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 12-11-2022



Did you know that even as firm believers in Jesus Christ that it's natural to have doubts about our faith? There may be days when we feel like we can walk on water, but other days we feel like we are slipping down into a deep, dark, sea. Throughout history, even some of the most famous Christians have experienced moments of doubt regarding their faith. We will see in the Gospel lesson today that one of those people who experienced doubts was none other than John the Baptist. In the first reading from the Old Testament, we will also see that the people of Israel were struggling to believe in the promises of God. Isaiah was sent as a messenger to encourage God's people to keep their covenant (or relationship) with God. The passage we looked at last week sets the stage for the unfolding good news that God has not abandoned His people.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading today is from Isaiah Chapter 35. Before we read the text, it's important to take note of the context, the audience to whom Isaiah was speaking, and information that we can glean from other prophetic voices in the Bible. This prophet ministered to the people of the Southern Tribes of

Israel, including Benjamin and Judah during the time that the Northern Kingdom was taken into captivity by Assyria. Micah and Hosea were prophets speaking on behalf of God at the same time as Isaiah. His message was one of repentance and subsequent hope for the future. Isaiah was a forerunner, one that announced the coming Messiah and his future kingdom, much like John the Baptist in the New Testament. Like the other prophets, Isaiah often saw near and far term events "telescoped" together, but even more so because of the greater range of his visions. This is called by the theological term "prophetic foreshortening." When we look back in hindsight, it's easy for us to differentiate between the near-term events and those in the distant future that have yet to be fulfilled. However, when we look at the events which haven't been fulfilled yet, such as the future era known by biblical scholars as the Millennial Kingdom, it's more difficult to determine the order and timing of the events. This portion of Chapter 35 concerns the coming Kingdom which would be brought in by the Messiah. Looking back we understand that this would be fulfilled at Jesus' Second Coming. But Isaiah did not have the advantage of knowing the difference between what would happen when Jesus came the first time and what is yet to take place in His second coming. This is why it's important to understand the whole of Scripture when we read isolated portions of the prophetic Books.

As you study the first reading, pay attention to Isaiah's proclamation of the future hope of Israel and the whole world of believers, in the context of the future Millennial Kingdom.

First Reading:

1 The wilderness and the desert will be glad, And the Arabah will rejoice and blossom; Like the crocus 2 It will blossom profusely And rejoice with rejoicing and shout of joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, The majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They will see the glory of the LORD, The majesty of our God. 3 Encourage the exhausted, and strengthen the feeble. 4 Say to those with anxious heart, "Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance; The recompense of God will come, But He will save you." 5 Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. 6 Then the lame will leap like a deer, And the tongue of the dumb will shout for joy. For waters will break forth in the wilderness And streams in the Arabah. 7 And the scorched land will become a pool, And the thirsty ground springs of water; In the haunt of jackals, its resting place, Grass becomes reeds and rushes. 8 And a highway will be there, a roadway, And it will be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean will not travel on it, But it will be for him who walks that way, And fools will not wander on it. 9 No lion will be there, Nor will any vicious beast go up on it; These will not be found there. But the redeemed will walk there, 10 And the ransomed of the LORD will return, And come with joyful shouting to Zion, With everlasting joy upon their heads. They will find gladness and joy, And sorrow and sighing will flee away. (Isaiah 35:1-10)

One of the things that Isaiah looks forward to in the Millennial Kingdom reign of Jesus is that the broken parts of this earth will be restored; that includes nature and people. If we pause to assess our world, it seems that every part of it is broken at some level. Families are torn apart, lives are exhausted, fear and anxiety seem to be rampant. Although Isaiah prophesied long ago, his words are very relevant today. Isaiah's prophecy is meant to remind God's people that one day all will be well—He will set the record straight. He will save us. Those who trust in God to save them are those who are called the "redeemed" and the "ransomed" of the LORD. To be redeemed is to be bought back or restored to one's original intent. To be ransomed is to be set free from being in the grip of an enemy with a payment. Both descriptions can be treasured terms of endearment for those who walk on the "Highway of Holiness" by trusting in Christ's holiness to save them.

As a Christian, it's important to be patient and wait upon God, even when we see great injustices going on around us. Impatience was one of the issues that got into the way of the Jews properly interpreting the passages concerning the coming Messiah. One may think that if the First Century Jews had a good grasp on the Scriptures so many of them wouldn't have missed the First Coming of Jesus. The Jews had endured centuries of persecution from the various world powers, including the Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, and finally the Romans. From all appearances the Prophet Micah made it very clear what would happen, even if this forerunner didn't explain the exact timing of the events. Micah said, "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity" (Micah 5:2). Micah named the exact town in which the Messiah would be born. Though there were two towns named Bethlehem, he differentiated between the one in the North and the one near Jerusalem in which the new King would be born. Like the other prophets, Micah also telescoped near and far term events today when he saw the kingdom of Jesus.

1 And it will come about in the last days That the mountain of the house of the LORD Will be established as the chief of the mountains. It will be raised above the hills, And the peoples will stream to it. 2 And many nations will come and say, "Come and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD And to the house of the God of Jacob, That He may teach us about His ways And that we may walk in His paths." For from Zion will go forth the law, Even the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. 3 And He will judge between many peoples And render decisions for mighty, distant nations. Then they will hammer their swords into plowshares And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they train for war. (Micah 4:1-3)

Micah said that the kingdom of the Messiah would be a time of peace, when weapons of war would be turned into peaceful usable (v. 3). In this age the city of Jerusalem would be the capital city of the universe (v. 1) and the King would serve as the perfect judge over the entire world (v. 3). The Jews

misinterpreted this to mean that the Messiah would immediately usher in His Kingdom when he came, and who can blame them? It was only after Jesus was crucified, raised from the dead, and explained the Scriptures (Luke 24:27) to them that **some of them** understood. Even then, some doubted (Matthew 28:17).

Malachi was another prophet who called the people of God to be patient. He provided clear details about the events concerning the coming of the Messiah. In fact, Malachi announced that a forerunner, who we know as John the Baptist, would precede Jesus. He said, "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts" (Malachi 3:1). This New Testament Prophet would come in the spirit of the Prophet Elijah (John 19:21), and that Elijah would return during the coming tribulation period. Malachi said, "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord" (Malachi 4:5).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Exercising patience is very important, especially when we expect God to come rushing in and fix the events in the fallen world. This is even more important when, like the Jews, we experience injustice at the hands of our civil rulers. In the second reading today from Saint James, we see this important leader of the Jerusalem Church (Acts 15:13) cautioning the young Church about the need to be patient concerning the return of the Lord Jesus.

Second Reading:

7 Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. 8 You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. 9 Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door. 10 As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. (James 5:7-10)

James reminded us that the Prophets were an example of those who were patient and persisted through suffering and quoted from them as scriptural authority. He admonished us not to complain against one another, because living in the spirit of "unthankfulness" would bring about judgment (v.8). This hearkens back to Jesus' words: "For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you" (Matthew 7:2). James exercised authority over the believers gathered during the Jerusalem council (refer to Acts 15) and exhibited great patience towards those with whom he disagreed. One of the ways in which he did this is to claim the authority of the prophets. James said, "And with this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written" (Acts 15:15), and then he went on to quote from the prophets. James, inspired by the Holy Spirit, was supremely wise because he rested his authority on the weight of the supremacy of Scripture by relying upon the writings of the Prophets.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

As we move onto the Gospel lesson about a New Testament Prophet, I wish to have you ponder this question. Some time ago, someone asked me who I thought was the greatest man that ever lived. I responded with a question. "Do you mean the greatest man that ever 'lived' in the past tense?" "Yes in the past tense," they said. My answer was easy. I said, "John the Baptist, and the greatest Man that ever 'lives' is Jesus." Who do you think was the greatest man that ever *lived*? Study the text of the Gospel lesson and as you read, try to ascertain why the greatest man that ever lived would ask Jesus the question that he did.

Gospel Reading:

2 Now when John in prison heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples, 3 and said to Him, "Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?" 4 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see: 5 the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM. 6 And blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me." 7 And as these were going away, Jesus began to speak to the multitudes about John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? 8 But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' palaces. 9 But why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I say to you, and one who is more than a prophet. 10 This is the one about whom it is written, 'BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER BEFORE YOUR FACE, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.' 11 Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there

has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. (Matthew 11:2-11)

Why would John the Baptist, the greatest man that ever lived (v. 11), send someone to ask Jesus whether he was the Messiah? Well, if you were in prison for speaking the truth and you expected the Messiah to deliver you, you might have trouble discerning whether Jesus was the promised one just like John the Baptist. The question for all of us is whether we want the real Messiah or whether we want our own version of the Messiah (someone who doesn't leave us in prison). Saint Paul said, "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Even though John was the greatest man that ever **lived* (in the physical sense, although his spirit lives forever), John the Baptist was a fallible, imperfect man. However, he was commended by Jesus for his faithfulness in fulfilling the role of the forerunner or messenger. In response to John the Baptist's question about whether Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus said, in so many words, YES! Since He was in the process of fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies (the blind see . . . the deaf hear and the dead are raised to life), He was reassuring John that his faith was well placed in Jesus being the Messiah of God. As we saw before, Malachi said, "And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple" (Malachi 3:1b). Jesus clearly fulfilled the prophecies about the Messiah, including Malachi, and quoted it as proof of His divinity. (Matthew 11:10).

*Jesus is the most perfect Man that ever *lives*.

John the Baptist's shortcomings stand to give Christians hope, especially during the upcoming Christmas season, which is such a difficult time for so many people. Since even the second greatest man that ever lived experienced periods of doubt in his life, we too shouldn't be surprised when it happens to us. Saint Peter said, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you" (1 Peter 4:12).

Reflection Questions

1. What about you, have you come to the place where you are doubting your faith? Read the advice from Jesus, the Greatest Man that Ever **Lives,** and see what He has to say about coming to a place where you either confirm your faith in Him or find faith in Him for the first time.

16 For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him. 18 He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 19 And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God. (John 3:16-21)

Saint Paul explained, "if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; 10 for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation" (Romans 10:9-10).

How do these Scriptures provide you with hope, especially during the Christmas season?

2. When you think of the terms "redeemed" and "ransomed" in regards to your relationship to God through Christ, how does this give you hope and patience for God to "work all things together for good" as He continues to conform you to the image of Jesus (Romans 8:28-29)?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 11-27-2022

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we will learn about the importance of responding to God's revelation of what will happen in the future. Each Scripture passage deals with a dimension of what will take place in the future. Knowing the future gives clarity to the present and helps us to interpret the events of the past from God's perspective. This is true for us who know and study the Bible. God has given us His precious Word so that we can be informed about ultimate reality, thus making wise decisions with the one life that each one of us gets.

On June 25, 1876, the Indian scout named Goes-Ahead warned General George Custer not to attack the Indian encampment at Little Bighorn, South Dakota. Goes-Ahead was so certain about the negative outcome that he removed his US Army uniform and changed into traditional Native American Indian clothing, which was supposed to ease the entry of his soul to the afterlife. Custer considered these actions as "defeatist" and was so angry at this and the other scout's behavior that the General dismissed them on the spot, an action which saved the Indian's lives. Custer continued with the attack that in retrospect, had very predictable results. Not a single Army soldier in Custer's brigade survived the attack and as a result, little was known about what actually happened during the battle. It wasn't until General Terry arrived two days later on June 27 that anyone even knew that the brigade had perished. "Custer's Last Stand," as it came to be known, was a disaster for Custer and his men because he was ill-prepared for the battle. The well-skilled and qualified General was alert, yet he ultimately wasn't equipped with the resources necessary to win the battle. Even though he was forewarned, he did not take the warning seriously, and thus, suffered irrevocable

damages.

What can we learn about General Custer's Last Stand? Although this military leader was forewarned, he overestimated his capabilities and underestimated the enemy's force. Likewise, we often overestimate our own abilities, and underestimate the power of the enemy. We often think that we can handle life on our own. What we don't know is that the enemy of our soul is a "roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). This puts us in a precarious place, for we were originally designed by God to rule and reign with Him (Genesis 1:26-27), but we are hounded by an enemy. The natural state of humankind, now, is one of being under God's wrath (Romans 1:18); not being able to give God our full allegiance, devotion, and worship. He gives us every chance to repent of our disloyalty and find our protection from impending judgment by His gift of Christ Jesus. In His kindness, God warns His precious creation, humans, about the return of the Lord and the coming tribulation for those who haven't trusted in Christ through faith. Yet many still persist in their sin and unbelief. The Bible is full of admonition for people to believe while they still have the chance. The Prophet Isaiah said, "Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near." In the Old Testament Book of Genesis, God instructed Noah to build an ark to save his family from the coming global flood (Genesis 6:13). Although the people didn't have the Bible, Noah, who was called a "preacher of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5), warned the people about their coming destruction. In spite of the fact that they were cautioned for 120 years (Genesis 6:3) the entire world perished except for Noah and his family (7:21-22). Though only Noah's family believed, it's certain that anyone who would have sought refuge in the ark would have been allowed to enter and be saved.

The Holy Scriptures play a very important role in warning the people in our era about the need to repent and trust in the finished work of Jesus for forgiveness of their sin and deliverance from the tribulation that is prophesied to come upon the earth. People in the western world today have even less of an excuse to say that they haven't been warned since the Bible is readily available to them. In past eras, this wasn't always the case. Not everyone has had access to the Bible in order to receive proper instruction about how to become a believer in God and His plan of salvation. Many years after Noah's flood in the Old Testament, there was an era when the Bible became lost to the Jewish people and was rediscovered during the reign of godly King Josiah. This discovery led to a vigorous revival among the Jews. If you desire to read more, this history is found in Second Kings Chapter 22. The moral of the story of Custer's Last Stand and the teachings of the Bible is to "repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2).

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the book of Isaiah, a prophet who spoke to the people of Judah, in a time when they were threatened by a formidable enemy. They were the southern tribes of Israel, small compared to their brothers who had already fallen into captivity to the powerful Assyrians. Isaiah spoke several themes to his countrymen at the time of their suffering: 1) Take heart, for God is sending the Messiah (one who will deliver them from their oppression); 2) Repent from trusting in self and trust in God's salvation; and 3) God's has an important future in store for those who align themselves with His purposes and value system. A prominent theme in the Bible is prophecy concerning the eventual restoration and spiritual awakening of the Jewish people. In the first reading, we see the Prophet Isaiah making a prediction about the future restoration of the Nation of Israel. The reading is from Isaiah Chapter 2. Read about God's plan for Israel and the prominent place that Jerusalem will play in the future. As you read, underline the word "will" each time it appears in the text.

First Reading:

1 The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. 2 Now it will come about that in the last days, The mountain of the house of the LORD will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it. 3 And many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways, And that we may walk in His paths." For the law will go forth from Zion, And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. 4 And He will judge between the nations, And will render decisions for many peoples; And they will hammer their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they learn war. 5 Come, house of Jacob, and let us walk in the light of the LORD. (Isaiah 2:1-5)

In the introduction today, we saw that the prophetic message of the Bible was to listen to God's warnings and to be prepared in order to avoid future judgment. In this part of Isaiah's message, the point is not necessarily a warning, but rather a disclosure to all the people in the world what God will do regarding His People Israel. Isaiah said that in the "last days" God will establish Jerusalem as the true religious capital of the world (v. 2). Jerusalem will be where God will live and judge the nations, and the location of His teaching that will go throughout the world (vv. 3-4). God will bring worldwide peace and weapons will be eliminated and converted into devices for peaceful use (v. 4). The entire nation of Israel will then walk in the light of the Lord (v. 5). It is interesting to note that people of all nations will look to the God of the Jews to teach them His ways. The fulfillment of this prophecy is already underway, as people of all nations and languages have heard the message of salvation and have responded by following Jesus, the Messiah. Isaiah's message can bring us hope

that God's plan for His people will ultimately prevail and bring worldwide peace. As in-grafted believers in Israel (Romans 11:17) this should provide us with comfort that God can and will work in our lives as well.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The letter to the Roman Christians, written by Saint Paul, provides an astounding amount of information about God's version of reality. Throughout the book, Paul delivers the bad news (all have sinned, Romans 3:23) and that the wages of this sin is death (Romans 6:23). But he does not leave us in a state of hopelessness, for we find out that there is "no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). The good news is that Christ has paid the price for our freedom with His blood shed on the cross. We can now be set free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2). In this part of the letter, Paul has laid out the plan of salvation and is now warning us of the importance of what we do with this information. In the previous verses, he told the Roman believers to owe no one anything, except the outstanding debt to love. Love does not take advantage of others; therefore, love is the ultimate motivator and moral behind the law of God. Love is to be the pervasive character trait of Jesus' people.

Second Reading:

11 And this do, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. 12 The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts. (Romans 13:11-14)

Paul's underlying assumption is that people are changed when they follow God's plan of salvation. When our hearts are awakened by God's love, we no longer walk like the people living in darkness, without the love of God in their lives. We don't love in order to attain salvation; we love as a result of God's salvific work in our hearts. After the point of surrendering to God, we have a role to play to walk by faith in this new life He has given us. We "lay aside the deeds of darkness" recognizing the destructive nature of this past way of life.

Paul told the Roman Christians to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" but then went on to tell them to take off other things. In verse 13 Paul said to "put on the armor of light" and take off drunkenness, sexual promiscuity, sensuality, strife, and envy (v. 13) and lust (v. 14). Paul said in Colossians 3, "But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, [and] abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its [evil] practices" (vv. 8-9). God offers us empowerment to be able to take things off through the putting on of the mind of Jesus Christ. There isn't a magical formula about how we can put on the mind of Jesus Christ, but some ways are through the study of His Word, prayer, and fellowship with other believers. By studying God's Word, seeking the Lord in prayer and fellowshipping with other believers, we start to recognize the patterns of darkness and begin to make no provision for the flesh (the old way of life apart from Christ) so that we can walk in newness of life. It is a battle, and unless we surrender daily to God's Spirit who gives us the power to resist the Enemy, we will have as much success as Custer in his last stand.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

In the Gospel reading today, we turn to Matthew and the subject of eschatology, the study of the final events in the history of the world. This section of Scripture is known as the Olivet Discourse because Jesus gave it on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem across the Kidron Valley from the Temple. Jesus startled his disciples by saying that there would be a day when none of the huge temple stones would be left on top of each other. This was mind-boggling to his disciples and they naturally asked when this would happen. Jesus answered their question with the teaching of His return to earth and the end times. He gave them information so that they would be forewarned and could prepare accordingly. Thanks to their faithful retelling of this information, we, too, are forewarned and can live in light of what we know will take place in the future.

Gospel Reading:

36 But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. 37 For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. 38 For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, 39 and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. 40 Then there shall be two men in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. 41 Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. 42 Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which

day your Lord is coming. 43 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. 44 For this reason you be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will. (Matthew 24:36-44)

While no one knows the exact time of Christ's return, there will be many signs to help His followers understand what is about to take place. Amazingly enough, many people will miss these signs, for they will be all caught up in assuming that the world will continue as normal. They will be eating and drinking and planning for the future (marrying) with no concern for the impending judgment. Although the warnings have been replete, the receptivity to these warnings fall on deaf ears, as in the days of Noah. As a result, Jesus' coming will be a surprise to many, just as a thief in the night comes as a surprise to those who live in false security. Jesus' return will shock people who are with others who are snatched away in the middle of their daily activities. First Thessalonians 4:17 describes this event, "Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord." Jesus' followers will be safe with Him, but those who are not under Jesus' saving protection will be left to face God's wrath on their own merit. Humanitarian works, even the best of efforts, are not enough to create a safe position in light of this impending judgment. Only the merit of Christ and being found in Him will protect us from being swept away in judgment.

What does the teaching in the Olivet Discourse mean to us today? First, we must believe in the finished work of Jesus Christ in order to escape God's coming judgment. Even though we have been warned we must also be prepared by seeking God while it's still possible. Second, God calls us to instruct others so that they also find salvation through the only means possible, faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). If we accept God's offer of eternal life through faith in Christ Jesus, we can have comfort that God will spare us from the tribulation period coming upon the earth (Luke 21:36, 1 Thessalonians 5:9). In addition, we become people of eternity, living for another world and we find that this world is not our home. This changes our daily life because it redefines our value system and priorities. Finally, we must allow God to place us into situations that require us to trust more in God. Saint Paul said, "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Philippians 1:29).

Reflection Questions

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1. Review the following insights from the Bible passages for this week:

a. The passage from Isaiah predicted that people of all nations would seek the God of the Bible, wanting to learn His ways and walk in His paths. Are you evidence of this prophecy? Are there others in your life that God may be asking you to influence towards this Him?

b. The second reading encouraged the people of God to be motivated by love, walking as children of the light who reject patterns of darkness. Are there deeds of the darkness that you need to put away and reject? Are there aspects to putting on the armor of light (like Bible study, prayer, fellowship) that you can give yourself to more fervently so that you have the mind of Christ?

c. The third reading typified the followers of Jesus as those who are preparing for His return. As you look at your life, what evidence do you see of your preparedness for His return? How does preparedness get translated into your daily perspective and choices?

Which parts of these messages would help give you resolve and encouragement to live with an eternal perspective for the hard decisions in your life?

2. Whether Christ returns in our lifetime or not, why would it be wise to surrender your life to Him and His will on a daily basis? What have you learned about the future and God's heart for you that helps you to live for Christ, as opposed to just seeking Christ for "fire insurance?"

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we learn about the appointment of godly King David. In the second reading, we learn about our position in Christ as believers. In the Gospel lesson, we see how faith in Christ leads us to eternal life the moment we believe, even if we have committed horrible crimes.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Second Samuel. At this time in Israel's history, the nation was divided. David had become King only over Hebron, while a large portion of the country was still holding allegiance to Saul's lineage of rulership through his son Ish-bosheth. Upon Ish-bosheth's death, the leaders realized that they were like sheep without a shepherd and finally gave David their allegiance to be king over them as well. This passage tells how David became king over all of Israel.

First Reading:

2 Samuel 5:1-3 NASB 1 Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, "Behold, we are your bone and your flesh. 2 Previously, when Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel out and in. And the LORD said to you, 'You will shepherd My people Israel, and you will be a ruler over Israel.'" 3 So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them before the LORD at Hebron; then they anointed David king over Israel.

The leaders of the tribes of Israel made a public declaration of allegiance to David as King. It might have been a little uncomfortable to admit defeat and finally give allegiance to the rightful king that God had anointed, but they finally did. They relayed several reasons for being willing to give David their allegiance: 1) He was one of them, they are brothers; 2) David had proven his trustworthiness; 3) David was God's appointed ruler. These leaders had to come to terms with their misplaced allegiance in order to give their full support to David as King. With this public declaration, Israel was now united under one ruler and the civil war that had devastated the people for many years could now end.

This is a significant passage in the redemptive story of God's people, Israel, for God had predicted that David's kingdom would have no end. This passage verifies that God's will was accomplished, even though it took many years and many trials for David to finally be anointed King over all of Israel.

This passage also points to a future King who would be of our bone and flesh (Heb. 2:17), who would show His trustworthiness through His sacrificial leadership (Rev. 19:11), and who would be the good shepherd of people who would surrender their lives to His rulership (John 10:11). Jesus came from the line of David and "He will reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). Putting our faith in Jesus is a worthy endeavor as we see the evidence of His competent leadership.

May we be like the elders of the tribes of Israel in this passage. They could no longer hold on to their vanity; instead, we see them surrendering to the king. This sort of scenario gets replayed over and over again as those who are guilty of spiritual treason finally let go of their allegiance to a false king and unconditionally surrender their lives to the rightful king, Jesus.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Let's take a look at what Saint Paul had to say to the Colossians in the second reading today.

Second Reading:

12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. 13 For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. 15 And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities–all things have been created by Him and for Him. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. 18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything. 19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, 20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. Colossians 1:12-20

Paul provided some deep truths about the nature of our relationship to God as believers in Jesus Christ. These truths are so profound that it's hard to comprehend all that Paul said in this short section. He said that "we have been delivered from the devil's kingdom" (v. 13), which is Satan's empire (Matthew 4:9) into which we became citizens when we were born. However, after we were born from above (John 3:3) through faith in Jesus (Ephesians 2:8-9) God forgave our sins and transferred us into His holy kingdom (Col 1:14). God created everything for His own purposes (v. 16) and He is the Head of the Church, the preeminent One (v. 18, also John 3:16 "the only begotten Son"). It was through Jesus' death on the cross as the sin bearer that He made peace with us through His precious blood that was poured out for us (v. 20). The peace that Jesus earned for us extends not only to the earth, but to the entire universe including heaven (v. 20).

These truths about our new life in Christ are so deep that it reminds me of the words of the Christian hymn "How Great Though Art" of which verse three reads as follows.

And when I think that God, His Son not sparing,
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in;
That on the Cross, my burden gladly bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin.

Jesus bore *our* burdens on the cross. He did it gladly, knowing that through His finished work there He would take away our sin and disarm the powers of darkness (Col 2:15). With these truths in mind, let us move into the Gospel lesson.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

In the Gospel this week in Luke Chapter 23, we jump forward to the Good Doctor's account of the crucifixion of Jesus. This is a sudden turn of events since last week in Chapter 21 Jesus gave a prediction of the destruction of the temple and looked forward to the time of His **second** coming. Read the lesson for today and pay particular attention to the insights that you picked up from Isaiah 53.

Gospel Reading:

32 And two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with Him. 33 And when they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. 34 But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves. 35 And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One." 36 And the soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine, 37 and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!" 38 Now there was also an inscription above Him, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS." 39 And one of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" 40 But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." 42 And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" 43 And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise." Luke 23:32-43

It played out exactly as Isaiah said it would. Jesus had his possessions divided (v. 34), was crucified with others (v. 32), and proclaimed to be a King (v. 38). Yet even at the hour of His death, Jesus showed compassion for others. First, Jesus prayed to God the Father to forgive the people that were bringing about his crucifixion. He said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (v. 34a).

Second, when one of the criminals on the cross expressed repentance and faith in Him (v. 42) Jesus told him, "today you shall be with Me in Paradise." Isn't it amazing that this criminal's simple faith resulted in Jesus' promise of eternal life with Him in heaven in spite of the fact that he wasn't baptized and had never gone to church or synagogue?

What are the relevance and importance of Luke's teaching for us in our lives today? First, we can be reassured that like the repentant thief on the cross since we too have repented of our sin and trusted in Jesus' finished work on the cross that we will be and are saved. Second, we can trust that we won't receive what we deserve for our deeds, but will instead receive rich blessings from God purely as a result of His grace and not as a result of anything that we have done to earn it (Ephesians 2:8-9). Since Jesus already entered His Kingdom these blessings will come to us in both the present time and also in the future when we meet Jesus face to face. "And when I think that God, His Son not sparing,

Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in. How great Thou art!"

Reflection Questions

1. Reflect upon Jesus' words to the repentant thief on the cross, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:42).

A. In what ways is it hard for you to accept that someone who was never baptized, never attended church, or never participated in any sort of religious activity was granted eternal life with Jesus?

B. How long of a time period did Jesus promise would elapse between the present earthly time when the criminal was hanging on the cross and when he would be in paradise with Jesus?

2. Read this verse again from the second reading. "*13 For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*" Considering both of these verses and what we learned about salvation in the

Gospel lesson, is Jesus making us a promise that we too will inherit eternal life the very day that we die?

3. In the second reading we read from the second chapter of Colossians in which was some very important truths concerning our position in Christ. This continues the theme Paul began in the opening chapter. In that previous chapter were more truths that are important concerning our position in Christ. Read and reflect upon Paul's Letter the Colossians, Chapter 1 verses 13-14:

"For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

What are the some practical implications of what these verses mean in your life as a believer in Jesus? Answer this question in light of the following contexts:

– When I am feeling afraid

– When I am feeling that evil people are encompassing me

– When I feel that I need to try harder to be a better person and not miss Mass

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for 11-06-2022

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 learn about how believers can be comforted through hard times as well as some insights into God's eternal kingdom he has prepared for us. We see that in the first reading from the Apocryphal book of Second Maccabees, then again in 2 Thessalonians.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Apocryphal book of Maccabees. This book provides much very important information about the happenings during the 400-year silent period before the birth of Christ, during which time no prophets of God spoke (1 Macc 9:27). The purpose of this book was to provide comfort to the Jews who were enduring intense persecution.

First Reading:

It happened that seven brothers with their mother were arrested

and tortured with whips and scourges by the king,
to force them to eat pork in violation of God's law.
One of the brothers, speaking for the others, said:
"What do you expect to achieve by questioning us?
We are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our ancestors."

At the point of death he said:
"You accursed fiend, you are depriving us of this present life,
but the King of the world will raise us up to live again forever.
It is for his laws that we are dying."

After him the third suffered their cruel sport.
He put out his tongue at once when told to do so,
and bravely held out his hands, as he spoke these noble words:
"It was from Heaven that I received these;
for the sake of his laws I disdain them;
from him I hope to receive them again."
Even the king and his attendants marveled at the young man's courage,
because he regarded his sufferings as nothing.

After he had died,
they tortured and maltreated the fourth brother in the same way.
When he was near death, he said,
"It is my choice to die at the hands of men
with the hope God gives of being raised up by him;
but for you, there will be no resurrection to life."
2 MC 7:1-2, 9-14

Today's reading from Second Maccabees was written during a period of intense persecution of God's people the Jews. The Nation of Israel was under terrible oppression leading up to the time when the tumult against the evil pagan king Antiochus IV Epiphanes climaxed resulting in the downfall of the beastly, antichrist figure by the Jewish hero Judas Maccabeus. The reading provides one tiny glimpse into the horrors the Nation experienced under Antiochus Epiphanes. The closing verses reveal the

hope that the dying brother had in the One True God, and his hope that justice would prevail against his tormentors. One can only imagine the horrors that the Jews experienced during this time, times which were eerily repeated under another antichrist type ruler, Adolph Hitler. The Bible describes how in the end times before the return of the Lord Jesus, how another ruler will emerge whom the Lord Jesus will crush. "*Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming*" (2Th 2:8).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Thessalonians. In this second Letter Paul addresses the people at Thessalonica with some important information regarding comfort during times of suffering.

Second Reading:

16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, 17 comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word. 1 Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you; 2 and that we may be delivered from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith. 3 But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. 4 And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will continue to do what we command. 5 And may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ. (2 Thessalonians 2:16 – 3:5)

In today's reading, we see that Paul experienced suffering and prayed for the Thessalonian believers to be comforted in their affliction. It is important to note that a biblical perspective never assumes that Christians will not suffer. The difference is that we have hope beyond this world, as Paul says, "eternal comfort" (v. 16). It is God's love that provides comfort, hope and strength to keep walking in the good works that He has prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). Instead of being sidetracked by suffering and opposition, Paul asked his fellow believers to pray for them that God would cause His Word to spread and be honored among the people who have not yet heard. Paul recognized the reality of suffering but did not see the situation as hopeless. He turned to God for help and hope.

The question for us to consider is, "What do *we* turn to for help and hope? Some turn to alcohol to deaden the pain, or prescription drugs. Others turn to people like their spouse, children, or parents. While not all of these sources are bad, they are all finite. God is the only One big enough to take care of us. May we learn to turn to God for help and hope. Moreover, may we learn to share or need for prayer with others like Paul did so that we are not alone.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from Luke chapter 20 and provides some very important insights into to the nature of God's eternal kingdom. Let me provide some historical background to help you to understand Luke's message. First, although the concept may seem strange to us today, the Sadducees argument related to the Jewish legal concept known as Levirate Marriage found in Deuteronomy 25:5. "When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a strange man. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her to himself as wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her." The usefulness of Levirate Marriage in that society was something that we saw wonderfully displayed in the life of Ruth found in the Old Testament Book of the same name. Boaz, said, "Moreover, I have acquired Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, to be my wife in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance, so that the name of the deceased will not be cut off from his brothers or from the court of his birth place; you are witnesses today" (Ru 4:10). Levirate Marriage provided an important means of insuring the continuance of a family line. Ruth's marriage to Boaz was ***extremely*** important to God because it was through Ruth that Jesus was born! "Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab, Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse" (Mt 1:5).

Second, The Sadducees were an interesting bunch of legalistic Jewish believers who held the majority power in the religious court authority called the Sanhedrin in First Century Israel. They held different beliefs than the other group called the Pharisees. The Sadducees didn't believe in the afterlife, and only held the first five Books of the Bible to be authoritative. This last thing led them to hold some unusual beliefs since they didn't have the benefit of the vast array of historical or prophetic Books in the Old Testament Bible through which to properly interpret the Jewish Law. With this background in mind, let's take a deeper look at the Gospel text.

The Sadducees approached Jesus with false motives. They were not truly seeking truth from Jesus, but instead were trying to stump him. They wanted to trip Him up in this theological chess game.

Looking back to the previous section Luke said about the scribes and Pharisees, "So they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, in order that they might catch Him in some statement, so that they could deliver Him to the rule and the authority of the governor" (Luke 20:20). This previous verse was directed at the other group known as the Pharisees, the ones who *did* believe in the resurrection. In the Gospel text today Jesus addressed the particular beliefs of the other group, the Sadducees. Jesus, seeing the Sadducees motives and the faultiness of their presuppositions, treated them with dignity and grace. Yet they set up an impossible scenario for Jesus to answer based upon their belief system. Jesus explained where they were off base in their reasoning, and His points were as follows.

- Marriage is a valid paradigm for this age but not in the one to come.
- In order to receive eternal life, one must be considered worthy. How does one become worthy of life after death? He states they must be "sons of God" (v. 36). How does one become a son of God? Jesus said in the Gospel of John, Chapter 20:31-32, "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this Book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:30-31). Also, "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, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13). Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live even if he dies" (John 11:25).
- We will not experience death in the life to come. There we will be like angels in that we no longer will have the capacity to die. We will be eternal, and in that regard, will be like God. "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" (1John 3:2).
- Sons of God are the sons of the resurrection. God's resurrection life lives in us, making us like Him. The Apostle Peter said, "For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust" (2 Peter 1:4).
- Jesus pointed to the Old Testament Pentateuch, which was the only piece of the Bible in which the Sadducees believed, to prove His point about the resurrection. Jesus said that since Moses used the present tense in describing the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, this proved from the Sadducees own Holy Scriptures that there is life after death on earth. Checkmate, game over!

Gospel Reading:

27 Now there came to Him some of the Sadducees (who say that there is no resurrection), 28 and they questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that IF A MAN'S BROTHER DIES, having a wife, AND HE IS CHILDLESS, HIS BROTHER SHOULD TAKE THE WIFE AND RAISE UP OFFSPRING TO HIS BROTHER. 29 "Now there were seven brothers; and the first took a wife, and died childless; 30 and the second 31 and the third took her; and in the same way all seven died, leaving no children. 32 "Finally the woman died also. 33 "In the resurrection therefore, which one's wife will she be? For all seven had her as wife." 34 And Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, 35 but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage; 36 for neither can they die anymore, for they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. 37 "But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the burning bush, where he calls the Lord THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB. 38 "Now He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to Him." (Luke 20:27-38 NASB)

The main point of this passage was Jesus' teaching of the truth of the resurrection, which is the central hope for Christian believers. Jesus taught His disciples that he would be resurrected, and later all of His believers have the hope that they too will one day rise from the dead with an eternal, perfect body. The Apostle Paul taught a great deal about the importance of the resurrection of Jesus. Let's take time to read what he 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. Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. (1 Corinthians 15:13-19)

Even though the Sadducees only believed that they would go around once in life, they believed in the biblical truths from the Old Testament Pentateuch. Jesus showed them that they were responsible for their actions in this life. Jesus graciously taught them through their own Scriptures that their eternal destiny was a direct result of their choices made during their lives. They were responsible for paying careful attention to the walk with God. Jesus said, "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). Believers are transformed through the resurrection into a "world" that is also transformed, a place where sin no longer exists, and God will walk among us. As believers, we can look forward to eternal life with God through the promises made by Jesus that "we are saved by grace through faith and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of

God, not of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Reflection Questions

1. What is the importance of the resurrection for you? What difference does knowing the truth of the resurrection make in your day-to-day life as a Christian?

2. Describe the importance of sharing your faith with nonbelievers. How does the promise of God to give you a new eternally perfect body free from pain and one in which you will be free from sin and able to stand with God in your renewed, eternal flesh, motivate you to share with others this good news?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for 10-30-2022

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we look at a reading from Saint Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians and then the Gospel reading from Saint Luke.

First Reading:

The first reading is from the Apocryphal book of Wisdom.

Before the LORD the whole universe is as a grain from a balance
or a drop of morning dew come down upon the earth.
But you have mercy on all, because you can do all things;
and you overlook people's sins that they may repent.
For you love all things that are
and loathe nothing that you have made;
for what you hated, you would not have fashioned.
And how could a thing remain, unless you willed it;
or be preserved, had it not been called forth by you?

But you spare all things, because they are yours,
O LORD and lover of souls,
for your imperishable spirit is in all things!
Therefore you rebuke offenders little by little,
warn them and remind them of the sins they are committing,
that they may abandon their wickedness and believe in you, O LORD!
Wisdom WIS 11:22-12:2

The reading from the Book of Wisdom affirms the biblical value that God places upon repentance. God is patient with us as sinners so that He gives us the time and wisdom we need to repent. Saint Peter affirmed this. "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" (2 Peter 3:9). God calls us, as the reading says, to "abandon (our) wickedness and believe in (Him)", the only source of total and true forgiveness. "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Even though "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a), "the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23b).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

It was a very windy midsummer day in northern Michigan as I raced my windsurf board across the Straits of Mackinaw on my way back from Mackinaw Island, Michigan. Earlier, I sailed between the towers of the mighty Mackinaw Bridge and then returned to the shore of Lake Huron to make a few adjustments on my sail. Next, I sailed seven miles across the Straits to Mackinaw Island and was on my way back towards the campground where we were staying. At this point the wind began calming and shifting in a direction that was going to make it very difficult to return to the spot from where I had launched. Eventually I made it back to the sandy shore of Lake Huron but was a few miles down from where I launched. I walked up the hill, borrowed a cell phone from someone, and called my wife to pick me up. I heard a strange silence on the other end, and she said, "You're alive!" As it turned out someone had given some bad information to the police who then called the Coast Guard thinking that I had gone down somewhere in the Straits. This led to a series of cascading events including a large manhunt with a helicopter, rescue divers, and local police operating from a command center in a marina in Mackinaw City. Evidently, a fellow camper had been watching me from the shore and at some point, she couldn't locate me. She then proceeded to tell one of the authorities at the campground who then called the police. The police then alerted the Coast Guard and the manhunt was on! The whole affair began from one piece of bad information. [*If you are interested you can read the story online here:*

http://www.cheboygannews.com/article/20130720/NEWS/130719421]

In the same way that a false report led to a series of cascading events that day while I was windsurfing, false information in the church can lead to a plethora of serious effects on the Christian church. This was the case in the second reading today from Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians. This was Paul's second written communication to this group of believers who had believed some false information concerning the timing of and events surrounding the return of the Lord Jesus. The overall purpose of the letter also included the encouragement of the believers in Thessalonica during their ongoing persecution for their faith.

Read the text including verses 3 – 12 which were skipped in the lectionary and are necessary to understand the context and the points which Paul was addressing.

Second Reading:

11 With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. 12 We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. 2:1 Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, 2 not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. 3 Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. 4 He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. 5 Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? 6 And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. 7 For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie 12 and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness. (2 THES 1:11-2: 12 NIV)

The key verses that revealed the context of Paul's address in this section were chapter 2 verses 1-2. "Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come." Evidently, the people had believed a false report from a forged letter reportedly written by Paul that Jesus had already returned. This news was very disturbing to the Thessalonians because they were enduring persecution for Jesus and if He had already returned then they had possibly been suffering for nothing. Paul had explained in his first letter to them how believers would meet the Lord Jesus upon his return. "According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever" (1Th 4:15-17). The phrase "caught up" in the original language is the word "harpazo" which means to snatch or take away. The same word translated in the Latin is "rapturo." Although the timing of this biblical event is unknown, Paul's teaching provided hope for the Thessalonian believers who were undergoing persecution. Paul was clear that Jesus' return wasn't something that they possibly could have missed since every single believer would be affected.

The Day of the Lord (DOL) is a very significant topic in both the Old and New Testaments. The DOL is the time when Jesus will return for His Church and the Father will pour out His wrath on unbelievers. The interpretation of the meaning of DOL depends upon the theological grid from which you view the events of the end times. Most scholars believe that the DOL occurs in the middle of what is called the tribulation period, what the Book of Daniel calls this period the 70'th week. "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city" (Daniel 9:24). The DOL marks the beginning of the second half of the period known as the Great Tribulation. Joel said about this period, "Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand–a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as never was of old nor ever will be in ages to come" (Joel 2:1-2). He also said that this was a time of redemption, for many people (especially Jews) will come to faith. "And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the survivors whom the LORD calls" (v.32). Like the "catching up" from 1 Thess 4:17, the DOL wasn't something that the believers wouldn't notice. The purpose of Paul's writing to the church in Thessalonica was to correct this erroneous belief.

Paul continued with a very detailed explanation of the series of events that would lead up to the return of the Lord Jesus to carry away His Church. Paul said that a "man of lawlessness" would be

revealed, a future world leader known throughout the Scripture as the "Antichrist." This satanic person would "oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God" (v.4). The lawlessness of this end time will be held back by the power of God until the time that the man of sin is revealed (vv. 7-8). The man of sin will be accompanied by "the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders" (v. 9). The people that remain on the earth during this time will "refuse to love the truth and so be saved" (v. 10b). This leads to a terrible conclusion. "For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness" (vv. 11-12). The powerful delusion is partly the counterfeit miracles, signs, and wonders brought about through satanic powers that are allowed to rule the earth during this terrible period of time. The satanic deception of the Antichrist, the person known as the False Prophet, and Satan constitute an unholy trinity that will wage war upon the people left on earth during the end times. To read about these three evil personalities read Revelation Chapters 12 and 13.

After the believers in Thessalonica read Paul's prophecy about what would happen around the time of the Lord's return, they would have been comforted to know that they hadn't missed Jesus as they had heard among the rumors that had been circulating. Paul's teaching about the end times helped them to view their suffering in light of the epic battle that would rage in the era when the Lord Jesus really did return. The "battle" though, is no battle at all, for "the Lord Jesus will overthrow [him] with the breath of his mouth" (v. 8). That shows us the undisputed ruling power of our Lord, which should bring us hope and comfort, just as it did for the Thessalonian Church.

Our take away from this passage is to heed Paul's warning. Don't be deceived – the Day of the Lord is still to come. Therefore, love the truth and let it lead you to safety. Many books have been written on the subject of the end times and we hope that everyone investigates these matters for themselves by carefully reading and studying the Bible. The brief introduction that we gave today perhaps raises more questions than it answered! We will close this brief introduction to *eschatology*, or the study of the things of the end, and move onto the Gospel lesson.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson for today is from Luke Chapter 19. It is essential to survey the context of the verses we are studying today in order to understand the full context and therefore the meaning of the text. If we back up to Luke 18:18 – 27 we found an occasion where Jesus was confronted by a

certain person that was both a ruler and chief tax collector. This ruler asked Jesus, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (v. 18). Jesus explained to him the requirements of the Jewish Law, and then addressed wealth, the particular obstacle to finding God that existed in the ruler's heart. "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (18b). Read the subsequent verses in this section.

23 When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. 24 Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! 25 Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." 26 Those who heard this asked, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus replied, "What is impossible with men is possible with God." (Luke 18:23-27).

Jesus mentioned the impossibility of a camel being able to pass through the eye of a needle. Throughout the ages, a story circulated that goes something like this. Somewhere along the wall in Jerusalem there was a gate called the "eye of the needle" which required a man to dismount his animal in order to pass through at night when all of the other gates were closed. As the saying goes, the existence of this certain gate meant that when Jesus spoke of a camel going through the eye of a needle he was referring to this particular feature in Jerusalem. The legend went on to say that in this Gospel story Jesus wasn't actually saying that it was impossible for a rich man to enter heaven because he was referring to this certain pint-sized entrance along the wall of Jerusalem. What he meant was that for a man to be saved he would have to prostrate himself before God and crawl on his knees in the same way that he could fit through the tiny gate. God does require a humble and prostrate heart in order to come to faith and to a certain extent, this legend is helpful if interpreted that way. Many people have researched this matter and have found that no such gate has ever existed in Jerusalem. Jesus gave an even better explanation of the whole matter in the text itself. Jesus knew that this young man was relying heavily upon his wealth and that it would be very difficult for him to lay it down in order to rely only upon Jesus for salvation. Jesus clarified that it wasn't impossible for rich people to be saved, but this could *only happen through the power of God*.

With this context in mind, let's move onto the Gospel lesson in Luke Chapter 19 in which Jesus encounters an unusual rich man that *does* receive salvation through the power of God. He didn't even have to locate the fictitious "eye of the needle" in Jerusalem!

Gospel Reading:

1 Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. 3 He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. 5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." 6 So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. 7 All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'" 8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." 9 Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." Luke 19:1-10

Zacchaeus' statement about giving away his wealth and repaying those he had cheated provided a glimpse into the true condition of his repentant heart. Jesus, who through the power of the Holy Spirit was able to read people's minds, understood that Zacchaeus truly did turn from pursuing wealth as his god and instead to rely upon God for his salvation. With the exhibition of his faith, Zacchaeus revealed that he was saved through belief in God. Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this house" (v. 9b). Once again, we saw that Jesus chose someone to pursue, whom everyone in the community knew was a lost sinner, to "save what was lost" (v. 10b). As we have pointed out in last week's study notes, good works and intentions do not make us a Christian, they merely reveal the condition of our heart. In this case, Zacchaeus' good works indicated that his heart had truly been changed by God's power.

What does it take for a person with power, privileges and wealth to become a Christian? The story about the Philippian jailor in the Book of Acts helps to shed light on what it takes for a person of authority like Zacchaeus in Luke's Gospel to be saved. In this particular story, the gates of the prison flew open after an earthquake, and the jailor feared for his life because he was responsible for the security of the men inside. If one person escaped, it might mean the death penalty for him. After the jailor awoke from the earthquake, he was sure that the prisoners were gone. Instead, he found Paul and Silas inside. "He then brought them out and asked, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' They replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved– you and your household'" (Acts 16:30-31). Rich people and people in positions of authority, such as this jailor can have a very difficult time coming to faith in Jesus Christ. However, through the power of God, even the hardest hearts can be broken. The conclusion of the story is as follows. "Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had *come to believe in God*— he and his whole family" (Acts 16:32, 34 emphasis added). The Philippian jailor was saved in the same way as Zacchaeus, through faith in Jesus Christ by the hearing of the Word of God.

Reflection Questions

1. Paul told the Thessalonians not to be deceived, but instead to love the truth that will save them. Read the following list of false beliefs. With which of these false beliefs can you identify? Pick one and then study the corresponding verses such that you understand the corresponding truth.

A. False Belief: All religions lead to God. Anyone that acts according to their conscience, even if they don't trust in Jesus, will go to heaven.

John 3:16-21 NIV 16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. 19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

Acts 4:8-12 NIV 8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! 9 If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, 10 then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. 11 He is "'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.' 12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

John 14:6 NIV 6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Matthew 13:40-43 NIV 40 "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom

everything that causes sin and all who do evil. 42 They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

Mt 25:41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

B. False Belief: God doesn't provide salvation to people who "just" repent and believe, salvation can only come through the authority of the Church.

Luke 23:32-43 NIV 32 Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. 33 When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals– one on his right, the other on his left. 34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. 35 The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One." 36 The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar 37 and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." 38 There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. 39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" 40 But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." 42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

C. False Belief: I'm basically a good person. If I go to church every Sunday and Holy Day as well as adhere to most of the teachings of the Church, I will go to heaven.

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1Corinthians 6:9-11 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

John 14:6 NIV 6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Acts 4:12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

John 3:3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

2. Now that you see these false beliefs contradict the truth, meditate on the following scripture. Then, take some time to talk to God, confess any false beliefs that you may hold, and ask God the Father to help you love the truth.

Romans 10:9-13 NIV 9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. 11 As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." 12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile– the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, 13 for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for 09-11-2022



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week in the first two readings we find some very important insights into the nature of God. This then helps us to come to a proper understanding of the Gospel lesson.

Last week we looked at the Gospel of Luke and gave some insights into what it meant to carry our cross for Jesus. We mentioned that God says, "For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:30). One aspect of what Jesus meant when he said in this context to "keep his commandments" is related to the First Commandment. This can be found in Exodus 20 which says, "You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship

them . . ." (Exodus 20:3-5a). God through his great love and foreknowledge cautions us regarding the risks in even creating an image of a spiritual nature because this could lead us to attribute special powers to that purely physical object. This is exactly what we will see in the first reading when during the time that Moses was up on the mountain receiving the Law from God the people built a golden calf idol to worship.

Introduction to the First Reading:

This reading is from Exodus and the context is during that 40 days that Moses spent on the mountain when God was giving him the Law. Since Moses was gone for such a long time the people returned to their former pagan worship practices that they had learned during their last four centuries in Egypt.

First Reading:

Exodus 32:7-14 NAS95 7 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, "Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. 8 They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!'" 9 The LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people. 10 Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation." 11 Then Moses entreated the LORD his God, and said, "O LORD, why does Your anger burn against Your people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? 12 Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, 'With evil intent He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your burning anger and change Your mind about doing harm to Your people. 13 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'" 14 So the LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people.

In the introduction we mentioned how the First Commandment comes into view with the people building a molten calf and worshiping it. From my study of archeology, it is very possible that this was what was known as a "pedestal god" which featured a platform on the top of the icon onto which

the god supposedly alighted. Giving them the benefit of a doubt along this line of thinking it's at least possible that their motives were to worship the true God Yahweh. However, we learn from the reading that God knew otherwise, for He said the people have "quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them" (v. 8). Regardless of the people's motives, their actions were a clear violation of the Commandment previously given to them. God's response was to ask Moses to move away so that "My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them" (v. 10). But Moses pleaded with the Lord on the basis of His special covenantal relationship with them and He relented. The people were those "whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt" and the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to whom God "swore by [Him]self [saying], "I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever" (vv. 11b, 13).

Moses' plea for mercy, brought about because of the people's violation of the First Commandment, gives us some insight into the nature of God. Moses reminded God of what he did for the Hebrews by bringing them out of Egypt. He asked God to remember his faithful servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, then recounted God's promise to make them a people as "numerous as the starts in the sky" and to give them the Promised Land. God's dialogue with Moses showed that the Father is longsuffering (patient), forgiving of sin, and will never forget his promises (mark this for later in the study). God cannot act against His nature.

The purpose of Moses' reminder wasn't of course for God, but for us! Moses' insights about the nature of God help us to understand our Father God and this understanding guides us in interpreting the rest of the Scripture. The Apostle Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 regarding the church there, "and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the **wrath** to come " (emphasis added). God forgives our sin and placates His wrath only through what Jesus did for us in dying for our trespasses. Our sins are many and include our worship of *contemporary* idols like money, sports, and etc. Perhaps we don't fall down before a golden calf, but we do fall down when circumstances arise in our finances or our health.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Paul's First Letter to Timothy. The context is just after Paul's mention of the dangerous teaching of the false teachers who had made inroads in the church. Paul said, "As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain

men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith" (1 Timothy 1:3-4).

Second Reading:

1 Timothy 1:12-17 NAS95 12 I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, 13 even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; 14 and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. 15 It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. 16 Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life. 17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Saint Paul said in the reading, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Of these I was the foremost. But for that reason I was mercifully treated" (emphasis added). Then, "so that in me, as the foremost [of sinners], Christ Jesus might display all his patience as an example for those who would come to believe in Him for everlasting life" (emphasis added). We can see in the reading insights into the nature of God. God is merciful. God saves sinners, even the worst of them – as Paul expressed about himself. Why did Paul think that he was the worst of sinners? This was because he persecuted believers in the church to the point of death until his conversion. He understood God's mercy. Finally, God is patient. He goes to great lengths to deliver people from the consequences of their sin.

In the Gospel reading we will see these attributes of God beautifully illustrated, with His patience and mercy displayed through three parables.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel for today consists of three parables, the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the

lost son (prodigal son). Our emphasis today will be on the last one, although one can easily see that the three parables share a common theme. Remember that all three parables in this section were addressed to the Pharisees, the group that we saw this past two Sundays. The Pharisees were a group of Jews that held to a strict interpretation of the Law of Moses. They were legalistic, false teachers who more concerned with outside appearances than with having a heart for pleasing God through faith. They loved money more than they love people (Luke 16:4).

Gospel Reading:

Luke 15:1-32 NAS95 1 Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. 2 Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." 3 So He told them this parable, saying, 4 "What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? 5 When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' 7 I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. 8 Or what woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? 9 When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!' 10 In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." 11 And He said, "A man had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them. 13 And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. 14 Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him. 17 But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! 18 'I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.' 20 So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; 23 and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and

has been found.' And they began to celebrate. 25 Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. 27 And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.' 28 But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him. 29 But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; 30 but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.' 31 And he said to him, 'Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 'But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.'"

The first two parables concern the celebration that occurs when something that is lost is found. The meaning of these parables is the same and is revealed in verse 7. "[T]here will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." Human souls are of tremendous value and all are born into a lost state of sinfulness at birth (Romans 3:23). It is only when souls are "found" by being "born from above" (John 3:3) that they are then transferred into the kingdom of God. Paul said about this, "For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:13-14).

The third parable of the prodigal son begins with the younger son approaching his father and asking for his inheritance while his father was still alive. Though he was the younger son, he still could plan on receiving some inheritance, but not as much as the firstborn son, and then only *after* his father died. So we could say that in some way when he asked his father for his inheritance he was wishing that he was already dead. The fact that his father went ahead and gave him the reward shows the father's great generosity. Then his father let his son go off and "find himself" through wild living in a strange nation, evidently not a Jewish nation because they raised pigs. The father's act of letting his son go shows that the father also allows freedom to his son. Soon enough the son had squandered all of his money and became a slave by "hiring himself out." In today's terms we would call this an indentured servant, but the New Testament would use the term "slave." After squandering his money as a slave to sin the prodigal son became a slave on a hog farm. Even the touching of a hog would have been forbidden back in his home city under Jewish Law. Then the son reached a turning point, something that is known by the theological term "repentance." Since he was already a slave and wasn't being treated even with the basic necessity of food, he figured that he would return to his father and become a slave for him so that at least he would have enough to eat. Also, he knew the character of his father and that he could trust him as he worked there in contrast to the swine farm owner who did not even provide him with any food. So the son began his

return to his father and this opened the next chapter of the story.

When the son returned his father saw him in the distance and embraced him. But the son evidently had been rehearsing what he was going to say and quickly offered his heartfelt confession. Certainly, the father heard this, but went on with the festivities of welcoming home his lost son. Just like in the other parable the lost sheep was found, the lost coin was located and this was cause for celebration! In the midst of the festivities a wrinkle developed when the older son heard the commotion. This elder one expressed deep resentment for his younger brother, and told his father that he had always done the right thing. It seemed unfair to him that his brother should receive a party for returning after blowing his inheritance while he had diligently sacrificed all of these years. The father's reply sheds light on the depth of God's love, mercy, and patience. "My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found."

The key players in the parable are obvious only to a person whose heart has been enlightened to the truths of God. The father is God the Father. Earlier in the study we found that the Father is longsuffering (patient), forgiving of sin, and will never forget his promises (to care for his family). The older son represents the Pharisees. The Pharisee like son didn't trust God's heart and instead saw God as miserly and not generous. The older son missed out on relationship with God, yet he was living under the umbrella of His provision. This eldest son believed he was righteous through his good works and sacrifice. As a result of all of his false beliefs he built a heart of resentment and entitlement against his father as well as his younger brother. The youngest son represents a believer in Jesus Christ who trusts in the provision of his Father. He, like all true believers before and after him, expresses a heart of brokenness, desperation for God and humility.

The big idea in this parable is that God is a lavishly forgiving God who goes to great lengths to save people. God gives people freedom to make mistakes but continues to reach out with his grace ready to bring repentant people back to his kingdom. In contrast the Pharisees have self-righteousness at the root of their beliefs. This leads to legalism in which they focus upon the letter of the law but not on the spirit of the law, thus missing relationship with the father. Legalism looks at outward standards of behavior without addressing the heart's motivation. Jesus warns that we can have all of the right religious terminology without the right heart attitude towards him when he said in Matthew 7:21, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

Which son are you more like? Where have you placed your faith? Have you stopped depending upon your own righteousness and confessed your need to the Father of His mercy? Or do you identify with the older brother, the Pharisee, who always did everything "right" in this life and yet distanced himself from needing the mercy of the Father? Saint John said in 1 John 5:13, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." If you are in the former category praise God for what He has done for you. If you are not sure then reach out to God for He is a longsuffering God, patient, wishes that none would perish but all would come to the knowledge of the truth. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Reflection Questions

1. This week's readings from the Bible highlighted God's heart of mercy, patience and forgiveness. How have you experienced these attributes in your own relationship with God?

2. Do you have a prodigal son in your family or know of one among your friends or relatives? Is their story one of redemption or are they still working as a slave for a pig farmer as in the Gospel lesson today? What can you learn from this prodigal person?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 07-03-2022

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we learn something about how to find peace and comfort from God during hard times by resting upon His future promises of peace and prosperity in the closing chapter of Isaiah. We learn about the value of humility and how God calls us to reflect upon His works and not our own. In the Gospel reading we see God's early missionary force sent out before His crucifixion in order to spread the word of the kingdom being ushered in through the Messiah Jesus and about coming judgment for those who ignored His promises.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The context of the message from the last chapter of the Book of Isaiah is God's closing message to Judah concerning the ultimate future restoration of Jerusalem, the city of God's own choosing given to the people of his choosing – the Nation of Israel. Chapter 66 provides important insights to the contemporary audience who were facing threats from the Assyrian Empire who soon took over the Northern Kingdom and also the Babylonians who later took over Judah itself.

First Reading:

Isaiah 66:10-14 NAS95 10 "Be joyful with Jerusalem and rejoice for her, all you who love her; Be exceedingly glad with her, all you who mourn over her, 11 That you may nurse and be satisfied with her comforting breasts, That you may suck and be delighted with her bountiful bosom. 12 For thus says the LORD, "Behold, I extend peace to her like a river, And the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream; And you will be nursed, you will be carried on the hip and fondled on the knees. 13 As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; And you will be comforted in Jerusalem. 14 Then you will see this, and your heart will be glad, And your bones will flourish like the new grass; And the hand of the LORD will be made known to His servants, But He will be indignant toward His enemies.

In the opening verses God taught Isaiah how Jerusalem was as a holy mother of God's people, a place of safe dwelling and nourishment full of bounty (vv. 10 – 11). Jerusalem, which was at that time still standing and had yet to face the utter destruction promised to it (Isaiah 22:1-14), had been since the conquering of the Jebusites and the placing of the temple there been a beacon of God's glory to the world. The city in which God dwelled served to reveal Himself to the Hebrew nation as well as the surrounding Gentiles. It is no coincidence that the name Jerusalem itself means "city of peace" since it was (and will be in some future age) the representation of God's presence and rule on earth. In verse 12 we see this aspect of the City of Peace extolled, where God says, "Behold, I extend peace to her like a river." The next part of this verse reveals the future, universal significance of the City of God, not just to the Jews but also to the Gentiles. God says that He will bring the glory of the nations into Jerusalem, with the coming of the nations is shown by Him to be a good thing. These would have been strange words to Isaiah's contemporary audience since they would have viewed anything from the Gentiles as unclean and dangerous. This was especially in light of the fact that the Gentile Assyrian army was poised ready to strike down the Jewish Northern Kingdom very shortly. The reading concludes by continuing the expression of God's peace and comfort to His people (vv. 13 – 15). God said their hearts would be glad (14a), that they would flourish physically like "new grass" (14b), and that He would conquer their enemies (14c).

This message of hope given by Isaiah the Prophet of Judah would have been very comforting to the people who had only to look to God for their ultimate deliverance from their enemies and future peace. Little did they know that the ultimate peace would not come until after they had killed their promised Messiah and waited while God fulfilled His divine plan by bringing the Gentiles to faith in Him through the mystery of the church (Ephesians 5:32). In our day we can look to Isaiah's message and find a similar application. We can trust that in the end God will vanquish our enemies, bring eternal peace to us as spiritual prosperity and ultimately will fulfil all of the prophetic promises that

He has made to us. When we read about the "nations" in the Old Testament passages such as we saw in Isiah, we can trust that God has a plan for us and that we are a people grafted into the nation of his choosing, Israel. As in-grafted believers, we share not only in the responsibilities of God's people, but also in the current and promised blessings.

The Scriptures teach us about the importance of focusing upon God, both in the good times and the bad. I remember once a few years back while I was windsurfing on the eastern coast of Florida when the boom which held the sail to the mast suddenly broke in two and I was forced to swim a long distance back to the shore. My readers may recognize that many of the illustrations I include are often drawn from my experiences windsurfing! As I made my way back towards shore with a sidestroke while grasping onto my board and broken rig and kept my focus upon the distant shoreline. I found it helpful to focus upon my goal as I made progress towards it at a snail's pace. It is during these times when keeping the goal in sight is helpful and how promises never to leave us or forsake us. During the easy times it's easy to place our beliefs on a shelf and not retrieve them again until the next hard thing comes along. But during our difficult struggles, God becomes paramount in our minds. This isn't necessarily a bad thing because we do indeed turn closer to God when hard times come rather than to fall away and feel that God has left us during our challenges. As I continued my long swim that day as I got closer to the shore the lifeguard who earlier been blowing his whistle at me for being too close to the guarded area began watching me through binoculars to see if I needed any help. With the whistle blowing exercise fresh in my mind, I happily scurried onto the grassy shoreline of the public park quickly rather than waiting around for him to question me. I thought, how dare I break down in the guarded area where windsurfing was prohibited, and there was nothing that the lifeguard could do about it! These lessons teach me reliance upon God and the value of focusing upon Him during the good times and the bad.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading picks up where we left off last week in Galatians. Here Paul continues his explanation of salvation by faith alone and not through the works of the Law. Earlier, Paul had just finished explaining the danger of the believers falling into the trap of conforming to religious Jewish practices for the sake of preventing persecution for their faith. Paul said, "Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ" (Galatians 6:12). Some in the church were urging conformance to religious practices including circumcision and the boasting about it as though they were the religious police, judge, and jury (v. 13). Paul's opposition to their boasting is the subject of today's reading.

Second Reading:

Galatians 6:14-18 NAS95 14 But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. 15 For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. 16 And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. 17 From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus. 18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen.

In this short message, Saint Paul extolled the value of boasting only in the finished work of Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for us rather than in anything that we do, even if it be of great religious or spiritual value. God promises the peace will fall upon those that walk humbly in light of this admonition although they may endure persecution for Him (v. 17, the "brand marks of Jesus"). Paul closes the reading and the entire Book of Galatians with a closing blessing in which he calls for God's blessing while affirming the brotherhood of those whom he had addressed so sternly throughout his message.

Paul's words from the reading reminds us of the Prophet Micah's message from God to the people of his era. Near the end of his Book he wrapped up the entirety of the calling God was placing upon the people in one short sentence: "He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8). As we saw in the first reading God calls us to focus upon His works and promises and through this we find comfort through our difficult times. In today's second reading Paul added to this by reminding his readers the value of walking in humility and boasting only in what God has done for them rather in what they have done for Him.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The context of the Gospel reading from Luke is Jesus' sending of the seventy, an early missionary group who went out across the land in pairs to present the message that "the kingdom of God [had] come near to [them" (v. 9). This group was given spiritual power for healing along with this message which also included an admonition for those who turned against God's provisions of the kingdom.

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Gospel Reading:

Luke 10:1-12 NAS95 1 Now after this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them in pairs ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come. 2 And He was saying to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. 3 Go; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. 4 Carry no money belt, no bag, no shoes; and greet no one on the way. 5 Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house.' 6 If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you. 7 Stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not keep moving from house to house. 8 Whatever city you enter and they receive you, eat what is set before you; 9 and heal those in it who are sick, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' 10 But whatever city you enter and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, 11 'Even the dust of your city which clings to our feet we wipe off in protest against you; yet be sure of this, that the kingdom of God has come near.' 12 I say to you, it will be more tolerable in that day for Sodom than for that city."

Luke 10:17-20 NAS95 17 The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." 18 And He said to them, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning. 19 Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you. 20 Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven."

God sent the seventy pairs with very specific instructions, the first of which was to discern the receptiveness of the house in which they were preparing to enter. Jesus had earlier warned His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount about "not casting their pearls before swine" (Matthew 7:6), meaning not to attempt to preach godly things to those persisting in ungodliness and unwilling to listen. Jesus expanded upon this admonition by promising to His missionary force that those who don't listen will be subject to severe and eternal discipline. Jesus told them that the destruction of those who reject the message would be worse than the destruction experienced by the unrepentant sinners in Sodom which the Lord destroyed by divine fire from heaven (v. 12). This missionary force returned after the conclusion of their assignment with the astounding news of divine power over Satanic forces (v. 17). Jesus then told them about how He had already seen Satan fall from his exalted position and how He had given them this divine authority which they experienced during their journey (v. 19). In closing, Jesus pointed them to His higher purpose. They were not to boast about the power that He had given them for their missionary responsibilities, but rather to rejoice in the fact that, unlike Satan and the nonbelievers, their names were written in the Book of Life in heaven (v. 20).

By application, the power to which Jesus extended to His first ministry force of seventy people extends to us in a certain extent today. As missionaries of Jesus, we are called to use discernment in gaging the receptiveness of our audience. We are also to recognize that like the seventy we too possess divine power that comes from God according to the spiritual gift which is given to us (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; and 1 Corinthians 12:28). We are also reminded to keep in mind the urgency of this message because nonbelievers will be judged with a worse fate than those of Sodom. And like we saw in the second reading we need to walk humbly before the Lord and exalt in His works rather than our own. We are to "rejoice that [our] names are recorded in heaven" (v. 20) while using the example of the seventy as guidance in how we are to approach that that may be highly resistant to the Gospel.

A few things to keep in mind regarding the reading are:

- There is a great need for missionaries in our world today.
- God places a great intrinsic value upon each person where He wishes that none would perish (2 Peter 3:9).
- The consequences of rejecting Jesus are real and eternal.
- Jesus demonstrated the value of community in accomplishing His missionary work by sending the missionaries in pairs. We don't need to accomplish our "scary" ministry alone, but rather we can follow Jesus' example and work in teams to achieve the greater glory of God.
- There is a fantastic spiritual battle that is happening behind the scenes in the heavenly realm. As believers we enter the "second heaven" which is invisible domain, but which is very real in terms of the spiritual battles being waged.
- Through all of these things we need to remember Jesus' Great Commission, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Reflection Questions

1. In the Gospel reading we learned about Jesus' first missionary force of seventy people sent out as "lambs in the midst of wolves (v. 3). In what ways do you feel as a lamb among wolves in the work that God has called for you to do today?

2. In what ways to God's promises empower you to accomplish His work, including the Great Commission? How does gaining a better understanding of God's promises help you? What are some ways in which you could learn more about God's promises and create future reminders about what you have learned?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 06-26-2022



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. A key verse this week that links all three readings together is in the second reading from Galatians, "For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please" (Galatians 5:17). We desire to accomplish great things for God, but our flesh works against us. When we cooperate with our carnal, fleshly desires, we may not achieve the full potential that God has for us. We will see how these forces rage among the people in all three of today's readings.

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Introduction to the First Reading:

The context of the first reading from First Kings is just before the appointment of Nimshi as the King of the Northern tribes of Israel and the replacement of Elijah by the prophet Elisha. Elijah, the great prophet of God, had just killed the prophets of Baal after the great contest at Mount Carmel. When King Ahab's evil wife Jezebel found out about the slaying of the prophets she set out to kill Elijah (1 Kings 19:2). This caused Elijah to flee and he came to believe that he was the only believer left in the entire kingdom. Elijah said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away" (1 Kings 19:10). God replied as we see in today's reading and corrected his false assumption.

First Reading:

1 Kings 19:16-21 NAS95 16 and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. 17 "It shall come about, the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall put to death. 18 "Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him." 19 So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, while he was plowing with twelve pairs of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth. And Elijah passed over to him and threw his mantle on him. 20 He left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, "Please let me kiss my father and my mother, then I will follow you." And he said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?" 21 So he returned from following him, and took the pair of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the implements of the oxen, and gave it to the people and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah and ministered to him.

God gave Elijah specific guidance to appoint Jehu as the king of Israel and to anoint Elisha as his own successor (v. 16). God told Elijah that he wasn't the only believer left and that He had 7,000 true believers left in the kingdom (v. 18). Next, Elijah went and found Elisha out working and placed his prophetic mantle (clothing) on him. When Elisha wavered about immediately accepting this responsibility Elijah told him, in effect, that to forsake this appointment would be an affront to God (v. 20). So Elisha accepted his new position and made a traditional sacrifice to confirm the "covenant" made between him and God to fulfill the prophecy given to Elijah.

The reading points out just how bad conditions had become in Israel such that Elijah believed that he was the only believer left alive. However, it is interesting that while 7,000 believers remained, even that was a very low number in view of the large size of the nation. Evidently most of the people had succumbed to the evil pagan worship practices memorialized in the Bible by King Jeroboam the son of Nabat who is recorded as a standard of evil. We see that standard mentioned earlier in First Kings. "For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat and in his sins which he made Israel sin, provoking the LORD God of Israel with their idols" (1 Kings 16:26).

The big idea in the reading is regarding the supreme sovereignty of God. Even when the great prophet in the entire world felt that all hope was lost, God continued making plans for the future of the kingdom and reminding him of His omniscience and long-term view. In our age we can look to this passage to be reminded that God has our best interests in mind, is establishing future plans for us as well as all believers, and even when we feel totally spiritually alone our sovereign Father is superintending the circumstances for His glory and our best interests.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The context of the reading from Galatians is Saint Paul's teaching on the freedom believers possess in Christ as contrasted to the bondage that the false teachers were imposing upon the people by instructing them that they must obey the Mosaic Law. Paul explains further in the reading the battle between a believer's spirit and their flesh.

Second Reading:

Galatians 5:1 NAS95 1 It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

Galatians 5:13-18 NAS95 13 For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." 15 But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. 16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 17 For the flesh sets its

desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

Paul reminded the believers in Galatia of their overarching purpose by quoting from the Mosaic Law in Leviticus 19:18: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." He cautioned them not to use their freedom in Christ to take advantage of their "neighbors." The Jews of that time had come to understand their neighbor in a very narrow sense, such that it only included their fellow countrymen. Jesus had earlier corrected this false teaching in Luke Chapter 10. There Jesus explained the meaning of "neighbor" by telling them the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus explained to His disciples that, of all the people who passed by the man who had fallen at the hands of robbers, the only one who acted as a true neighbor as intended by God in Leviticus 19:18 was "The one who showed mercy toward him" (Luke 10:37). This is extremely important in this context because the Epistle to the Galatians was directed at the false teachers who taught that in order for people to be saved, they must obey the constraints of the Mosaic Law making them, in effect, proselyte Jews. Paul and Jesus taught something quite different, that the neighborhood of God included anyone who was in need. Our true family includes those who have come to the Father through faith in the Son (John 3:16). Therefore, instead of trying to follow all of the contours of the Mosaic law, one would fulfill the spirit of the law by being a loving person. The only way a person can be truly loving (self-sacrificing and honoring of others above self) is if their heart is surrendered to God and His Spirit is now in control of the individual. The difference between someone who tries really hard to be a good person and one who is a Christian, is the power of the Holy Spirit alive in one's heart. The Holy Spirit is God's evidence that His life is inside a believer. While a believer is a work in progress and will not be perfect in this life, a fundamental change has taken place when we surrender ourselves to God through Christ. A new relationship has begun, and we are under the influence of God's Spirit, which transforms us. We begin to walk in step with the values of God's Spirit. And since God is love, it makes sense that He teaches us how to be more loving. This is not a matter of self-effort, but a growth in the life of God who makes His home in our hearts. Paul was clear that "*if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law*" (v. 18).

One wonders if at times Paul felt marginalized like Elijah as we discussed in the first reading where the prophet had fled from evil Jezebel's murderous plot. Paul, surrounded by false teachers that plotted to drag believers into the strictures of Jewish legalism, expressed God's prophetic word regarding the freedom that was to be found only through faith in Jesus Christ.

In our lives, we must ask ourselves in what ways are we attempting to work out our own salvation through obedience to some form of religious law. It's hard not to notice those in our neighborhoods

who never seem to leave their houses on Sunday morning to go to church. Do we hold to a false belief system that we are a pretty good person because we have faithfully attended Mass on Sundays and holy days that we are somehow going to be set apart from others who have not so zealously obeyed the commandments of the church? When we place our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins we have moved from darkness into light (1 Peter 2:9). The difference between a person that has truly trusted in Jesus versus the one that is relying upon their own works for salvation is subtle but very real as Jesus explained to Nicodemus. In John Chapter 3 Nicodemus, a legalistic Jew from the group known as the Pharisees, was a Rabbi who came to Jesus at night for fear of the Jews (John 3:2). Jesus explained to Nicodemus how he could only enter the kingdom of heaven through faith in Him. In one of the most important verses in the entire Bible, Jesus told him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Jesus went on to explain to him that in addition to the obvious necessity of physical birth, something much less obvious was necessary. In order to become a citizen of heaven one must be born spiritually through faith in God's Son. He told Nicodemus, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him." (John 3:16-17).

If you are struggling with understanding the true motives of your heart, the Scripture says that you should call out to God in prayer. Paul said, "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation" (Romans 10:9-10). As we move to the final reading this week, take a moment to affirm your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The context of the reading is Luke's recording of the beginning of the end of Jesus' earthly life just before he gave His life for us on the cross at Calvary. Earlier the disciples had been arguing over who among them was the greatest. Jesus then presented them with a child and told them, "Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me; for the one who is least among all of you, this is the one who is great" (Luke 9:48). He then corrected His disciples who had rebuked someone for casting out demons in the name of Jesus, saying "Do not hinder him; for he who is not against you is for you" (v. 50). This hints at some of the same tension that Paul was indicating in the second reading between the strict followers of the Law and those that followed it less closely or held to other religious traditions. Nowhere was this tension more evident than in the region of Samaria where the people were held in contempt by the Jewish legalists. The

Samaritans were considered a half breed people since they had been overtaken by the Assyrian Empire during the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC. Interestingly, Jesus turned to this despised group for help in making the preparations for the celebration of His last Passover feast. This was the Passover after which the true Lamb of God would be sacrificed for the sins of the world.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 9:51-62 NAS95 51 When the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined to go to Jerusalem; 52 and He sent messengers on ahead of Him, and they went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make arrangements for Him. 53 But they did not receive Him, because He was traveling toward Jerusalem. 54 When His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" 55 But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; 56 for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." And they went on to another village. 57 As they were going along the road, someone said to Him, "I will follow You wherever You go." 58 And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." 59 And He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father." 60 But He said to him, "Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God." 61 Another also said, "I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home." 62 But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

We see in the reading that the Samaritans didn't welcome Jesus' disciples' efforts in making the arrangements for the Passover feast even though Jesus had sent messengers ahead of time to them (vv. 52-53). Instead, they were forced to travel on to another village, one which was very likely outside the constraints of Samaritan beliefs. When James and John, named by Jesus the "Sons of Thunder" (Mark 3:17), were confronted with the rejection of their efforts they showed their passion and love for Jesus by asking Him whether they should command fire to come down from the sky and destroy the Samaritans (v. 54). The disciples were familiar with how Elijah had commanded fire to come down from the sky to consume the sacrifice during the contest with the prophets of Baal, but now they were asking not to burn already dead cattle but rather living people! Jesus quickly corrected their false thinking and reminded them that He didn't come to "*destroy men's lives, but to save them*" (v. 56). This is reminiscent of what we read in our discussion of the second reading from John 3:17 where Jesus said, "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him." As the reading progressed, Jesus taught His disciples about true discipleship and answering the calling of God. A true disciple would have to be willing to not only forsake their comfortable home (v. 58) but also to forsake their family in order to follow Him (v.

59). Here we see a clear parallel with Elisha's initial response to God's call through Elijah that we read about in the first reading.

As believers in the Lord Jesus, we are called to forsake the things which hold us back to true obedience of the Lord Jesus. As we saw in the first reading, when God places a calling upon our lives, we are to respond in obedience. Our answer must be to forsake the things which may hold us back, whether they be family, as we saw in the Gospel reading, or religious practices as we saw in the second. Like Elisha, even if in our humanness we hesitate for a moment while we count the cost of our obedience, we are called to respond in faith by following the directives given to us by God. As a first step of belief we are called to forsake the false understanding that we are saved from our good works and rather seeing that our deeds flow from our relationship with God. As we enter into God's invisible spiritual kingdom, the "kingdom of heaven" that Jesus explained to Nicodemus in John 3:3, we participate through God's power, as Paul said in the reading from Galatians, being led by the Spirit. At times, although we too may desire to command fire down from heaven to consume our adversaries, Jesus calls us to a higher standard by recognizing these people as our "neighbors." This battle will continue for the duration of our life here on earth, "For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please" (Galatians 5:17).

Reflection Questions

1. Most Christians are not known for their love. Instead, the world characterizes us as judgmental, harsh, and angry. Who are the "neighbors" that you regularly interact with? What would it look like for you to walk in the Spirit and change this characterization with your "neighbor?"

2. Jesus illustrated true discipleship as a relationship with Him that prioritized Him above all other priorities. In what ways have you made intentional decisions to orient your life around His Kingdom principles? What has been the cost of discipleship for you? Are there any new ways that He is asking you to follow Him?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 06-19-2022



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we spend a great deal of time discussing the mysterious person of Melchizedek mentioned in a reading from Genesis. We dedicate so much time to this man because of the way his ministry prefigures the eternal intercession and finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ on our behalf. In the second reading we learn from Saint Paul's teaching about the celebration of communion and conclude this week's study with the miracle of our Lord's feeding of the five thousand along the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The context of the first reading is when Abraham was returning from battle with the forces that kidnapped his nephew Lot (Genesis 14:12). Earlier, Lot had separated himself from Abraham after he chose the well-watered, fertile Jordan River Valley towards the east. Not long afterwards, Lot found himself surrounded by war in the nations surrounding the Dead Sea (Genesis 14:3). Abraham

mustered his troops and successfully rescued his nephew and all of his possessions (Genesis 14:14-16). Today's reading picks up during Abraham's return from this perilous rescue mission as he passed by the city of Salem, what we know by the modern name of Jerusalem (formerly Jebus, the land of the Jebusites).

First Reading:

Genesis 14:18-20 NAS95 18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. 19 He blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; 20 And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." He gave him a tenth of all.

In the reading, we are introduced to the mysterious figure of Melchizedek, "priest of God Most High" (v. 18b). Melchizedek is perhaps one of the most important people in the entire Bible, second only to Jesus. In fact, some believe that Melchizedek was the preincarnate Christ Himself, a "Christophany" or appearance of Christ before His physical birth to Mary as recorded in the Gospels. Why is Melchizedek such an important person, and what application does his ministry have for our lives today? Before we answer this question, we will provide some background about him.

Who is this man Melchizedek, king of Salem? In today's reading we find Melchizedek bringing out bread and wine to greet Abraham, who was returning from battle with the forces that kidnapped his nephew Lot. The New Testament provides more information about this mysterious person. In Hebrews chapter 7, in verse 1 the text reads, "Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him." Looking at the Book of Hebrews as whole, you can see that it's grounded in an explanation of Christ through the perspective of the Old Testament Levitical priesthood, thus the title given to the book "Hebrews" meaning Jews. In Genesis 14:3 Abram, later called Abraham, the father of the Jews, is called a Hebrew. We see back in Hebrews 7:1 that Melchizedek is three things: 1. The King of Salem, the area we now identify as Jerusalem, 2. A priest of the "Most High God," meaning a priest of the *only* true God, and 3. One to whom Abraham the father of the Jews gave tribute. The lesser person gives tribute to the greater. To summarize, Melchizedek was a king, and a priest worthy of tribute.

Going on in Hebrews 7 we find in verse 17, "You [Jesus Christ] are a priest forever according to the

order of Melchizedek," quoted from the Old Testament Book of Psalms 110:4. According to the Book of Leviticus under what we call the Jewish Law, all of the Old Testament Priests had to come from the tribe of Levi, but Melchizedek was a priest before the separate tribes or Law even existed! Yet Abraham gave a tenth portion (or tithe) to Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:4) as required under the later Law for all priests (verse 5). What is being explained here is that Melchizedek was one of a class of priests that foreshadowed the coming final, eternal (and final) High Priest, Jesus. Melchizedek, whose name means King of righteousness, could not have come from the line of Aaron (Levi) or Judah, because these did not exist during his lifetime. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrificial system, the final sacrifice was Jesus' own death on the cross which did away with the Levitical priesthood (Hebrews 10:11-14). Christ was from the "order of Melchizedek (Ps 110:4, Hebrews 7:17), not the line of Aaron. This new order is made even more clear by reading beyond the quoted section of Psalm 110 to verse 7, "Therefore He will lift up his [Jesus Christ's] head." This eternal priest, Jesus of the non-priestly line of Judah, is and will be exalted by God. As a side note, Melchizedek was the first biblical person to picture the reality of a priest/king.

Now, with this wisdom in mind, let's answer the question we posited in the opening, why is Melchizedek such an important person, and what application does his ministry have for our lives today? As Christians, we cannot underestimate the importance of what Melchizedek's priesthood teaches us. First, the "Melchizedekian" is eternal, in contrast to the Jewish sacrificial system that passed away after the destruction of the temple in AD 70. Truly, the Levitical priesthood died the moment that Jesus died and the veil was torn in two (Matthew 27:51), although the Jews nursed it along for another four decades. Second, the priesthood of Jesus is eternal and is not tied to the life of the priest. Hebrews says, "The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing," (Hebrews 7:23). This is a critically important point because the Scripture says regarding Jesus, "Therefore He is able also to save **forever** those who draw near to God through Him, since **He always lives to make intercession for them** (Hebrews 7:25, emphasis added). Bold text alone does not do provide this quote with enough emphasis, as the implications for the church and the Christian are enormous:

- Since Jesus lives eternally, He is always there for us. His intercession with the Father God is eternal on our behalf. In contrast, human priests died and their ministries ended with their passing.
- Regardless of whatever type of human priesthood was instituted after Jesus' death, the Scripture is clear that the sacrificial system and associated priesthood was eliminated by God forever. The sacrifice of lambs (Exodus 12:5, Numbers 28:7), wine (Numbers 28:7), or bread (Leviticus 7:13) was forever eliminated by Jesus willingly offering Himself and one perfect sacrifice forever, because "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14). We can be thankful that Jesus' sacrifice cannot ever be repeated

and will never need to be.

- Jesus declared victory over sin, whereas the Levitical priesthood left a memory of sin. We see this clearly in the Book of Hebrews.

  Hebrews 10:1-4 NAS95 1 "For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. 2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? 3 But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. 4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."

- Jesus is the Victor of sin and is nowhere in the Bible every portrayed as a victim. Jesus chose to go the cross on behalf of our sin. Jesus is our Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, the One Who suffered on our behalf. Jesus said, "No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father" (John 10:18). Because Jesus was victorious over sin, we can be victorious over sin as well. The Bible says, "but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57).
- Jesus instituted a new priesthood consisting of all believers, and the old, broken, bloody, corrupt (Matthew 21:13) sacrificial system of the Old Testament has passed away forever. The Scripture says, "But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). As believers in the risen Lord Jesus Christ, we offer continual **spiritual** sacrifices to God. "Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Hebrews 13:15-16).

In closing, was the man Melchizedek in the reading the preincarnate Christ? Hebrews 7:3 says about him that he was "Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually." However, later in verse 15 the author made the point quite clearly that Melchizedek is a type of Christ, something that points to the later Messiah Jesus. "And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the **likeness** of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 7:15, emphasis added). So, was Melchizedek Christ in the flesh? Maybe, though this isn't explicitly stated in the Scriptures. What we do know is that he points to Christ by representing an eternal priesthood that Jesus now carries for us.

As we move on to the second reading, hopefully each of us recognizes the principle of giving to God as demonstrated by Abram after his victory in rescuing Lot from the ungodly kings who surrounded

him and took him captive. Our giving to the church, charities and those in need demonstrates that we understand the source of victory is God and He owns it all. We are to hold our time, talents, and treasures loosely in our palms and let God take from them as He sees fit. As Christians, we are not like the people of Pompeii who perished while grasping their possessions before trying to flee the volcano.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading from 1 Corinthians deals with Saint Paul's teaching on the celebration of communion.

Second Reading:

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 NAS95 23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25 In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

In the reading, Saint Paul spoke about the celebration of the communion meal. He said, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26, emphasis added). This teaching placed a clear time limit on the celebration of this important ordinance. As we look forward to the return of the Lord, we, like the Jews on the evening of the Passover, walk in obedience to the Lord's commandment to celebrate communion *until* He returns.

The celebration of the Lord's Supper is a very important ordinance given to us by the Lord Jesus before He returned to heaven. Each time we celebrate communion we commemorate Jesus' death on the cross for us on which He gave his body and poured His blood for us. Jesus instituted the communion celebration during His Last Supper with the disciples on the eve of the Jewish holiday known as Passover. This important feast commemorated the Jews deliverance from the final plague

brought against the Pharaoh as recorded in Exodus 12. On the solemn eve many millennia ago, the Hebrew people were instructed to slaughter a lamb and mark their doorway with its blood. On that evening, the Death Angel passed through the land and killed the firstborn of every living thing, both human beings and animals, except those whom had followed God's commandment in faith by marking their doorways with the symbol of the Lamb of God. The Feast of Unleavened Bread, in which the Jews eat bread without the yeast rising agent, follows Passover. The absence of leaven is symbolic of the Jew's rapid flight from Egypt immediately after that first Passover evening in which the lamb was slaughtered in obedience to God command for the salvation of each household. The absence of leaven also came to be associated in later Jewish thought with the purification from sin, i.e. leaven is sin, such as Jesus noted when He said to be on watch for the "leaven of the Pharisees" (Matthew 16:6). The symbolism is clear; Jesus is *our* Passover Lamb, the Lamb of God that takes away our sin. John the Baptist said about Jesus, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Jesus is the "Lamb slain since before the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8).

What does this reading mean for our lives? First, God calls us not to forsake the assembly together in the communion service (Hebrews 10:25). As we celebrate communion from now until the day the Lord Jesus returns, we look back to the one sacrifice that He made for our sins. Second, we can recognize that we are saved by grace through faith in God (Ephesians 2:8-9) the same as Moses and the other believers in the Old Testament. They looked forward to Jesus through the symbols of God's supernatural provision through manna and the healing by faith in God by humbly kneeling before the bronze serpent. The elements of communion are the way in which we remember Jesus' body broken for us and His blood shed to pay the debts for our sin. "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). This truly is a celebration, for though our sins are scarlet, we have been washed as white as snow through this sacrifice. We now live in response to this great and precious gift. May you not only celebrate communion, but each day, with a joyful and thankful heart.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading from Luke 9 records Jesus' feeding of the five thousand. This is the only miracle that appears in all four of the Gospels. The total number of people fed would have likely been over ten thousand as the crowd numbered five thousand men not counting women and children.

Jesus' feeding of the five thousand along the shores of the Sea of Galilee marked the beginning of a

series of turning points in His ministry that we can identify by following the parallel accounts from the Gospel of John. One of these crucial points of decision for the crowds of followers is evident in the easy to remember verse 6:66 in John's Gospel, "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore." These turning points came about as the people began to determine in their hearts whether they are true followers of Jesus. Another of these is in the previous chapter of John where it says, "For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God" (John 5:18). This is where the rubber meets the road; the true followers of God are those that recognize Jesus as God in the flesh, the Messiah, rather than just a miracle doer who they thought would deliver them from their Roman oppressors.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 9:11-17 NAS95 11 But the crowds were aware of this and followed Him; and welcoming them, He began speaking to them about the kingdom of God and curing those who had need of healing. 12 Now the day was ending, and the twelve came and said to Him, "Send the crowd away, that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside and find lodging and get something to eat; for here we are in a desolate place." 13 But He said to them, "You give them something to eat!" And they said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless perhaps we go and buy food for all these people." 14 (For there were about five thousand men.) And He said to His disciples, "Have them sit down to eat in groups of about fifty each." 15 They did so, and had them all sit down. 16 Then He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed them, and broke them, and kept giving them to the disciples to set before the people. 17 And they all ate and were satisfied; and the broken pieces which they had left over were picked up, twelve baskets full.

As the story progressed, we know from the parallel accounts that Jesus asked Philip (who was from this region) to provide for the crowd. We know from that account that Philip responded to Jesus stating that to buy that much food would require the amount of 200 days' wages. This was a significant amount, but worthless that far away from the city and in light of the huge size of the crowd. Nevertheless, the people had followed Jesus some distance away from the city and saw Him as One Who would provide for them, so it was natural for Jesus to accommodate their needs through His disciples. In this case, the people found out that God was the true multiplier of things. Again, we know from the parallel account in John that the people did indeed recognize Jesus as a Prophet, seemingly the One prophesied about in Deuteronomy 18:15. However, they misunderstood the role of the Messiah (John 6: 14–15). The people saw in Jesus a political ruler Who could free them from their poverty and Roman oppression. In the end, twelve baskets were left over corresponding exactly to the count of Jesus' disciples. Each disciple was left with one basket to highlight Jesus' ability to

provide in the midst of impossible circumstances. God provided the food, regardless of the people's faith and used this sign to point to the True Messiah Jesus.

We too may have misunderstandings about how Jesus' power should be used in the world. Though we should ask God to provide for our circumstances we have to recognize that like the people of the biblical era we often want God to use His power for our comfort, security, and advancement. We need to be careful to let God be God and not expect Him to be our personal "Genie in the bottle" performing miracles on demand. Nobody stands above Him, for He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords and His purposes are beyond understanding. Even though the people in this story wanted Jesus to become their civil King, Jesus ministered to them to meet their spiritual needs instead. One day Jesus will return to rule and reign on the earth and fulfil the expectations of a perfect ruler.

Reflection Questions

1. The Book of Hebrews opens as follows. "*In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe*" (Hebrews 1:1-2). With this passage in mind, move forward in the Book and study the context of Hebrews before and after chapter 7. What do you find regarding how Jesus really is the eternal priest/king that fulfilled the requirements of the Law and how He is our eternal High Priest that makes intercession for us (1 Timothy 2:5). What impact should / does Jesus' intercession make on your perspective and response the challenges, blessings, and your inadequacies?

2. In the Gospel lesson, Jesus called upon God's miraculous power to perform a miracle to provide for people's basic needs and at the same time to confirm Himself as the Messiah. It is evident from reading the synoptic Gospels that His disciples didn't understand the miracle until Jesus explained it to them some time later after feeding a second large crowd. What ways have you missed understanding the miracles of God in your own life? List two or three ways in which God has recently provided for you that you may have taken for granted. Tell God your thankfulness for His provision and ask Him to point out to you ways in which He continues to do so.

Going Deeper

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Another figure that prefigured this ministry was Joseph in the Book of Genesis, then later on King David, also of the tribe of Judah. Do your own study of these people and see what amazing parallels you can draw between them and Jesus.

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 06-12-2022



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we examine a reading from Proverbs and learn something about the Person of Jesus Christ. In the second reading we see how God uses trials in the life of a believer, making them grow in their faith and trust in Him. In the Gospel reading we learn about how Jesus promised His disciples how He would send the Holy Spirit to empower them to accomplish His work and to persevere through the tribulations that He predicted would come upon them.

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Introduction to the First Reading:

Proverbs is a Book that provides wisdom from God on a variety of matters. Most of the Proverbs were written by King Solomon. While reading this section of the Bible, we have to remember that these biblical principles were delivered to a people bound to the Mosaic Law. Additionally, we must keep in mind that they are general proscriptive principles and not prescriptive in every case. For example, Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it." While this is a good and godly principle, all of us are acquainted with circumstances of parents who closely followed this principle but yet had wayward children. Proverbs 8 begins with the personification of wisdom, a common theme in this Book. "Does not wisdom call, And understanding lift up her voice?"

First Reading:

Proverbs 8:22-31 NAS95 22 "The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way, Before His works of old. 23 From everlasting I was established, From the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth. 24 When there were no depths I was brought forth, When there were no springs abounding with water. 25 Before the mountains were settled, Before the hills I was brought forth; 26 While He had not yet made the earth and the fields, Nor the first dust of the world. 27 When He established the heavens, I was there, When He inscribed a circle on the face of the deep, 28 When He made firm the skies above, When the springs of the deep became fixed, 29 When He set for the sea its boundary So that the water would not transgress His command, When He marked out the foundations of the earth; 30 Then I was beside Him, as a master workman; And I was daily His delight, Rejoicing always before Him, 31 Rejoicing in the world, His earth, And having my delight in the sons of men."

The reading opens with the idea of the eternity of a certain person, "me" in verse 22. While we can say that God foreknew those whom He also "predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:29) and therefore knew us as believers in eternity past, the plain sense of these verses points to the "eternality" of the Person of Jesus Christ. The wording used by the author aligns with what John said about Jesus Christ in his Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). The proverb says about this Person that He was established from everlasting, "From the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth" (v. 23a). John said about Jesus, "We was in the beginning with God" (John 1:2). The proverb also speaks to the role of Jesus as the creator, while at the same time brings out the unity that exists between the

Father God and the Son. Verse 30 says, "Then I was beside Him, as a master workman; And I was daily His delight, Rejoicing always before Him." Colossians 1:16 says, "For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities–all things have been created through Him and for Him." Yet Isaiah said, "Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, and the one who formed you from the womb, "I, the Lord, am the maker of all things, stretching out the heavens by Myself, and spreading out the earth all alone." Finally, in Genesis 1:2 we see that "the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters" during creation. Therefore, the Trinity of God was involved in the creation process, we see a sense of this in today's reading.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The context of the second reading from Romans follows Saint Paul's teaching on justification by faith alone. Today's reading opens with the word "therefore," and as always, we need to reflect upon what this word is "there for." In the reading that follows, the "therefore" provides the linkage to Paul's persuasive argument to the Christians in Rome regarding how God had justified them through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Paul looked back to how "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Romans 4:3) Paul taught how Jesus "was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification" (Romans 4:25). Paul's point was that as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ we inherit the righteousness of God through our faith in Him, "just as if" we had never sinned at all. Understanding the legal concept of justification is essential because otherwise it makes our salvation the result of our "good" works. Salvation is something which God has stated expressly we cannot earn. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Through our faith in the finished work of the Lord Jesus on the cross we have a new judicial standing before the throne of God, "just as if" we had never sinned. For once we believe God has "removed our sins as far as the east is from west" (Psalms 103:12). Our faith is extremely important in the eyes of God, for God sees us through the righteousness of Christ (Romans 13;14, Galatians 3:27, Job 29:14, Isaiah 61:10, Revelation 3:4).

[Note: Our online readers will benefit by being able to quickly peruse these verses by the verse lookup feature by hovering over each of them. We encourage everyone to study all of the quoted verses used each week in Mass Notes.]

Second Reading:

Romans 5:1-5 NAS95 1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. 3 And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; 4 and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; 5 and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Paul taught how through our faith we are justified and "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 1). Paul taught in Colossians how as nonbelievers we were alienated from God (Colossians 1:21). Interestingly, in that same section of Colossians, Paul continued with the concept of rejoicing in suffering (Colossians 1:24), which is exactly what Paul did in verse three of today's reading. Paul said, "we also exult in our tribulations" (v. 3a). He said that the reason we are called to do this is because it builds perseverance which leads to godly character, then onwards to hope (v. 4).

In applying today's reading we may ask how tribulation produces perseverance, character, and hope? Tribulation, a word which literally means "suffering," are any type of tests to your faith. This includes things like health problems, broken or strained relationships, persecution by nonbelievers, financial concerns, and the death of a loved one. If we turn to God during our trials, we can expect to experience growth in our faith as we see how God delivers us through them. God may deliver us from them, or sometimes He may. But regardless, the promise in today's reading is that if when we persist in faith, God will use our trials to conform us more perfectly to the image of Jesus Christ, the Suffering Servant of God (Isaiah 53:1-12).

As I was reflecting upon the ways in which God has worked in my own life (see study question #2), I reviewed some of the thoughts that I had written in one of my prayer journals. In one journal entry dated 9/13/2011 me and my wife had been praying for a man we know to find a godly wife. I am pleased to report that he got married in the summer of 2015 to a very godly young woman whom he met at church. In another entry dated 12/4/2011 I had been praying for God to provide a means for me to pay off a $25,000 surgical bill. In that case God provided through a combination of insurance and provisions through bonuses and my salary at work. As I continued to review my prayer journal I see how God has worked in so many different people's lives. Yet some of the people for whom we have been praying continue to struggle. One in particular has had a half-down year long struggle in her life with chronic pain in her back. Perhaps God desires us to continue to pull together as believers to pray for her, and I am confident that He will continue to work in her life.

More recently, however, God has been working in a miraculous way in my life. Men frequently don't share the struggles with their wives that they may have in their thought life. We should, however, share these both with God and when appropriate with a prayer partner of the same sex who would understand. Recently, after watching a Christian movie that focused upon how God is able to produce miracles in the lives of people who pray boldly with faith, I sensed a calling from God to present to Him a particular struggle that I was having with my thought life. After I was all pumped up spiritually after watching that Christian film, I brought this matter boldly to the Lord in prayer. After a week went by in which I did not struggle with this particular thought pattern, the thought occurred to me that perhaps God was up to something in my life. After a month had gone by I began to understand that God had indeed intervened in my life, and then began to focus upon ways to prevent myself from falling into this particular pattern again. What are some areas in which you are struggling? We encourage you to bring these to God and expect His answer as you persist in prayer to Him. If you feel your faith is weak, pray that God would first give you the faith that you need. Perhaps He will lead you to study a particular book, or meet with a particular person. But do expect God to show up when you come to Him boldly in prayer.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading from John chapter 16 is Jesus' counsel to His disciples about how they will be able to prosper once He leaves the world through His sending of the Holy Spirit. They are to expect great persecution and be "outcasts from the synagogue" (John 16:2). In fact, the deception of nonbelievers in the world will be so bad that "everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God" (v. 2b). Jesus promised how then when He went away He would send the "Helper," Who would "convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" (v. 8).

Gospel Reading:

John 16:12-15 NAS95 12 "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. 14 He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. 15 All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you."

Jesus taught His disciples how the Holy Spirit would "guide them into all the truth" (v. 13b). The

prophecy of the Holy Spirit led to the inspiration of our Holy Bible. Peter spoke about this by saying, "for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:21). The Word of God is but one of many ministries of the Holy Spirit that we as believers possess. The Spirit also works to draw unbelievers to faith in the Lord Jesus, convict both believers and nonbelievers of their sin, regenerate our spirits making us "born from above" (John 3:3), sanctify us in the Lord, help us in prayer, guide us in understand Scripture, provide us with comfort through His divine power dwelling within us, and provides us with gifts and fruits of the Spirit. Although Jesus' disciples certainly couldn't understand the implications of His prophecy concerning the coming of the Spirit, they spent their lives living out the fullness of all that the Spirit had to offer them even though they endured unparalleled tribulation in their lives.

We too are called to partake of God's divine gift through the ministry offered to us in the Holy Spirit that lives within us. It is this Spirit that empowers us to live lives pleasing to God. In order to take advantage of the Spirit's guidance "into all the truth" mentioned in today's reading, we must endeavor to become students of God's Word in the Bible. Our prayer is that these weekly studies will prompt you to go further in your study of God's word, and "test all things, holding fast to that which is true" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. What is something through which you either are suffering, or have suffered in recent years? In what ways have you seen how God produced in you the character qualities noted by Paul of increased faith, perseverance and character?

2. Perhaps one of the most useful ways in which you can learn from the tribulations allowed by God in your life is to journal about your experiences and then look back upon how God used these circumstances for His eternal purposes and your own good (Romans 8:28). If you have written down anything in past years, retrieve these journal entries and review the changes that have occurred since then. In what ways can you see how God actively used these trials to produce perseverance and character in your life?