and faithfulness. In today's reading, a third theme emerges: that of readiness. With this crucially important context in mind, let's study today's reading. [We encourage you to read all of Matthew 24 before today's reading.]

Gospel Reading:

> *Matthew 25:1-13 NAS95 1 Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. 3 For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, 4 but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. 5 Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. 6 But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' 7 "Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. 8 The foolish said to the prudent, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' 9 But the prudent answered, 'No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' 10 And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. 11 Later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' 12 But he answered, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.' 13 Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.*

The reading is a "kingdom parable," in which Jesus likens the kingdom of heaven to an earthly event to present a spiritual meaning. The reading opens with, "the kingdom of heaven will be comparable," pointing to a future, heavenly reality (v. 1). Jesus teaches that the spiritual kingdom is like a group of

ten brides: the first five are prepared for His coming, and the second five are not. The Old Testament portrays Yahweh as the husband of His people (for example, in Hosea 2:19), and here in the parable, Jesus is the husband of the brides (v. 1). According to Jewish customs, a bride would leave their homes with a group of friends who gather in a procession to meet the bridegroom. The groom would then join them in the marriage feast, but at some unannounced time. Since the feast often occurred at night, lamps were necessary, along with enough oil to keep them burning during the wait, which could be unexpectedly long. In our day, we can relate somewhat, as we often leave the wedding ceremony and wait in the reception hall for the newly united couple to join the group at an unexpected time. After riding around in a limousine drinking champagne, this might come even later than expected!

After a very long wait, both groups of people fall asleep (v. 5). This reminds us of how Jesus' own disciples fell asleep during the night before He willingly surrendered His life to be crucified as a substitute for our sins (Matthew 26:40). This is where the story takes a turn. At midnight, they shouted, and both groups got up and trimmed their oil-fired lamps (v. 7), but only the prudent had enough fuel to light the way to the feast with the bridegroom. The imprudent virgins begged for fuel and then had no other choice than to head off at midnight in the dark to buy fuel from some sort of 24-hour Walmart, which didn't exist in that era.

In the parable we see the theme of readiness. There are two groups of people: those who are ready for Jesus' return, and those who are not. The first group differs qualitatively from the second: they are "prudent," while the second is "foolish." The foolish group recognizes the need to barter with the prudent ones when they see the imminent signs of Jesus' return, something we discussed in the introduction regarding the signs of His coming (Matthew 24:1-13). However, in the same way that Jesus described in Chapter 24 regarding those left behind to perish in the worldwide flood in Noah's time (Matthew 24:37-39), the foolish group will be locked out of the kingdom of heaven (v. 10, "the door was shut." We must not underestimate the significant difference between these two groups.

There are two groups of people in the world, those who believe and those who do not. God loves the world so much that He gave He sent His only begotten Son to us, so that whoever would believe in Him would not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). Go says, "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 3:18). Believers travel along a narrow road filled with obstacles allowed by God to deepen their dependence upon Him, whereas those in the second, larger group follow the broad road carried along by the ways and whims of the world (Matthew 7:13-14). When Jesus returns, it will be too late for those on the broad road to seek faith in the Lord Jesus, and they will be eternally rejected from the presence of the King (John 3:36).

As believers in the Lord Jesus, we are called to patiently await Jesus' return while building and equipping the kingdom of God. Unlike the foolish who are unprepared for Jesus' return, we know the many signs and prophecies in Scripture about this imminent event. God calls us not to believe the false teachings that we have been left behind because the Lord has already returned (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2). God has given us many signs to expect before His return, so we **will** be prepared, unlike the foolish ones who will be forever locked out of the kingdom of heaven.

I remember well the dark day that lived in infamy, now known as "9-1-1." I was in my office in suburban Detroit that morning, and first heard about the unfolding tragedy when one of the secretaries from the law office across the hall came knocking on our door to tell us about it and to invite us to watch it unfold on the television set that they had in their waiting room. As the tragedy grew worse and worse, my Christian coworker and I were struck by the terror of the whole thing and began to talk to the other two employees in our office about whether this was somehow signaling the end of the world and the return of Jesus. These two people came from a background of nominal Christianity, having been raised in families that attended church services at least on Christmas and Easter, "Chreasters" some have called them. In my shock, I pleaded with them to find faith in the Lord Jesus for protection from the curse coming upon the country as the scene in New York and elsewhere unfolded. They looked at me in dumbfounded amazement, a look I will remember forever.

Within a few days, the reality of what had happened settled in, and although some people were moved to attend church services and seek God, many slowly returned to their normal lives. My two fellow employees also returned to their lives, and neither of them, at least as far as I know, ever sought God through faith in His Son. Although these two men are some of the smartest people I have ever worked with, they were not wise enough to read the signs of Jesus' imminent return. Jesus will meet us one way or another, and we can be in one of four groups; today's readings help us understand them.

The Three Groups:

1. Believers who die before the return of the Lord Jesus. They will meet Jesus when they die (John 14:3), then enter heaven for eternity, only to return with Jesus in the air during the Second Coming, when they will receive glorified bodies (1 Thessalonians 4:15).

2. Believers who are alive and meet Jesus when He returns (1 Thessalonians 4:14) and receive their

glorified bodies at that instant while still alive.

3. Nonbelievers who die before the return of the Lord Jesus. These meet the Lord Jesus as their judge with inevitable sentencing for their sin, with no means of repaying their eternal debts (Matthew 7:23, Matthew 25:41)

The people in the first three groups are the wise servants who procured the oil of the Holy Spirit before their Lord came. In contrast, those in the last group were foolish and persisted in their nonbelief until it was too late. Today's message calls us to do the work Jesus has called us to do by reaching out to those in this last category. Perhaps we could all benefit from a personal 911 emergency to motivate us to reach out to our lost friends and coworkers.

Reflection Questions

1. In what ways does knowing the signs of Jesus' coming help you to be better prepared to serve the Lord Jesus in the area(s) that He has called you? How does knowing the signs comfort you during the significant challenges you face in your life?

2. Understanding the big picture of the end times is essential to be able to recognize the gradual progression of events we see around us leading up to Jesus' return. Read the following summary, which provides a high-level overview of some of what we discussed today and includes events promised to those "foolish brides" who ignore God's teaching on salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Then, answer the question that follows.

The Lord's return follows a period of judgment known as the "Day of the Lord" (DOL), a prominent theme throughout the Old Testament. This period was first mentioned by the Prophet Isaiah who said, "For the LORD of hosts will have a day of reckoning against everyone who is proud and lofty and against everyone who is lifted up, That he may be abased" (Isaiah 2:12). The Day of the Lord, or DOL, is mentioned at least another 18 times in the Old Testament, including Ezekiel 13:5, "You have not gone up into the breaches, nor did you build the wall around the house of Israel to stand in the battle on the day of the LORD" (emphasis added). This time, also known as the time of Jacob's trouble (Jeremiah 30:7), is the conclusion of the period of time during which God will pour out His

judgments upon the unbelieving world left after the church has been "caught up" from the earth as described by Saint Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. After Jesus returns with His church (Revelation 19:11, 14), the Lord Jesus Christ rules the world in peace for one thousand years (Revelation 20:4).

How does understanding the eschatological picture (the end times) help us share the Gospel with people who don't believe?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 667: 11/01/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we take a fairly detailed look at the mysterious Book of Revelation, which is hard to cover briefly.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Revelation. The reading is set in a "parenthesis," or pause, in John's account of the seven seal judgments Jesus unveils. We cannot overstate the importance of understanding a reading's context, especially when it comes to the end-time events portrayed in the Book of Revelation. When reading Revelation, remember that the story moves between visions of events on earth and things happening in heaven. Along the way, the action frequently pauses, or "parenthesis," as the vision shifts from earth to heaven or vice versa.

Looking back on today's reading beginning in chapter 6, Jesus pours out a series of judgments on the earth (Revelation 6:1-17). When the sixth seal opens, great signs appear in the sky (Revelation 6:12). This aligns with what Jesus said in Matthew 24:29-30. John said, "I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood" (Revelation 6:12). Jesus said about this in Matthew, "But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (Matthew 24:29). The next verse in this section of Mathew provides is with strong clue as to the overall context of the signs as it relates to Jesus' promised return (Acts 1:11). Jesus said, "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory" (Matthew 29:30, emphasis added). Jesus said He would return after displaying the signs in the sky, just before the seventh-seal judgment is poured out on the earth. This brings us to the parenthesis in the text from which we take today's reading: after the revelation of the sixth seal, but before the return of the Lord Jesus and the unveiling of the seventh seal.

Today's reading is another tangential pause in which John records the gathering of 12 groups of elect saints (believers) from within Israel. We have included the skipped verses to provide full context.

First Reading:

Revelation 7:2-4 NAS95 2 And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun,

having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, 3 saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads." 4 And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel:
Skipped Verses:
Revelation 7:5-8 NAS95 5 From the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand, 6 from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, 7 from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, 8 from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand were sealed.
Reading, Continued:
Revelation 7:9-14 NAS95 9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; 10 and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." 11 And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying, "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen." 13 Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?" 14 I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

The angels divinely mark 12 "tribes" of Israelites, 12,000 from each group. The number 12,000 may not be literal (or it may be), but it indicates the task's fullness or completion. Regardless, this marking sets these people apart to receive God's divine protection during the balance of the tribulation period, about three and a half years. John makes this clear later in Chapter 12. "But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent" (Revelation 12:14). This "sealing of the bondservants of our God" is also indicated in the parallel passage in Matthew. Jesus says in that Gospel about this event, "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET, and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other" (Matthew 24:31). This divine sealing, marking, or

protecting occurs just before Jesus' return and the unleashing of the final judgments upon the earth, including the seventh seal, seven trumpet judgments, and seven bowl judgments. The bowl judgments conclude the wrath God has stored up to pour upon the unbelieving world at the end of the age. "Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished" (Revelation 15:1).

In the reading, John said, "After these things," meaning after the sealing of the "144,000" (Revelation 7:4) and the outpouring of the first six seal judgments upon the earth. The scene now shifts back from events on earth to events in heaven. We must interpret the events in heaven cautiously because they occur outside the space/time domain we are bound to on earth. However, John's placement of this parenthesis here in Revelation is significant because it identifies the source of the great cloud of believers John describes. Verse 14 reveals that the "great multitude" (v. 9a) comes from "the ones who come out of the great tribulation." These "tribulation saints" are the believers who are killed for their faith as the end of the age grinds to a halt during the reign of the Antichrist on earth. Later, John says about this wicked person, "It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him" (Revelation 13:7, emphasis added). During this terrible time, the reign of the Antichrist will be so strong as to almost fatalistically determine the outcome of each person alive on earth at the time. "If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints" (Revelation 13:10). The saints that are killed during this time will be divinely protected in heaven forever; in contrast to the "144,000," we saw who is divinely protected on earth during the tribulation period. This group in heaven will no longer hunger or thirst, or be too hot or too cold" (v. 16); "for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd" (v. 17a). Many of the Christian saints on earth during this time will be martyred for their faith, while the "144,000" will enter the Millennial Kingdom alive to repopulate the earth. When Jesus returns, He will gather the saints (believers) who have survived up to that point and those who died in the Lord. Saint Paul said about this, "*Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord*" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). This is the return of the Lord promised in Acts 1:11 and the rapture (or catching up) of all believers, both alive and dead, as stated in this verse from 1 Thessalonians.

The big idea is that even though this world does not recognize or treat God's people (saints) well, these verses reassure us that God will bring justice and provision in life to come, with eternal comfort. We see how Jesus acted as the divine Shepherd of His sheep in heaven.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from First John, where believers are called the Children of God.

Second Reading:

> *1 John 3:1-3 NAS95 1 See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. 3 And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.*

In the reading, God affirms that, as believers, we are "children of God" (v. 1b). This contrasts with those whom Saint John called "children of your father the devil" (John 8:44), the default category for everyone who is not a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. As Children of God, we will become like God when we receive our eternal bodies at the Lord's return (Acts 1: 11), either at our death or during the rapture of the church, as described above (1 Thessalonians 4:17). In the end, we will join into the great cloud of witnesses before the throne of God.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The reading from Saint Matthew is from the section known as the Sermon on the Mount. Here we see Jesus as the Shepherd of His Sheep and teaching the ethics of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Gospel Reading:

> *Matthew 5:1-12 NAS95 1 When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and*

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

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

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

Someone living the blessed life:

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

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

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

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

5. Shows mercy because they were offered mercy themselves through God's forgiveness and can extend it to others.

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

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

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

9. Endures insult for proclaiming the truth (the Word of God), just as the prophets did.

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

sin against us.

Reflection Questions

1. How do you respond internally when you read the Sermon on the Mount? Does it feel like another list of impossible feats you must accomplish to win God's favor? Or have you responded to Jesus' invitation to live in the kingdom (where He is the King of your heart), and the Sermon on the Mount reflects the work He is doing in your life

2. If you do feel that Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount is a list of impossible feats you need to accomplish, pray and journal this week about ways in which you can change your understanding of God's love for you as a believer in the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 148: 10/25/2026

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 open with the first reading from Moses' Book of Exodus, in which we see God's concern for widows, orphans, and the poor. Then we move to the second reading, a continuation of the study we began last week in 1 Thessalonians. We conclude with another of Jesus' discussions with the Jewish leaders from the Gospel of Saint Matthew, this time with the infamous Pharisees.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Exodus 22. It is one of the first five Books of the Bible, known as the Pentateuch, and was written by Moses. The Book recounts God's sovereign raising up of Moses as a leader to shepherd the Israelites out of their captivity in Israel. The Book also chronicles the giving of the Law to Moses, including the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. Whenever biblical texts use the term "Law," they mean the whole canon of Jewish Law, including the Ten Commandments and the several hundred other laws in the last four books of the Pentateuch: Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Chapter 20 contains the Ten Commandments and opens as follows. "Then God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." (Exodus 20:1-2). God, who calls Himself "I am" in verse one, meaning the "self-existent One," led the Israelites out of their bondage under the oppressive rule of the

Pharaoh of Egypt through His ordained leader Moses. God gradually revealed the entire Canon of the Law to Moses during his wanderings in the desert.

Understanding today's reading requires some considerable insight into the cultural and religious milieu of Jews in the ancient Near East. Foreigners were not the only downtrodden class of people to whom God afforded special protection in the Law. In those days, three classes of people were as low in the socioeconomic strata as foreigners. These were widows, orphans, and the poor, though the first two certainly shared the characteristic of poverty. These groups of people had almost no rights in the secular kingdoms that surrounded Israel. However, throughout the Law, we find God's special protection for these groups. God's protection of the lower classes through the Law reveals something about His very nature. In the Book of Psalms, we see God's care for the poor. God says that He is "A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows" (Psalms 68:5). The Psalmist said, "I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted And justice for the poor" (Ps 140:12). "The LORD performs righteous deeds And judgments for all who are oppressed," the Psalmist said (Ps 103:6). God made special provisions for the protection of these classes of people throughout the Law. In Lev. 19:9–10, God protected strangers and the poor by providing for them through the gleanings in the corners of the fields. In Deut. 14:28–29, God provided special Laws for strangers, the fatherless, and widows. At the opening of his book, the prophet Isaiah called the Israelites to repent of their sin. God said, "Learn to do good; Seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow" (Isaiah 1:17). This admonition appears multiple times throughout the Old Testament and is, in fact, what James in the New Testament called "basic religion." He said, "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).

As you read the first reading, try to imagine what it would be like to have absolutely nothing and no social standing in the ancient world. *Note: Verse 27 was included for context.*

First Reading:

> *Exodus 22:20-27 NAS95 20 "He who sacrifices to any god, other than to the LORD alone, shall be utterly destroyed. 21 "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. 22 "You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. 23 "If you afflict him at all, and if he does cry out to Me, I will surely hear his cry; 24 and My anger will be kindled, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become*

> *widows and your children fatherless. 25 "If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, you are not to act as a creditor to him; you shall not charge him interest. 26 "If you ever take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, you are to return it to him before the sun sets, 27 for that is his only covering; it is his cloak for his body. What else shall he sleep in? And it shall come about that when he cries out to Me, I will hear him, for I am gracious.*

The reading opens in verse 20 with the often-repeated warning about idolatry. "He who sacrifices to any god, other than to the LORD alone, shall be utterly destroyed" (Exodus 20:20). In the next verse, God introduces new teaching on how to treat aliens. God says, "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 20:21). Here, God gives a reason for treating foreigners properly: the Israelites were once foreigners under Pharaoh's rule.

In the reading, we see God's concern for widows (v. 22), orphans (v. 22), and the poor (v. 25). God said that He would hear the cries of the widows and the orphans and answer with judgment by allowing the people to be killed by their enemies with the sword (v. 24). This is something that was repeated over and over again throughout the Old Testament, especially in the era of the Judges. When times were good, the people would begin to oppress the lower classes, then God would allow an alien nation to overtake the people. Then they would repent, God would raise up a deliverer (for example, a judge like Gideon in Judges 6), the people would again return to prosperity, and the cycle would repeat. God's instruction not to oppress the poor continued in verses 26-27, as a neighbor took his neighbor's cloak as collateral for a loan. This person was so poor that they had nothing to pledge but their clothing. God knew this was a dire situation and provided a clear principle: fellow Israelites were not to take such essential items as collateral for loans. The principle is that when a poor neighbor is taken advantage of by being forced to pledge his essentials to survive, God will raise up a deliverer against the more prosperous man and bring judgment upon him for his unrighteous action. Instead, God said in Leviticus something that we shall study later in the Gospel lesson, "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 19:18). Loving your neighbor, in the case of what God said about not taking your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, instead meant sharing in your abundance and that of the community.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

As we move on to the second reading, ask yourself what it means to act in full conviction of the Holy Spirit in response to the biblical precepts about serving Jesus and others. The Jews knew the Laws about not oppressing aliens, orphans, and the poor, yet they didn't practice what was preached. You may have heard the cute acronym "J-O-Y," which means to consider our lives in light of the hierarchy of Jesus, others, and you. As the teaching goes, we should consider Jesus first, then others, and finally ourselves. See what you can uncover from Saint Paul as you read his admonition on taking the Word to heart.

Second Reading:

> *5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. 6 You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. 8 For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. 9 For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, 10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come. (1 Thessalonians 1:5-10)*

Paul told the Thessalonians how impressed he was with them because they didn't just do as he told them to ("word only," v. 5), but also carried out what he directed through the power of the Holy Spirit. Not only that, but they became examples to others (v. 7). The Thessalonians turned from the worship of idols, as was the custom of their culture, to the worship of the One True God (v. 9). Finally, Paul commended them for holding hope in the resurrection of the dead. When he said that Jesus "rescues us from the wrath to come" (v. 10), he meant the eternal punishment promised to unbelievers in hell, not some temporal deliverance or rapture (catching up) from their present circumstances. Later in the Book, Paul discusses how believers alive when Jesus returns will be united with him in the clouds (1 Thessalonians 4:17), which is the context of the book and movie *Left Behind* (we will cover that in a future lesson). Paul's key point to the Thessalonians was his commendation of them for living out their Christian lives in word and action, something the

Sadducees and Pharisees in the Gospel narrative hadn't learned.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

In the second reading, we saw Saint Paul's admonition to take the Word to heart and his commendation of the Thessalonians for doing so. In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus summarizes the Law into two key points that reveal the hypocrisy of the Pharisees' hearts, who didn't take the Word to heart. This lesson is another of Jesus' interactions with the Jewish ruling authorities during His inevitable journey to death at Calvary, this time with one of the Pharisees' best legal experts.

Gospel Reading:

> *34 But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. 35 One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, 36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" 37 And He said to him, "'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' 38 This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' 40 On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:34-40)*

First, a bit about the context. When Matthew says, "But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees," he refers to the story that just happened. Here, the Sadducees, who didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead, asked Jesus about a theoretical expansion of the Levitical Law known as Levirate Marriage. They asked Jesus about the relationship in the resurrection between a certain woman and the chain of husbands the Levirate Law afforded her. Remember that the Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection, but they were just trying to trap Jesus. When they asked Jesus whose husband the woman would be in the resurrection after being married to seven different brothers, Jesus answered them as follows: *29 But Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God. 30 For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. 31 But regarding the*

resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: 32 'I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living." 33 When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at His teaching. (Matthew 22:29-33)

The Sadducees' brief silence gave the Pharisees a chance to test Jesus themselves. They asked Him, "Which is the great commandment in the Law?" (v. 36), again addressing Him with the honorable title of Rabbi (teacher). When the Pharisees use the term "Law," they mean the whole of the Old Testament. During that era, rabbis frequently debated which elements of the Law carried the most weight and which could be given less weight or even discounted. Jesus' answer summarized the whole Canon of both the Law **and** the Prophetic writings. He answered them by quoting from the Levitical Law, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets" (vv. 38-40). Here, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:5, or the "Shema," a phrase that religious Jews stated twice a day. He also quoted from Leviticus 19:18, which we mentioned in the discussion of the first reading.

Jesus says a true follower of God is a whole being, with a heart united in purpose (heart, soul, and mind), rather than compartmentalized theoretical knowledge that doesn't lead to action. Loving God naturally leads us to keep His commandments. Jesus said in John 14:23, "If anyone loves Me, he will obey my teaching. . . ." Saint John continued Jesus' connection between love and action when He said, "Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue, but with action and in truth" (1 John 3:18). And again, "We love, because He first loved us. If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also" (1 John 4:19-21).

This was the heart of the indictment against the Pharisees. They were a group about which it could be said, "do as I say, but not as I do," as the expression goes. Love demands concrete action, not just correct information about God. This means helping your neighbor when he needs it, not offering him a loan by taking his cloak as collateral, as we saw in the first reading. Loving your neighbor as yourself also means loving yourself as someone created in the image of God. This means caring for our bodies, spiritually and physically, as temples of the Holy Spirit.

Reflection Questions

1. As you journey through the week, what does it look like for you to have a heart united in love and action for God? In our global society, what "neighbor" is God placing on your heart to help with a gift that doesn't require a loan or collateral?

2. Spiritually, we are all as helpless as the orphans and widows of the ancient society. How do you respond to God's heart for you in your own spiritual poverty? What spiritual resources (see below) have you appropriated in your life? Which ones do you need to continue internalizing?

Spiritual Resources in Christ:

- I have been washed (1 Corinthians 6:11).
- I have been sanctified (set apart for special use) (1 Corinthians 6:11).
- I have been justified (pronounced "not guilty") (1 Corinthians 6:11)
- I have been forgiven of my sins (1 John 1:9)
- When I sin, I have an Advocate – Jesus Christ, who speaks to the Father in my defense (1 John 2:1)
- I am a new creation, the old has passed away, and the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17)

- I have been blessed in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Ephesians 1:3)
- I belong, I have been adopted, I have a spiritual family (Ephesians 1:5)
- I have resurrection power (Ephesians 1:19-20)
- I have God's grace that teaches me to say "no" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live a self-controlled, upright, and godly life (Titus 2:11-12, 1 Corinthians 10:13)

3. Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-14. Unpack the meaning of verse 13 in light of the surrounding verses. How does this spiritual truth help you live as a Christian in the face of temptation?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 145: 10/18/2026

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 open with the first reading from the Book of Isaiah, where we see a prophecy about a future world leader fulfilled about 150 years later. Then we move to the second reading from Paul's Letter to the Thessalonians, including a general introduction to that Book. Finally, we conclude with another of Jesus' interactions with the Pharisees from the Gospel of Matthew.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is a prophecy from the Book of Isaiah, which is a book filled with an amazing series of prophecies, especially regarding the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. His prophecies include many detailed predictions about the Messiah, including that He would be born of a virgin and even that He would be named Immanuel, meaning God with us (Isaiah 7:14). The reading today also contains a prophecy about a world leader who, like Jesus, was not yet born, and the prophecy also includes his future name, although he wouldn't be born until a century and a half later. One verse before today's reading, a lead-in introduced today's message. God said through Isaiah:

> *"It is I who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.' And he declares of Jerusalem, 'She will be built,' And of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid.'" (Isaiah 44:28).*

Cyrus was the King of Persia (in present-day Iran) and reigned from around 559 BC to 530 BC. God used King Cyrus as his shepherd to "regather" the Jewish people (Ezra 1:1-4) after their deportation to Babylon in three waves in the years 605, 597, and 586 BC (2 Kings 24-25). King Cyrus ordered the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple that the Babylonians destroyed in 586 BC. The rebuilding of the temple under the direction of Nehemiah marked the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy above. As we move on to today's reading, we will learn more about Isaiah's predictions regarding Cyrus, who was named even though he hadn't yet been born. *Note: Verses 2-3 were included for context.*

First Reading:

> *1 Thus says the LORD to Cyrus His anointed, Whom I have taken by the right hand, To subdue nations before him And to loose the loins of kings; To open doors before him so that gates will not be shut:*
> *Omitted verses (2-3):*
> *2 "I will go before you and make the rough places smooth; I will shatter the doors of bronze and cut through their iron bars. 3 I will give you the treasures of darkness And hidden wealth of secret places, So that you may know that it is I, The LORD, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name.*
> *4 For the sake of Jacob My servant, And Israel My chosen one, I have also called you by your name; I have given you a title of honor Though you have not known Me. 5 I am the LORD, and there is no other; Besides Me there is no God. I will gird you, though you have not known Me; 6 That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun That there is no one besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other," (Isaiah 45:1-6)*

God called Cyrus His "anointed," in English, or transliterated from Hebrew as "mashiyach"which means "the anointed one or Messiah." This is the same word used for the "Messiah the Prince," Jesus, in Daniel 9:25. This language makes clear that God meant Cyrus to prefigure the later Messiah, Jesus Christ, God's true and final Shepherd of His people (Isaiah 44:28, above). God said in verse 1 that although Cyrus would not be a believer in God (v. 4d "Though you have not known me"), He would be used as God's "right hand" to "subdue nations before him" and subdue and kill kings ("loose the loins"). This prophecy was fulfilled when Darius the Mede, Cyrus' maternal uncle, overthrew the Babylonian Empire, as recorded in Daniel 7:30-31. Cyrus proclaimed himself King of Babylon in 540 BC after the great battle in that city. Secular accounts support this biblical record, including the famous "Babylonian Chronicle," a clay tablet that was found and shows details of Babylonian history during the period.

You may ask why God would prefigure the Messiah through an unbelieving, civil king like King Cyrus. God provided some insights into this in the verses that were omitted from the reading:

> *2 "I will go before you and make the rough places smooth; I will shatter the doors of bronze and cut through their iron bars. 3 I will give you the treasures of darkness And hidden wealth of secret places, So that you may know that it is I, The LORD, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name. " (Isaiah 45:2-3)*

Cyrus was a king that God set apart by His divine providence to use for His purposes. God gave Cyrus the power to "shatter the doors of bronze and cut through their iron bars" (v. 2). God said that it was He who would give Cyrus "the treasures of darkness and hidden wealth of secret places, **so that you may know that it is I,** the **LORD, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name**" (v. 3, emphasis added). God promised Cyrus these victories to reveal His divine power. God used non-believing people throughout the Old Testament for this purpose, including men like the Pharaoh in the Book of Exodus. God uses not only men but also animals such as Balaam's donkey (Numbers 22:21-39).

Consider how God may be using unbelieving rulers even today. Even if you disagree with the rulers' actions, consider whether God is still working out His larger plan through these ungodly leaders. Although Cyrus was an ungodly type of ruler, we can rest in the fact that God used even this ungodly

leader to accomplish His purposes. When you consider these things, you can find comfort that since God was able to predict with exact precision who the ruler would be to "regather" the Israelites after their deportation to Babylon, He will superintend all human events to accomplish His purposes. You can also praise God for raising up godly spiritual leaders such as Saint Paul, whom we will read about in the next reading.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Thessalonians. This Book is one of the earliest letters Paul wrote (1 Thessalonians 1:1), penned around the year 51, as confirmed by an inscription found in the temple of Apollo at Delphi (near the town of Corinth). Paul's two Letters to the Thessalonians are sometimes called the "eschatological epistles" because of their wealth of content regarding the end times, but they were primarily letters to the local church in Thessalonica. Paul's occasion for writing was to show his concern for the believers there after he had visited them on his second missionary journey (Acts 17:1). He had a variety of purposes in writing to them, including instructing them in holy living, commending them for their significant progress made in implementing the biblical truths he had given them, and correcting a misunderstanding that they had about the return of the Lord Jesus.

Read the text and ask yourself, what key points jump out at you?

Second Reading:

> *1 Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. 2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; 3 constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, 4 knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you; 5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. (1 Thessalonians 1:1-5)*

The key point that jumped out when I read this passage was Paul's overwhelming thankfulness to God for how the Thessalonians had embraced and lived out the Gospel truths. First, Paul thanked God for their "work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father" (v. 3). Second, Paul was thankful that they didn't just mentally embrace the truths of the Gospel, but they also lived them out "in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction" (v. 5). Finally, Paul was thankful for how they had emulated him (v. 5). The example of the Thessalonians faith provided comfort to him as he endured troubles from the Jews and Gentiles as he traveled on his missionary journeys. Paul said in Chapter 3, "we were comforted about you through your faith" (1 Thessalonians 3:7b).

A final observation is how Paul honored all three Persons of the Godhead in the opening verses of this Letter. Paul commended God the Father and God the Son in verse 1, and God the Holy Spirit in verse 5. Paul told the Thessalonians that their power came from God through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (v. 5). The word translated "power" in English is the Greek word "dunamis," from which we also get the word "dynamite." The Holy Spirit gave the Thessalonians dynamite, but they had to set the fuse and light it. Paul rejoiced because the Thessalonians took advantage of God's power. As we move to the Gospel lesson, we will see how the religious Pharisees **didn't** take advantage of God's power, but instead took the Scriptures for their literal "word only" (v. 5).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson is another interaction Jesus had with the Pharisees. Last week we studied Jesus' Parable of the Wedding Feast, found just before today's reading. In that study, we saw how Jesus told the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders that the kingdom would be taken from them and given to the Gentiles. This week's reading introduces a new group: the "Herodians." The Herodians were secular, non-religious Jews who held political power in alliance with King Herod Antipas (reigned 4 BC to 39 AD). Their alliance with King Herod and secular worldview set them at odds with the ultra-religious Pharisees. As you read today's Gospel lesson, you will discover a new alliance that emerged to fight a common threat.

Gospel Reading:

> *15 Then the Pharisees went and plotted together how they might trap Him in what He said. 16 And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodian's, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any. 17 Tell us then, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?" 18 But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, "Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites? 19 Show Me the coin used for the poll-tax." And they brought Him a denarius. 20 And He said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" 21 They said to Him, "Caesar's." Then He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's." (Matthew 22:15-21)*

The Herodians and the Pharisees allied themselves to fight their common threat, Jesus Christ (v. 15). Their plot was to trap Jesus by asking Him some questions (v. 15) that would reveal Jesus' opposition to the ruling Roman authorities and therefore make it easy for them to bring an indictment against Him. They began their attack by patronizing Jesus, calling Him "Teacher," a word meaning Rabbi (v. 16). Their plan backfired. When they asked Jesus whether it was lawful to pay taxes to the Roman government, Jesus amazed them with His answer. Matthew said in the next verse after the end of today's reading, "And hearing this, **they were amazed**, and leaving Him, they went away" (Matthew 22:22, emphasis added). Jesus told them, in effect, that He had not yet come as a military leader. Jesus not only foiled their plan to entrap Him with their question, but also validated the legitimacy of the Roman government in collecting taxes, something the Pharisees would have opposed. The irony was that the Pharisees led the charge in collaborating with their former enemies to defeat Jesus. But Jesus ultimately defeated their belief that the Roman taxation system was illegitimate. In yet another irony, the whole account was recorded by none other than Saint Matthew, the former tax collector!

Sometimes the easiest way for us to learn is when a teacher provides us with a clear contrast between two conflicting positions. The message God gave us in today's Gospel lesson illustrated two opposing forces that came together to defeat the Messiah, Jesus. During our study, we saw that these forces weren't really in opposition at all. Instead, they were both aligned with false religion. The Pharisees strove to obtain righteousness through the Law, and the Herodians found their faith in aligning themselves with the right group, with the necessary influence of the Roman government.

What does this mean for us today? First, we can trust that although Jesus didn't come the first time as a military leader, He will do so the second time He returns, as chronicled in the Book of Revelation. John said in that Book, "And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war" (Revelation

19:11). Second, Jesus' answer revealed that during the intermediate period between his first and second comings, we will have obligations to obey civil governments. Paul said, "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God" (Romans 13:1). Finally, we must recognize that God owns everything, and even though we may have to give to Caesar that which bears the resemblance of Caesar, we are to give to God the things that are God's (v. 21). This means that unlike the Pharisees who only gave lip service to doing God's work, as we saw in Paul's Letter to the Thessalonians, we are to emulate God by giving back to Him what is His own. This includes stewarding our time, talents, and treasures far beyond what our civil government requires. Paul praised the Thessalonians for emulating his character, and Paul strove to emulate Jesus Christ. Paul said:

> *8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, 9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, (Philippians 3:8-9)*

May we find our righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ and not in our political power, like the Herodians, or through our good works in obedience to an elevated and false interpretation of religious laws, like the Pharisees.

Reflection Questions

1. Since humans are made in the image of God, what did Jesus mean when He said to give to God what is God's?

2. Think of a few ways in which you can live this truth out in your own life this coming week.

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 142: 10/11/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the first reading from Isaiah 25, which presents a song of praise and a promise of redemption for the fallen earth and its people in a future age. Then we move to the second reading, which is a continuation of the study from Paul's Letter to the Philippians. Finally, we conclude with a parable of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew addressed to the Jewish leaders that is very similar to what we studied last week.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Prophet Isaiah, who wrote of God's judgment and blessings. The context is just after God spoke about warnings of wrath in Chapter 24 that began with, "Behold, the LORD lays the earth waste, devastates it, distorts its surface and scatters its inhabitants" (Isaiah 24:1).

This theme continued throughout that chapter with promises of wrath for those who dealt treacherously (v. 16) as well as promises of judgment of the angels who rebelled against God. God said, "So it will happen in that day, That the LORD will punish the host of heaven on high, And the kings of the earth on earth" (Isaiah 24:21). Chapter 25 then opens with a song of praise reminiscent of the Book of Psalms as follows, which will provide a backdrop for the first reading later in this study.

> *1 O LORD, You are my God; I will exalt You, I will give thanks to Your name; For You have worked wonders, Plans formed long ago, with perfect faithfulness. 2 For You have made a city into a heap, A fortified city into a ruin; A palace of strangers is a city no more, It will never be rebuilt. 3 Therefore a strong people will glorify You; Cities of ruthless nations will revere You. 4 For You have been a defense for the helpless, A defense for the needy in his distress, A refuge from the storm, a shade from the heat; For the breath of the ruthless Is like a rain storm against a wall. 5 Like heat in drought, You subdue the uproar of aliens; Like heat by the shadow of a cloud, the song of the ruthless is silenced. (Isaiah 25:1-5)*

These verses apply both in Isaiah's near-term context and in the eschatological (end-times) future, a frequent occurrence in Isaiah. The city in verse two symbolizes any city that sets itself against God, rather than a particular place. In the Old Testament, this was pictured in cities such as Moab, Edom, and Babylon. The Babylonian Empire was destroyed some two hundred years after Isaiah wrote about the capital city of Babylon, marking one of the near-term fulfillments of verse 2. However, in a future time, a city also called Babylon will set itself against God and ultimately be overthrown, as we read in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 14:8, 18:2). In the verses that follow, God promises to be an advocate for the weak (v. 4) and to silence all of His oppressors (v. 5d). An understanding of this context helps to understand the banquet described in the subsequent text of today's reading because God will prepare this feast for His believers after he vanquishes the enemies of His people. As you read the first reading, note that God will, at some future time, prepare a banquet for His people.

First Reading:

> *6 The LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain; A banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow, And refined, aged wine. 7 And on this mountain He will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples, Even the veil which is stretched over all nations. 8 He will swallow up death for all time, And the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces, And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth; For the LORD has spoken. 9 And it will be said in that day, "Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; Let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation." 10 For the hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain, And Moab will be trodden down in his place As straw is trodden down in the water of a manure pile. (Isaiah 25:6-10)*

God promises us that at some future time He will prepare a banquet for His people, either during Christ's one-thousand-year reign on the earth as described in Revelation Chapter 20 or some other time. God says that this banquet will be held "on this mountain" (v. 7a), most likely meaning the location from which the rulership will be centered, meaning Jerusalem, the center of the earth (Ezekiel 5:5, Revelation 11:2, Daniel 8:14). Next, God says that He will remove the veil that is over the nations (v. 7b) and eliminate death forever. Saint Paul spoke of the spiritual veil in the heart of every nonbeliever. He said, "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). Before this bountiful feast, once the earth has been purified during the time Jeremiah calls "Jacob's trouble" (Jeremiah 30:7), the people who remain will enter God's eternal reign. Any nation that ever exalted itself against God, typified by "Moab" in verse 10, will be put down into the "manure pile" (v. 10b).

This passage in Isaiah recalls what John wrote in the Book of Revelation. Biblical revelation works as God gradually unfolds information about His divine plan, first through the Old Testament writings of Moses and the Prophets, and finally through Jesus and the New Testament. Jesus' disciples understood more than the Old Testament saints did, and John understood more than did the readers of Isaiah as God gradually unfolded more of the scroll of revelation. Perhaps this is why the events in the Book of Revelation are the unrolling of a scroll (Revelation 5:1). Notice the similarity in Revelation Chapter 21 to what we read from Isaiah:

> *3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, 4 and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." 5 And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." (Revelation 21:3-5).*

We can rest in God's promises because, as we have seen, He faithfully accomplished His past promises and will also accomplish His future promises. God is faithful to do what He says He will do, and generous in what He gives us and promises us in the future. These truths are true regardless of how we feel about them, although as believers the veil has already been lifted from our hearts (2 Corinthians 3:16). As we move on to the second reading, we will see a continuation of the themes of faithfulness and generosity as God calls His people to model both traits.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Philippians. The context is Paul's teaching that we studied last week on the antidote for worry. Paul made a commanding call to prayer, correct thinking, and right actions in order to combat anxiety. He said that instead of worrying, we should pray (Philippians 4:6). Second, we should focus our thoughts upon the correct things, including a list of good things that are worthy of praise (v. 8). As you read today's reading, note that we have included verses 15-18 in order to understand the full context.

Second Reading:

> *12 I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. 13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. 14 Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me*

> *in my affliction.*
> *15 You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; 16 for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs. 17 Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. 18 But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.*
> *19 And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*
> *20 Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (Philippians 4:12-20)*

Paul said that he understood how to "get along with humble means" (v. 12), meaning just the necessities of life such as food, water, and clothing. He said he had learned "the secret" (v. 12) of being satisfied whether he had an abundance or a lack of what he needed. In verse 13, Paul revealed the secret of his success in dealing with a lack of provision. He said, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." The verb that Paul used for being able to do all things means to "be strong," or to have strength. The word he used for "strengthens me" means to "put power in." Paul was saying he could be strong when he was lacking because God infuses him with the power he needs. In the closing verse, Paul said God would supply all our needs "according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (v. 19). This means God will supply our needs in proportion to His **infinite** resources.

To apply Paul's message, we must understand the context in verses 15-18. The Philippians had given generously to Paul, and they were the **only** ones to do so. This gives us strong insight into how to apply Paul's message. As believers, we are to be generous in our giving because this is how God supplies other people's needs. We are to hold the possessions that God has given us with an open hand and let God take from them and add more as He sees fit. The principle is that the more generous we are, the more He will place in our hands to steward for giving to others. This is far from the "name it and claim it" theology often seen from many TV "preachers." Rather, this is how God ordains us to give to others by entrusting us to be good stewards of what He has given to us.

How many of us can understand what it means to live with nearly nothing? I remember a story about a friend of mine from Liberia who immigrated to America and is now a pastor. During the oppression by the various military forces in the country, he was forced to live without any food for a period of two weeks. He said that, looking back, he endured it through his faith that God would provide for his needs. His faith in God got him through it and kept him safe during his harrowing journey out of the

country. He told me something like, "It wasn't bad; you would be surprised how easy it was to go without food for two weeks when you are on the run, and you know that God is on your side." Saint Paul said, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson is from Matthew and is like what we studied last week, with Jesus addressing the Jewish religious leaders. This time the story is about a king who planned a wedding feast for his son. Notice how Jesus opens the story with "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to" (v. 1), which gives insight into the meaning Jesus intended the chief priests and Pharisees (Matthew 21:45) to understand.

Gospel Reading:

> *1 Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying, 2 "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. 3 And he sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling to come. 4 Again he sent out other slaves saying, 'Tell those who have been invited, Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are all butchered and everything is ready; come to the wedding feast.' 5 But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business, 6 and the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them. 7 But the king was enraged, and he sent his armies and destroyed those murderers and set their city on fire. 8 Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. 9 Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast.' 10 Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered together all they found, both evil and good; and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests. 11 But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, 12 and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?' And the man was speechless. 13 Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' 14 For many are called, but few are chosen." (Matthew 22:1-14)*

In the story, we see how the king, who by application is God, sent the good news (aka the Gospel) of the marriage feast for his son, who by application is Jesus. The invited guests were, by application, the Jews to whom the kingdom was initially given, but they rejected the king's message and went about their worldly business instead (vv. 3-6). Some even went so far as to kill the king's servants, who are, by application, the prophets that we discussed last week. The fact that the invitation came directly from the king made the rejection all the more serious. By application, the Jews rejected the offer of salvation provided by God through his Son Jesus Christ. As a result, they will bear the king's rage (v. 7). When the invited guests failed to attend the wedding, the king sent his servants to find other guests; by application, the Gentile world. The Gospel message went out to the Gentile world, and many came to the church, but not everyone who came was clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ (v. 11). The person whom the king discovered without the wedding clothes (v. 11) was guilty of a great sin because God was the One who provided the attire in the first place. The application is that of a person who goes through the motions of Christianity but was never "born from above" (John 3:3). The penalty for committing the only unpardonable sin of not putting on the righteousness of Christ (Romans 13:14) is the assignment of the soul to a literal place known as hell, where there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 8:12, 13:42). Jesus taught about this in His Sermon on the Mount:

> *21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. 22 "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.' (Matthew 7:21-23)*

God provides everything that a person needs to be properly clothed at the upcoming feast that we read about in the first reading from Isaiah. People obtain the necessary "wedding attire" by repenting of their sin and trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ's finished work on the cross. Any good works that believers do flow out of their relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9) as a result of the new heart that was given to them the moment that they believed (2 Corinthians 5:17). They are justified in the eyes of God, meaning that it was just as if they had never sinned. Although Scripture is clear that a believer's sins are not held against them, as we saw in the second reading, they are accountable for stewarding what God has given them. As believers, we are accountable to God for how we use our time, talents, and treasures. We will give an account of ourselves to God for our stewardship (Romans 14:12), resulting in various degrees of reward in heaven.

Reflection Questions

1. God will lovingly hold us accountable for the use of our spiritual gifts, so it's very important to understand what we have been given. Sometimes the best way to understand your gifts is to ask others. A second way to understand our spiritual gifts is to ask ourselves what we like doing. What gifts, meaning time, talents, and treasures, have you been given by God? Write down a list of two or three gifts that you feel, or others have told you, that you possess.

2. How are you using each of the gifts that you have been given? Pray that God would enlighten your heart and show you ways you may expand your ministry. Perhaps you will receive an insight similar to this: "I have the sense that I want to volunteer in a nursing home one night a week" (gift of helps or hospitality). Alternatively, "Many people have always told me how positive I am" (gift of encouragement), "I will be more intentional about encouraging those whom I come in contact with each week."

For Further Study:

If you want a more comprehensive way to determine your spiritual gifts, innovative spiritual gift tests are available online. Here is a link to one such resource:
http://tinyurl.com/spiritualgifts