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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 106: 07/19/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we open by briefly looking at the responsorial Psalm from the first reading and then move on to the second reading, in which we study some deep truths from Paul's Letter to the Romans. Finally, we move to the Gospel lesson in which we continue Jesus' teaching of the parables in Matthew 13 that we looked at last week.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Apocrypha. The main idea of the reading is expressed in the responsorial Psalm that follows. This is from Psalm Chapter 86, and we have included verses 5-7:

First Reading:

WIS 12:13, 16-19

There is no god besides you who have the care of all,
that you need show you have not unjustly condemned.
For your might is the source of justice;
your mastery over all things makes you lenient to all.
For you show your might when the perfection of your power is disbelieved;
and in those who know you, you rebuke temerity.
But though you are master of might, you judge with clemency,
and with much lenience you govern us;
for power, whenever you will, attends you.
And you taught your people, by these deeds,
that those who are just must be kind;
and you gave your children good ground for hope
that you would permit repentance for their sins.

First Reading (Responsorial Psalm):

5 For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, And abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon You.
6 Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer; And give heed to the voice of my supplications!
7 In the day of my trouble I shall call upon You, For You will answer me. (Psalm 86:5-7)

God forgives those who call upon Him (v. 5), listen to their prayers (v. 6), and answers them during times of distress (v. 7). It is good to know that God is above our problems (He is not wringing His hands in worry), yet He is not aloof to us in our neediness. There are two terms that help us to understand these important facets of God's character: transcendence (God is above His creation and rules over it) and immanence (God draws near to His creation and desires to be with us). These few verses teach us that He not only has the power to help us, but He is also interested in answering us; God's transcendence and immanence. What an amazing God, powerful and using His power in good and loving ways. His loving power is most clearly seen in the cross, as He gave His Son as a sacrifice for our sin debt.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading also has a theme of prayer, only this passage teaches that the Holy Spirit Himself is praying for us. This passage from Paul's Letter to the Romans also reinforces God's transcendence and immanence.

Second Reading:

> *26 In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; 27 and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:26-27).*

In this reading, Saint Paul revealed a marvelous mystery about God the Holy Spirit. He said that God the Holy Spirit prays on our behalf (v. 26) and intercedes for us (v. 27). God is transcendent over the believer, knowing our real needs and working towards His ultimate goal of glorifying Himself in our transformation. Yet, He also comes alongside us as the Helper who lives inside of us (John 14:6), praying with "groanings" too deep for words. He is not a cosmic policeman trying to enforce the rules. Instead, this passage teaches that God the Holy Spirit is moved by our helpless estate and He desires to accomplish the Father's will in our lives. He prays for things that we ourselves may not yet value and may not see as necessary in our lives. Maybe one important takeaway is to begin listening to God's heart for our lives as we read the Bible, and see if He may be answering His prayers for us when we don't see Him answering our prayers the way we desire. God's vision for our lives is much bigger than our small hopes and dreams. Saint John of the Cross said it well:

> *How will a person*
> *Brought to birth and nurtured in a world of small horizons,*
> *Rise up to you Lord*
> *If you do not raise him by your hand which made him?*

The text doesn't say whether God changes our existing prayers to align with His will or makes new petitions for us. Regardless, each person of the Holy Trinity intercedes with the other on our behalf. This is extremely important because Paul said, "we do not know how to pray as we should" (v. 27). We know from Jesus' prayer in John Chapter 17 that He prays for us. Because this prayer is recorded in Scripture, we can be certain that Jesus continues ministering on our behalf. Later on in Romans 8:34, Paul assures us that "Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the

right hand of God, who also intercedes for us." Again, God's transcendence (knowing what we need) and immanence (being with us in our need) are important truths that should warm our hearts in our daily lives. We are not alone. God is with us.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson this week includes three parables from the continuing study in Matthew 13. The first is the parable of the weeds and the tares, and this provides some extremely important insights into the nature of the kingdom, both in the near term and looking on into eternity. It also gives important insight into those who will be locked out of the kingdom. As with the parable of the sower we looked at last week, Jesus went on to explain its meaning to His disciples. The second parable is the parable of the mustard seed, and the final one covered this week is the parable of the leaven.

Some specific cautions are in order about the interpretation of these particular parables as well as that genre in general. First, each parable must not be construed in such a way as to make it "walk on all fours" by taking terms literally without fully considering the context. For example, though the word "leaven" (Matthew 13:33) is almost universally a negative term in the Bible, for example, the "leaven of the Pharisees" (Matthew 16:6), it is also a very good thing when used in the context of baking bread. A second word in the reading today about which we take note is the word "birds." In the Old Testament, many, though not all, birds were considered unclean and therefore bad in the Jewish context. John, the author of Revelation, used this association when he described the future religious and civil empire of the Antichrist Mystery Babylon as the home for every "unclean and hateful bird" (Revelation 18:2). However, as we will read in a moment, Jesus used this word to describe the rapid growth and size of His kingdom, not necessarily the nature of the kingdom (although some will debate this point). A large and fast-growing kingdom is a good thing, though we need to take caution in believing that everyone who appears to be in the kingdom may not be what they appear, as we will see in the parable of the wheat and the tares. We have to focus on the main point of the parable and lay aside the word studies unless they change the meaning of the main point.

In our day and age, we know what we mean when we say, "People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones." We would never say this means that people should literally not throw stones while living inside that type of house, whether or not that was true. Instead, we mean that people should not criticize others for having the same faults they have. That is the main point of this modern parable, which brings us to a second caution about interpreting parables. Parables in the First-

Century Jewish context were used to prove one (or sometimes two) main ideas by "laying alongside" a story that was easy for hearers in an oral culture to grasp. Although there is usually only one main **meaning** in a parable, there are multiple **applications**. With these things in mind, let's read the Gospel lesson.

Gospel Reading:

> *24 Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25 But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. 26 But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. 27 The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' 28 "And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' The slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' 29 "But he said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. 30 'Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.'"31 He presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; 32 and this is smaller than all other seeds, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR come and NEST IN ITS BRANCHES." 33 He spoke another parable to them, "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened." 34 All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable. 35 This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: "I WILL OPEN MY MOUTH IN PARABLES; I WILL UTTER THINGS HIDDEN SINCE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD." 36 Then He left the crowds and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field." 37 And He said, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, 38 and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; 39 and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. 40 "So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, 42 and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear." (Matthew 13:24-43)*

Jesus taught the crowds and the disciples through three parables. First, let's examine the parable of the wheat and the tares. This is a very important parable that provides essential insights into both the nature of Jesus' holy kingdom and the nature of the place where those excluded from it will be assigned for eternity. Many points arise from Jesus' teaching; here are a few.

- The picture provided by the separation of the wheat and the tares is what will occur in Revelation Chapter 17 at the end of the Great Tribulation, when believers will be welcomed into Jesus' kingdom reign on earth, and all unbelievers will be removed.

- There are two literal destinations, heaven and hell. Hell is a real, literal place that is eternal, and everyone who doesn't go to heaven goes there. Jesus taught more about hell than He did about heaven. In Matthew 13, he clarifies by saying, "The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (vv. 41-42).
  The author of Hebrews said, "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this to face judgment" (Heb. 9:27).

- The weed plants grow, seemingly out of control, alongside the wheat during their natural lives. But when the weeds die they are subjected to the control of the Master who rounds them up to be burned. It is at this point that their true nature becomes evident. Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter" (Matthew 7:21).

- The nature of the seeds is different. Only God knows which one will grow into a wheat plant and which into a weed. The doctrine of predestination is tied directly to God's foreknowledge. Romans 8:29 says, "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified." God wishes that none would perish, but all would come to the knowledge of eternal life (1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9).

- Angels serve God in a unique ministry of gathering souls, bringing them to their rightful

eternal destinations. The destination of the person's soul being transported is known to the angels at this point, even before God affords them justice through a trial. (Revelation 20:12). For "nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Revelation 21:27).

- The "church age" is a mystery, one not seen even by the disciples and Old Testament Prophets (Ephesians 5:32).

Second, Jesus told the parable of the mustard seed (vv. 31-32). Anyone who has ever seen a mustard seed knows of its tiny size, but how could a mustard seed grow into a tree, and what does that have to do with the kingdom of heaven? The plant becomes so large that even birds can lodge in it, something that no normal mustard plant could ever hope to achieve. The kingdom of heaven is **like** a mustard seed, and when it is full-grown, it becomes so large that it brings refuge to people in the entire world.

Finally, Jesus told the parable of the leaven. As we said in the introduction, although leaven was equivalent to sin in the minds of a Jewish audience, the context makes it clear that this wasn't the meaning that Jesus intended. Instead, Jesus said His kingdom would grow and expand in a mysterious way, **like** leaven (v. 33) placed in the dough. The leaven is hidden in the bread, and its work is a mystery. In the same way, the church is a mystery hidden in the world (Ephesians 5:32), and unseen by the Prophets and even the disciples.

What do these parables mean for us today? What are some possible applications? First, since the weeds are not uprooted, we are called to be discerning. We must know the Word of God and be willing to provide our testimony, the hope that we have (1 Peter 3:15). Second, Christians are called to provide salt and light in their workplaces, consisting of a mix of believers and nonbelievers, including a variety of other faith groups. Finally, we can take courage in the fact that God will continue to build His kingdom into a large web, regardless of persecution and the political happenings of the age. The Word will spread as leaven through the dough, and the tiny seed will become as large as a gigantic tree.

Reflection Questions

1. The parables in Matthew 13 give us teachings about the Kingdom of Heaven. Since Jesus was from heaven, He speaks with authority of what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. His goal was to transform people from being citizens of earth to citizens of heaven, even while living here on earth. How does Jesus' vision for Kingdom living compare and contrast with your present vision for life? Where is your life in line with His vision, and where is your life out of line with His vision? Spend some time talking to Him about what you would like to see Him do to move you closer to His vision.

2. The first two readings pointed out God's transcendence (He is above creation) and immanence (He draws near to His creation). What difference does God's transcendence and immanence make in our everyday lives? How might you (and others) know that you are growing in internalizing these truths?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 103: 07/12/2026

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the first reading from the Prophet Isaiah in which we will see a calling to respond to the Lord's message before it's too late. Then we will move on to the second reading from Paul's Letter to the Romans, and then close with an important Gospel lesson called the parable of the soils.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Isaiah 55. The chapter opens with an invitation for everyone, even the Gentiles (Isaiah 55:5), to partake of the benefits earned by the Suffering Servant in chapter 53, whom we know was the Lord Jesus. Isaiah said, "Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk Without money and without cost" (v. 1). Isaiah then went on to say some of the most often quoted verses from the Old Testament. In the verses immediately preceding today's reading, Isaiah explained God's invitation to salvation to everyone, as well as an important insight into the nature of God.

> *6 Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. 7 Let the wicked forsake his way And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, And*

> *He will have compassion on him, And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. 8 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. 9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:6-9)*

The Prophet emphasized the need for a person in the Old Testament to see the Lord before it was too late (v. 6), repent of their sin (v. 7a), trust in God's ability to forgive sin (v. 7), and recognize their insufficiency and the sovereignty of the Lord (vv. 8-9). Now, let us move on to the reading that begins at verse 10.

First Reading:

> *10 "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; 11 So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10-11)*

Isaiah said that in the same way that the seasons are regular and reliable (v. 10), so it is that God's Word is regular and reliable (v. 11). The rain and snow water the seeds and make them fruitful. Therefore, God's Word operates in the hearts of His people through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:10-13) in order to make them fruitful. Later in the Gospel lesson, the importance of this principle will become evident in Jesus' parable of the soils.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Before we move on to the Gospel lesson and continue to learn the importance of listening to the Word of God and operating upon what it says, we will move on to the second reading from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans. In this section, Paul emphasized the fallen condition of God's creation in which both the creation itself and humanity are crying out for reversal of the curse brought on as a result of Adam's sin.

Second Reading:

> *18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 19 For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. 23 And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. (Romans 8:18-23)*

Paul said that the "creation is groaning and [suffering]" (v. 22) in labor pains along with our groaning while awaiting redemption (v. 23). The reward for our faithfulness in bearing fruit in our response to the Gospel message won't be evident until our bodies are redeemed when we die and go to be with the Lord (v. 23). Until then our spirits groan (v. 23) and so does the fallen creation (v. 22).

Have you ever noticed how the sound of wind whistling through the trees is a way in which the creation groans as it awaits redemption? I remember one particular evening when I was deer hunting in the woods on my parents' farm back when I was a teenager. As the sun was getting ready to set, I crept along through the pine forest, being careful to move upwind in order to surprise any deer that may be wandering about in the woods that windy evening. As I continued to move through the woods, I stopped for a long time and just listened to the eerie sound of the wind moving through the trees. Although I had heard the wind moving through the trees before, for some reason that evening it took on a special significance. The sounds in the trees worked in an opposite way to a chord; they clashed in such a way as to leave a lasting impression upon me that evening. I was glad I was carrying a gun. "The whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now" (v. 22).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

As we move on to the Gospel lesson, pause for a moment and imagine what it would have been like to sit at the feet of Jesus and not only hear his teaching but also have it privately explained to you. That is what happened in the Gospel lesson from Matthew 13 in Jesus' famous parable of the soils.

The context is just after the Pharisees scolded Jesus' because his disciples had picked and eaten from standing grain on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:2). Jesus used this occasion to proclaim his Lordship, saying, "For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath" (v. 8). He then went on to offend the Pharisees even more by healing a man with a withered hand, an action that caused them to "[conspire] against Him, as to how they might destroy Him" (v. 14).

The parable of the soils in the reading today from Saint Matthew is also found in a parallel account in chapter 8 of Luke. This parable is unique from many of the others because in both accounts Jesus went on to explain the meaning to his disciples privately away from the crowds.

Gospel Reading:

> *1 That day Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the sea. 2 And large crowds gathered to Him, so He got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd was standing on the beach. 3 And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, "Behold, the sower went out to sow; 4 and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. 5 Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. 6 But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. 7 Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. 8 And others fell on the good soil and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. 9 He who has ears, let him hear." 10 And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" 11 Jesus answered them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. 12 For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. 13 Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. 14 In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, 'YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; 15 FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES, OTHERWISE THEY WOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.' 16 But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. 17 For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it. 18 Hear then the parable of the sower. 19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed*

> *was sown beside the road. 20 The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21 yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. 22 And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. 23 And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty." (Matthew 13:1-23)*

This parable focused on the Gospel and its impact on people's lives. Jesus explained the parable to His disciples and then told them how they were blessed because their eyes were open and their ears had heard (vv. 14, 16). They were blessed because they had heard things for which the prophets waited. Saint Peter said about them that they were, "seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow" (1Peter 1:11).

Some people may ask one of two questions. First, why did Jesus guard the truth by speaking in parables? Jesus answered this in verse 13, "Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand." Saint Peter shed additional light on this in his Epistle when he was teaching about the false teachers that he prophesied would come into the church and had been troubling the church:

> *For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, 'A DOG RETURNS TO ITS OWN VOMIT," and, "A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire'" (2 Peter 2:21-22).*

Peter said, "It would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them" (v. 21). Jesus taught in parables as a means of grace by reducing the amount of light given to those who would **not** respond to His Gospel message. On the Day of Judgment, everyone will be accountable to God for how they responded to and used the information that they had. Paul said, "So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12). A half dozen other verses in the Bible say that we are judged according to our deeds, meaning the fruit that we bore with the knowledge we were granted. [For further information, see the following: Job 34:11; Ps 62:12; Pr 24:12; Jer 17:10; Jer 32:19; Mt

16:27; 1Co 3:8; 2Co 5:10; Re 2:23; Rev 20:12; and Rev 22:12.] This is the meaning of the parable of the soils; we are accountable for what we have heard, although only one of the soils produced any fruit. Three of them are what Jesus called the "broad road" (Matthew 7:13). Only the seed that fell on the good soil produced any fruit, and then the production was in different measures. Additionally, note that fruit bearing is **evidence** of salvation, not the cause of it (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Second, some have asked the question, what about the heathen in far-off places that have never heard the Gospel, how will they be judged? [Hint: See Romans 1:19.] In this case, we need to step back, reconsider the question, and ask a different one. The question we should ask is what about us, what we have heard, and what fruit we have borne in response to the testimony of God's Word in the Bible?

Saint John wrote about the differences between the unfruitful hearers and those whom responded to the Gospel by producing good works for the Lord Jesus:

> *9 If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for the testimony of God is this, that He has testified concerning His Son. 10 The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son. 11 And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12 He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. 13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:9-13)*

Even though we work alongside other types of soil, as believers in Jesus Christ, we can rest assured that God will accomplish the good works He began in us (Philippians 1:6). Our good works flow from our faith in Jesus Christ. Though some will produce more than others (as we saw in the parable), each believer **will** produce something precious in the eyes of the Lord. As we saw in the first reading, it's important to act upon the information that we have been provided before it's too late.

Reflection Questions

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1. We read in the Gospel lesson the subject of fruit bearing of the four different types of soils. What would you understand "fruit" to represent? What are some worries or other distractions that make you unfruitful in your Christian life?

2. What are some fields in which you have the opportunity to sow seed?

3. Some have taken the challenge of fruit bearing by instead going about their lives as "soil testers" or "fruit inspectors." Based upon what you have learned today why is such a "ministry" ungodly?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 100: 07/05/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. The first reading highlights a prophecy about Jesus, who

came humbly the first time, riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. However, He will return a second time in justice and power to claim victory over a world entrenched in war against Him and His people. In the second reading, we encounter the contrast between those who had Jesus' Spirit living inside of them and those who are driven purely by their carnal, spiritually dead natures. As we move to the Gospel lesson, we will learn about how Jesus relied upon prayer to God the Father for His spiritual victory. The last reading gives us insight into the communication between these two Persons of the Godhead, which serves as a pattern for the communion God wants with all of us (John 17:20-21).

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Prophet Zechariah. Zechariah was one of the twelve Minor Prophets, a term that refers to the size of their writings compared with the larger Books of the Major Prophets, such as Isaiah and Jeremiah. Zechariah wrote during the exile of the Jews to Babylon and returned to Jerusalem with Zerrubbabel, also known as Sheshbazzar (Ezra 1:8), the leader of the tribe of Judah. One of the things for which Zechariah is known is the prophecy of the flying scroll (Zechariah 5:1-11). This message symbolized the Word of God, which Israel had disobeyed, and the moral components that the entire world had also broken. The message called for judgment according to God's righteous rule. The context of today's reading is the reign of the Persian King Darius, some two years before the Jews rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem. In Chapter 8, Zechariah prophesied about what we know today as the Lord Jesus's return to Jerusalem. He said, "Thus says the LORD, 'I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts will be called the Holy Mountain'" (Zechariah 8:3). Chapter 9 opens with a prophecy against the nations surrounding Israel, followed by a pronouncement that God would deliver His people. "But I will camp around My house because of an army, Because of him who passes by and returns; And no oppressor will pass over them anymore, For now I have seen with My eyes" (Zechariah 9:8).

As you study the reading, take careful note of the prophecy of the Coming King and remember Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on the day we call Palm Sunday (Mark 11:1-11).

First Reading:

> *9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, humble, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey. 10 I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem; and the bow of war will be cut off. And He will speak peace to the nations; and His dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. (Zechariah 9:9-10)*

In this prophecy, we see both advents of Jesus compressed into three short verses. Verse 9 contains Zechariah's prophecy, which was fulfilled on Palm Sunday, when Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey. In verse 10, the tenor suddenly changed from one of a triumphal celebration of the coming Messiah to one of war. At Christ's Second Advent, He will cut off the world war (v. 10a) and "He will speak peace to the nations" (v. 10b). Finally, Zechariah said that the territory under the king's reign would extend from the Euphrates River all the way around the earth.

The war about which Zechariah was speaking is the war that will come with the appearance of the man known in Scripture as the Antichrist. Saint Paul said, "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there comes a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition" (2 Thessalonians 2:3). This "man of sin" will fill the world's vacuum for a leader and will seize power by intrigue (Daniel 11:21). We can take comfort in knowing that one day Jesus will return to the earth to usher in worldwide peace and bring in an era of justice. When we see wars and rumors of war all around us, this does not take God by surprise. He is waiting for the perfect timing to bring His Son back to rule and reign on the earth. Second, we can rest in the fact that although Zechariah probably didn't understand the prophecy that he wrote, he faithfully recorded it in the Scriptures. We can trust that the prophecies, such as this one from Zechariah, provide important, after-the-fact, confirmation of the accuracy of God's Word, even if they are hard to understand before the events have played out. This gives us confidence to follow God's Word, because we know that it is not man-made, it is supernatural.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading today is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans. Paul opened Chapter 8 in Romans by explaining the difference between a person who was born again through the Spirit of God and the one whose heart was set on the flesh (Romans 8:6). The believer, whose righteousness is found through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ, is in a right relationship with God. Paul said, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after

the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Romans 8:1). Next, he explained the significant contrast of the heart of the unbeliever. "For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8:6-8). This context is helpful in understanding the word "however" which serves as a contrast and opens today's reading beginning in verse 9. We included verse ten, although it didn't appear in the reading.

Second Reading:

> *9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. 10 If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. 11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. 12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh– 13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (Romans 8:9-13)*

Paul said that a person must have the Spirit of God dwelling in them in order to belong to Him. This is the same thing that Jesus explained to the Jewish ruler Nicodemus, who came to Jesus at night, which I like to call "Nick at night." Jesus told him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3b-ff). Jesus and Paul taught the same very important scriptural truth: a person must be indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God in order to be one of His children. This indwelling happens the moment a person surrenders his or her life to Christ for salvation. Whether or not they sense anything tangibly, this is when the Holy Spirit comes to live inside of a believer. It is a mystery of God (John 3:8), but something we can be assured happens because of the reliability of God's Word.

Paul further explained that although the believer's body would die because of sin, their spirit was made alive (quickened) because of the righteousness of Jesus Christ imparted to them through faith (v. 10). Next, Paul gave words of hope for believers by saying that since Christ was raised from the dead someday our bodies will also be given eternal life (v. 11). Finally, Paul called believers to put to death the carnal, fleshly behaviors inherent in our sinful nature through the power of the Holy Spirit (v. 13).

It is important for us to pause here and contemplate what Paul said regarding the calling of believers towards holy living. "[F]or if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (v. 13). His teaching on this matter took the form of a set of "if then" conditional statements. **If** a person who doesn't have the Spirit of God lives according to the natural flesh, which of course is the only direction they know to take, **then** they will die. But **if** you who are indwelled by the Holy Spirit (are born again, born from above by the Holy Spirit, John 3:3), **then** you will have empowerment from God's Holy Spirit to live according to the purposes of the Spirit, who inherently has life. Jesus is the empowering force that lives within us through God's Holy Spirit, enabling us to turn from the natural inclinations of our sinful flesh and towards the things of the Spirit. It's not so much that God doesn't like unholy living and punishes it with death; it's more about the natural course of consequences that are inherent in the universe that God designed. He pleads with people to choose life, but often times we choose death (Deuteronomy 30:19). Paul makes a striking case for the ongoing growth of believers to become more and more like Christ, from the inside out, because we have a new relationship of grace with His Spirit who "teaches us to say 'no' to ungodliness" and calls us to righteous living (Titus 2:12).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson is from Saint Matthew. The context of the lesson is when Jesus was traveling from city to city with the disciples (Matthew 11:1) to preach and teach. Jesus had some not-so-nice things to say about His experiences there. "Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent" (Mt 11:20). Jesus used several examples of the cities to which He had visited, then spoke about Capernaum, a town located on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, a town that possibly was the location of Saint Peter's home. "And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day" (Matthew 11:23). We pick up with the reading in verse 25.

Gospel Reading:

> *25 At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. 26 Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. 27 All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the*

> *Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. 28 Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Matthew 11:25-30)*

Here we see a prayer between God the Son and God the Father, given by Jesus in a public setting to provide the hearers with important spiritual insights. Remember that Jesus had just finished speaking about the people's urgent need to repent. In His ministry, Jesus had taken over where John the Baptist had left off with this urgent call of repentance. Frequently, the "wise and intelligent" (v. 25c) find it quite difficult to humble themselves and become like infants (v. 25c). God asks us to come to him humbly (Matthew 5:5) and rewards those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).

Jesus revealed several very important spiritual truths in this passage:

- God has given Jesus complete sovereign control over the earth.
- The only Person with a true understanding of God the Father is God the Son, and those to whom God the Son has revealed Himself.
- Jesus has provided the believer a position of rest. We not only do not have to earn our salvation, but we may also rest and trust in our righteous standing with God. We saw this in the second reading today from Romans 8 as well.
- The way of Jesus is easy compared to the way of the religious. In those days, the religious leaders were called Pharisees, and they believed they earned their salvation by performing many religious acts. In contrast, the believer's burden is light because the hard work Jesus did to earn our salvation is already complete. Nothing can be added to it, no matter how hard we work. Therefore, being yoked to Jesus provides freedom from the burdensome labor of religion.

Jesus' calling is to the humble people, like Himself, not proud ones who are "carnally minded" (Romans 8:6) as we saw in the second reading. In the same way that Jesus pronounced curses upon the nations that did not repent, God will one day pronounce judgment upon each unbelieving person who doesn't repent. "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Romans 8:13). We can rest in our faith in Jesus for He said, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Mathew 11:29-30).

Have a great week being happily "yoked" to Jesus.

Reflection Questions

1. We read about the difference between a person who is "carnally minded" and one who is motivated by the Spirit of God. How can a person know that they are saved? Read the following verses and write down a few ways in which a person can know they are in a right relationship with God.

> *Romans 8:16-17: 16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.*

> *1 John 2:3-11: 3 By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4 The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; 5 but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: 6 the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. 7 Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard. 8 On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining. 9 The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. 10 The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. 11 But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the*

darkness has blinded his eyes.

2. Pride is one of the things that keeps people from entering into a righteous relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Read the verses that follow and answer the questions below.

Proverbs 6:16-19: 16 There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: 17 Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises evil schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies, and a person who stirs up conflict in the community.

James 4:13-15: 13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." 14 Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that."

A. Why do you think that pride was first on the list of things which the LORD hates? How are all the rest of the evil things on that list connected to and/or generated by pride? In what ways does pride blind people to the scriptural truths of salvation through faith in Jesus?

B. In what ways do you identify with what James said about the self-confident person? In light of your answer, how could you pray to look at things differently this week?

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we'll talk a little bit about the cost of being a disciple of Jesus. We will see how God empowers us by resting in His omnipotent power and by providing us with reminders of His marvelous grace as we look back to our baptism.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The context of the reading is more strange and mysterious goings on of Elijah's replacement, Elisha. Today's reading is just after Elisha's miraculous replenishment of the widow's oil (2 Kings 4:1 – 7). In the reading, we see yet another of Elijah's great miracles, the birth of a child to a childless Shunammite woman whose husband was very old. This was in repayment to her for the many kindnesses that she had done for him (2 Kings 4:1 – 13). We know from the text that follows that this miracle child would later die and be miraculously resurrected through another miracle (2 Kings 4:32 – 35).

First Reading:

> *2 Kings 4:8-11 NAS95 8 Now there came a day when Elisha passed over to Shunem, where there was a prominent woman, and she persuaded him to eat food. And so it was, as often as he passed by, he turned in there to eat food. 9 She said to her husband, "Behold now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God passing by us continually. 10 "Please, let us make a little walled upper chamber and let us set a bed for him there, and a table and a chair and a lampstand; and it shall be, when he comes to us, that he can turn in there." 11 One day he came there and turned in to the upper chamber and rested.*

> *2 Kings 4:14-16 NAS95 14 So he said, "What then is to be done for her?" And Gehazi answered, "Truly she has no son and her husband is old." 15 He said, "Call her." When he had called her, she stood in the doorway. 16 Then he said, "At this season next year you will embrace a son." And she said, "No, my lord, O man of God, do not lie to your maidservant." Omitted: 2Ki 4:17 The woman conceived and bore a son at that season the next year, as Elisha had said to her.*

Gehazi was Elisha's attendant, although his motives may not have been entirely pure towards the Shunammite woman, and he pointed out to Elijah her desire for a son. Perhaps Gehazi thought that he would supplant the woman's elderly husband. Instead, God brought about a miracle reminiscent of the birth of Isaac to Abraham.

The big idea here is that God is a God of miracles. God sees the larger picture and fills people's needs, even without their asking. Although God desires that we ask to meet our needs (James 4:2), He is able to go above and beyond to provide even the things we don't ask for because we think they are too big for God to provide. This helps us endure times of persecution and suffering. We can be thankful to God for giving us these vivid reminders through the scriptural writings of those believers who went before us.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The context of the reading from Romans is Paul's teaching on a believer's unity with God through Christ.

Second Reading:

> *Romans 6:3-4 NAS95 3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.*
> *Omitted: Romans 6:5-7 NAS95 5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; 7 for he who has died is freed from sin.*
> *Romans 6:8-11 NAS95 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. 10 For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11 Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

In the reading, we learn much about the Christian life. We identify with Christ through our water baptism (v. 3). We see a contrast between the old self (v. 6), and our new self who is no longer a slave to sin (v. 6b). This fundamental transformation is brought about through the conversion of our soul. Our dead soul was symbolically buried with Christ at our baptism (v. 3), while our new self came to life when we became united to Christ through faith (v. 8, Ephesians 2:8-9). The big idea is that as believers, we are united with Jesus. Our lost souls were united in Jesus' death for us. Then we were united with Jesus and given a new soul through His resurrection from the dead. These truths are vividly expressed through the act of water baptism, which symbolizes a believer's death to the world and resurrection to the newness of life through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Understanding our identity in Christ and holding to it helps us persist during times of persecution for our faith. As we move to the Gospel reading, we will learn more about the promised persecution of believers in Jesus. We can hold onto God's promises and remember that He is a God of miracles even while facing challenges brought about by our faith.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The context of the reading from Matthew is Jesus' private message to the twelve disciples named

individually by name (Matthew 10:2-4). The chapter opened with Jesus sending the disciples on a missionary journey with very specific instructions to bring nothing with them and to expect persecution. This first mission was specifically to the Jews; they were to "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (vv. 5-6). Jesus sent them out as "sheep among wolves," to be "wise as serpents," "innocent as doves," and to "beware of men" who would persecute them (vv. 16 – 21). They were not to fear them, and Jesus reminded them that "even the hairs of the head were numbered" (vv. 26, 30). Jesus' instruction in this preface to today's reading extended not only to the immediate context of His disciples' journey, but also to all believers going out into the world to spread the Gospel message. "I say to you, you will not have gone through all of the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes" (v. 23).

All our longtime readers will understand that the addition of the two verses before today's reading is to provide the full context of the reading. As you read, take special note of repeated words, phrases, and patterns in the text.

Gospel Reading:

> *Verses before today's reading:*
> *Matthew 10:34-36 NAS95 34 "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I came to SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW; 36 and A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD.*
> *Today's Reading*
> *Matthew 10:37-42 NAS95 37 "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. 38 And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. 39 He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it. 40 He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. 41 He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. 42 And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward."*

The reading is filled with repeated phrases and the use of a literary technique called parallelism. In

the first case, we see the phrase "not worthy of Me" or just the word "Me" repeated multiple times in verses 37 – 40. I counted a total of eight repeats of the word "Me" and three of the phrase "not worthy of Me." The latter condition, literary parallelism, occurs throughout the reading. Both literary techniques are used to bring attention to the big ideas in the text, the conflict arising from one's choice to follow Jesus, and the rewards of doing so. We see,

"Jesus brought not peace / but a sword."

> "Jesus pits man / against father."
> And, "Daughter / against mother," or "daughter-in-law against mother" (imagine that!).
> "He who loves their father or mother more than Me / is not worthy of Me."And,
> "Loves son or daughter more than Me / not worthy of Me."
> A person "Not willing to carry one's cross / is not worthy of Me."
> "People receive your Gospel message / receives Me."

The reward for persisting in all the conflicts that Jesus warned us about is the reward of a prophet (meaning anyone who carries Jesus' message), and a righteous man (meaning all believers) "vv. 41 – 42), eternal rewards which shall never be taken away "v. 42c).

What does it mean to take up one's cross, follow Jesus, and persist during persecution (v. 38)? I remember, as a child, attending catechism classes and being taught about the burden of carrying one's cross. The context of this teaching, as I remember it, was more about continuing a grueling journey of self-sacrifice rather than the big idea presented by Jesus in the reading. Here, Jesus presented the concept of making hard choices through God's empowerment of us to oppose the worldly kingdom in favor of following Him and presenting His message to a God-rejecting universe. Jesus is clear that these choices could even include forsaking one's own family in order to follow what Jesus is calling one to do. As followers of Jesus, we understand that carrying one's cross for Christ is joyful, not the drudgery I imagined from the picture portrayed in my catechism classes. Jesus said just a few verses later, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. Mt 11:30 "For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:29-30). The bottom line of the reading is that, as believers in Jesus, we must expect persecution and make the hard choices God calls us to make.

There is a popular song from the 70's by Rupert Holmes named "Him" in which the chorus line says,

"Him, him, him, what's she gonna do about him?" The meaning of the song is **far** different than our spiritual relationship with God. However, if you are someone like me whose mind is often filled with repeating chorus lines, we do have to ask ourselves the question. Him, him, him, what are **we** going to do about him? Jesus calls us to decide what to do about **Him**. It's Him, or it's me. Serving God or serving self. This is a conscious step of faith one must make. As believers, we rejoice in the fact that regardless of how we may feel from day to day, our final judgment is not guilty. Jesus has borne our sins on the cross forever. He bore the penalty of our sin by suffering in our place, something that only the perfect, sinless Son of God could do. We cannot increase the burden of personal cross and add anything to what Jesus completed for us through His carrying of the cross once and for all.

Reflection Questions

1. As you contemplate the story of Elijah's miracle from the first reading, what are one or two things for which you would like to ask God? Share these with another believer and ask them to pray that God would bring them about or a change in circumstances.

2. What is your perspective on carrying your cross? In what ways does understanding Jesus' promise of persecution help you in this regard?

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we learn about suffering and persecution, first from the Prophet Jeremiah, then from Saint Paul and Jesus.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Prophet Jeremiah. This passage is set against the backdrop of Israel receiving dire consequences for rejecting God's rule in their lives. Jeremiah, a true prophet of God, had been beaten and mistreated by a false priest named Pashur (Jeremiah 20:1-2). While Jeremiah proclaimed a curse on Pashur in a veil of confidence, this section of our reading shows that inwardly he was troubled by the persecution he faced. This is Jeremiah's prayer of complaint before the LORD.

First Reading:

Jeremiah 20:10-13 NAS95 10 For I have heard the whispering of many, "Terror on every side!

> *Denounce him; yes, let us denounce him!" All my trusted friends, Watching for my fall, say: "Perhaps he will be deceived, so that we may prevail against him And take our revenge on him." 11 But the LORD is with me like a dread champion; Therefore my persecutors will stumble and not prevail. They will be utterly ashamed, because they have failed, With an everlasting disgrace that will not be forgotten. 12 Yet, O LORD of hosts, You who test the righteous, Who see the mind and the heart; Let me see Your vengeance on them; For to You I have set forth my cause. 13 Sing to the LORD, praise the LORD! For He has delivered the soul of the needy one From the hand of evildoers.*

Jeremiah's suffering at the hands of an evil man provides an important lesson for those of us who follow after him. Just like Jeremiah, we cannot control how people treat us. But we can take our complaints to God and ask Him for justice and help.

Jeremiah was quite graphic in his lament, showing that he could be brutally honest with God about how he felt and what he was experiencing. He felt persecuted by his enemies and realized that even his friends had turned against him, waiting for him to mess up. Jeremiah was in a very, very difficult place, and could have relieved his suffering by denouncing the LORD and His ways. But he stood firm in his convictions, banking his life on the justice of God to prevail. These are some of the things that Jeremiah knew were true about God:

- God listens (otherwise he wouldn't waste his energy praying)
- God is a champion, which causes the enemy to fear
- God's justice will prevail in an everlasting way
- God is the LORD of armies (hosts)
- God tests the righteous

- God knows the minds and hearts of humans (we can't pull the wool over His eyes, so to speak)
- God will deliver vengeance upon the enemy
- God is worthy of praise, even in the midst of persecution and suffering
- God delivers the soul of the needy from the hand of evildoers

These important truths can sustain us in the midst of trials as well. Just as in Jeremiah's case, it may not seem like God is in control, but He is providing an opportunity for His children to walk by faith, not by sight. When we cannot see God, and it doesn't make sense to keep trusting Him, we are in a great test of faith. God highly values our faith (Hebrews 11:6) and allows trials to come into our lives so that we might internalize the reality of His existence, apart from receiving immediate rewards. That is why James says that we can "count" it all joy when we face trials of many kinds (James 1:2-3). For God is working to produce a higher vision in us—a vision of maturity and stability in Him that stays strong in spite of shifting circumstances.

Jeremiah's perspective can be our perspective as we encounter disappointing and debilitating things in this life.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

One of the debilitating experiences that all of us face is the loss of someone we love. At the loss of a loved one, many of us contemplate existential things: life, death, meaning, and purpose. We wonder why life has to end and whether there is meaning in our existence, if we will all end up in the grave at some point. These existential questions are dealt with in the New Testament passage. Saint Paul, in the Book of Romans, provides some background logic that helps explain the universal reality that we all face: death.

This reading is set in the context of explaining the power of the Good News: we can be free from the law of sin and death (Romans 6-8). Instead of feeling like paupers in the King's throne room, Christians can bask in the lavish grace of God. Paul carefully lays out the contrast between Adam's one sin, which affects all humans, and Jesus' free gift of eternal life that overcomes the grave and results in abundant and eternal life. The gift of eternal life is an overwhelming extension of God's heart towards wayward humans. Paul reminds the reader that God sent His righteous Son to die for unrighteous humans. "For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:7-8). God's grace is not stingy or miserly. It is abundant and overflowing.

Second Reading:

> *Romans 5:12-15 NAS95 12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned– 13 for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. 14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. 15 But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many.*

Adam is the man through whom sin entered the world. In the Garden of Eden, Satan did not disclose to Adam the far-reaching and universal effects of his choice to live outside of God's provision. God had provided all of the trees in the garden for Adam and Eve's enjoyment, except for one (Genesis 2:16-17). The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was excluded from their experience because the Lord knew that determining what is right and wrong was His responsibility. But Adam stepped outside of God's protective covering and ate of the "forbidden fruit," thus exposing himself to a world he was ill-equipped to handle. While the effects of physical death were not realized immediately (Adam lived to be 930 years old according to Genesis 5:3-4), a spiritual death occurred instantly. Previously, they were naked and unashamed, but now "the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked" (Genesis 3:7).

Because Adam represented all of humankind and gave us a sin nature, all of humankind receives the mark of death. God is not being mean-spirited in allowing death to reign in this world; He is merely being consistent with the laws He had set forth from the beginning. A life apart from Him results in

death. Life with Him and in Him results in eternal life.

In this passage, the Apostle Paul explains that everyone has sinned, even those who lived before the Law was established through Moses. In the days before Moses, people were still reaping the effects of sin, i.e. death, even though God had not given them the Ten Commandments. After Moses and the Law, people were not able to follow God better; they just were more aware of how far short they were missing the mark (Romans 3:23). Paul's point is that either way you slice it (before or after the Law), people have been reaping the tragic effects of sin.

One of the greatest words in the Bible is the word "but," which appears here in our passage as a turning point in the universal experience of the tragedy of death. Paul is almost overflowing with enthusiasm as he recounts the abundant grace of God displayed in Christ Jesus, the One who "was to come" (v. 14). For if Adam's sin permeated all of humanity to bring death into the world, how much more would Christ's life counteract this tragedy and actually re-tell the story of humanity, showering us as actors in the story with the possibility of redemption. The grace of God does not just cancel the many debts; it provides richly for those who accept the free gift offered in Christ. We do not have to quiver before God the Father if we are in Christ, for He has provided grace upon grace (more than enough) to root us and establish us in His love. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). This is a game-changer, for in Christ, the story of our lives can have meaning and purpose, not just here but for all eternity. Death is not the final chapter and no longer deals a tragic sting (1 Corinthians 15:55). This is the victory that is ours in Christ!

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Because we have such a great Savior, who has justified us though our sins were many, our loyalty to Him should far outweigh our loyalty to our own physical comfort or ease in this life. The cost of discipleship is not hard to pay when we realize what a great salvation He has provided for us.

The cost of discipleship is something the Gospel reading addresses today. One of Jesus' most strategic ways of making a lasting impact in the world was to "disciple" a group of people in His way of life. He spent time with them and taught them about life in the kingdom of God, which was in sharp contrast to their lives lived under their own reign. In this Gospel reading, Jesus was preparing His 12 disciples to go out and teach others what He had taught them. "Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of

disease and every kind of sickness "(Matthew 10:1). He gave them specific instructions that would help them to be ambassadors for God's redemptive purposes in the world. He also warned them that the road of discipleship would not be easy. They would be persecuted, questioned, and hated (Matthew 10:17-25). The only way they could move forward would be to know the truth claims Jesus makes in the following verses.

Gospel Reading:

> *Matthew 10:26-33 NAS95 26 Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. 27 What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops. 28 Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. 29 Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. 30 "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows. 32 Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. 33 But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.*

Jesus gave the disciples support to help them overcome the trial of persecution that awaited them. The big idea of this passage was to share an eternal perspective that would give them comfort when they are wrongly treated for the sake of Christ. He reassured them that God, who is eternal, was keeping track of the injustices of this life and would hold humans responsible for their choice to be disloyal to Christ.

Jesus communicated several important points that can help each of us, who consider ourselves His disciples, as we face ill-treatment for the sake of Christ. First, He said not to fear those who mistreat us. Fear is only legitimate if there is no life after death. If this life is all there is, then we will find that the values of the Christian life are untenable. But because there is a God, who is eternal, and because He has made a way for us to live with Him, we can live our lives on earth with an eternal perspective. Jesus reminded his followers that there will be a day of reckoning and that God's final evaluation of a life is the only thing to fear. If evil people get away with things on this side of eternity, that is not the end of the story. Therefore, we can have confidence to share the truth of Jesus' teachings, even if it brings persecution and ill-treatment.

Second, since God sees and knows the smallest details of our lives (how many hairs on our head), how much more then is He acquainted with the most important details of our lives? If God can keep track of the little things (sparrows), He surely is capable of keeping track of the bigger things. When we are suffering, Satan would like us to believe that God does not care about us and has lost track of what is best for us. These verses counteract that lie by pulling back the veil to see the supernatural realm, where God, who sits on the throne, is actually intimately acquainted with the details of our lives. This truth can provide comfort and hope in the midst of trials and persecution for the believer in Christ. This truth should also be a warning for those who abuse God's people, for their evil deeds will not go unpunished.

The main point Jesus wraps up with is a reminder that our loyalty needs to be affixed to Him, no matter the pressure on us. We may be presented with an easier road if we stay silent about our relationship with Christ, or we may even have our physical life spared if we deny Him. But we will forfeit our eternal soul, which is far worse than losing our physical life. Loyalty to Jesus in this life will translate into His vouching for us before the throne of the Father, thus atoning for our lack of righteousness in this life. That is called grace. But if we deny what Jesus has done on our behalf by rejecting Him in this life before men, there is no other way to the Father's heart and eternal rest for our souls. In another place, Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, but through me" (John 14:6). The centrality of Christ for eternal salvation is very clearly stated by Jesus in this and other passages. It is important that we prioritize this relationship above all other pursuits and pressures. That is what true discipleship looks like.

Reflection Questions

1. Review the list of attributes of God in the first reading that Jeremiah is banking on. What attributes are you having trouble believing are true about God based on your current or past circumstances? Talk to God about your desire to walk by faith in these truths, asking Him to help you to believe He is faithful to His Word. You might even have a spiritual friend to share this struggle with and to ask for prayer support in growing in living by the Truth.

2. As you think about the pressures you face to deny Christ, what form does persecution take in your life? What are the costs of discipleship? How can reflecting on the abundant grace of God from Romans 5 help you to count the cost of discipleship and stay loyal to Christ in the midst of persecution? How does the loyalty of Christ to you engender loyalty back to Him?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 91: 06/14/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we return to the Old Testament Book of Exodus, and then in the first reading, we study a summary of the Christian faith. In the Gospel reading, Jesus empowered His disciples with miraculous powers to heal and cast out demons.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Old Testament Book of Exodus. The reading begins after God had provided water to the Israelites at the Rock of Horeb (17:6) and Moses' Father-in-Law Jethro's visit. During the visit, Jethro gave Moses important advice about appointing elders over the people to judge the smaller matters and then bring judgment only in the larger ones. Interestingly, Jethro returned home to his own country after his visit rather than wander forty years with the Nation.

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First Reading:

> *Exodus 19:1-6 NAS95 1 In the third month after the sons of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. 2 When they set out from Rephidim, they came to the wilderness of Sinai and camped in the wilderness; and there Israel camped in front of the mountain. 3 Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: 4 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself. 5 'Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; 6 and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel."*

Three months had elapsed since the Nation had gone out of Egypt (v. 1). Moses then went up on the mountain of God as His prophet. God then provided Moses with an important insight as to the conditional nature of the Law that would be given to him during his future visits up the mountain. God gave Moses an "if then" statement, something which theologians refer to as a "lawsuit." God said, "*if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples*" (v. 5a, b). Next, God affirmed part of His nature as that of the creator and sovereign God (v. 6, "for the earth is mine." In the closing verse, God revealed that the Nation of Israel was called to be a "holy nation" and a "kingdom of priests" (v. 6).

We see in the reading how Moses spoke as a prophet of God to bring special divine revelation to the people who were now camped in the desert, unaware of their future 40 years of wandering. It was at this crucial point that God gave Moses insights into the kingdom He was building on the earth through His chosen people. These people were to be to Him a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. This promise was conditional, however, as the future promises later revealed to Moses were contingent upon the people's obedience. The conditional aspect of what was later called the "Mosaic Covenant" did not nullify in any way the promises that God had previously made to Abraham (see Genesis 12).

Today's reading revealed how Moses was appointed to act as a prophet of God by bringing His holy revelation to the Nation. Moses, who we later understand was a "type of Christ," brought God's word to God's people in order to build the Nation of God. We can celebrate, as believers in God, members of the New Covenant, that the nature of this eternal covenant with God is unconditional,

pointing back to the promises of God through Abraham. Although the record of humanity is one of failure, Jesus came to earth in human form as a Victor. *Note: Scripture never records Jesus as a Victim.* Although Adam, the first man, broke God's commandments, and the Nation of Israel did too, Jesus came along as a substitute for our sin and fulfilled the commandments and the Law (1 Peter 2:22, John 8:46). As believers in Jesus Christ, we are not people who in a sense wandering in the desert, rather we are those who are led by God's Word celebrating our daily delivery from sin through God's power.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Today's reading is from Romans chapter 5, a chapter that opens with a "therefore." "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). The unconditional nature of the New Covenant is conditioned by faith (see Ephesians 2:8-9). The opening verses of this chapter then reveal the value of faith as the gateway to God, "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" (v. 2).

Second Reading:

> *Romans 5:6-11 NAS95 6 For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. 11 And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.*

The reading is perhaps the greatest summary of faith in the New Testament. It shows how God revealed His love for us through His sending of Jesus, even though we are lost sinners (v. 8). Even though we were sinners, we were justified (through faith) by Jesus' death (v. 9b, "His blood." As non-believing sinners, we were justified with God when we believed, and reconciled to God (v. 10). As a result, we can "exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have received reconciliation" (v. 11). We are no longer promised the "wrath of God" (v. 9b) because of the gift

given to us by Jesus.

We cannot overstate the value of the salvation that we as believers have through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul revealed in the reading from Romans that God has delivered us from the wrath of God, a promise still made to non-believers. We can continually celebrate "in God through our Lord Jesus Christ" the momentous victory that Jesus achieved for us, "while we were yet sinners" (v. 8c), not yet born when Jesus came to earth to die for our sins some 2,000 years ago. His victory over sin is as fresh now as it was when it happened way back then. We have been "justified by His blood" (v. 9b), which is a legal, judicial term meaning that God has pronounced that we have been set free from our former sinful status "just as if we had never sinned." Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from Saint Matthew beginning with the closing of chapter 9 just after Jesus had gone "throughout all the cities and villages" (9:35) teaching and healing the people, events which brought about crowds of people.

Gospel Reading:

> *Matthew 9:36 – 10:8 NAS95 36 Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then He *said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. 38 "Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest." 1 Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. 2 Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; 3 Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; 4 Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him. 5 These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; 6 but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7 "And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' 8 "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give.*

Even though there were plenty of priests, scribes, and Pharisees, Jesus proclaimed that, although many sought to believe in God, there were few true proclaimers of the faith. He then went on to list the twelve leaders of the faith, one of whom was a devil (v. 4c). The Twelve (minus Judas Iscariot) were the true reapers of the plentiful harvest that God had planted in the world, and a foretaste of the future harvesters now working to build God's kingdom through His church. The Twelve were given a special mission and powers to go only to the Jews, and also received the same healing powers that Jesus had just previously demonstrated to them.

The Scriptures are very interesting because they are often very personal and give real names of real people, such as the Twelve Apostles of Jesus. These are the Twelve that are forever enshrined as the Apostles of the Lord, the ones whom God sent as the first "workers into His harvest" (v. 38b). We can forever remember them and note how Peter (the Rock), was listed first, followed closely by Andrew, James, and John.

In summary, as believers, we can praise God that we are not under the Law and its conditional promises, since these were fulfilled by Jesus. God has led us out of Egypt in a sense, through faith in Jesus, and sent us as harvesters to work in His fields through our faith in the Lord Jesus. We can celebrate how, "while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6), meaning us in our former sinful state.

Reflection Questions

1. The second reading from Romans is often upheld by theologians as one of the more famous "but God" statements in the entirety of the Bible. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" Romans 5:8). Read the following verse 9 again. What did today's reading reveal as the alternative outcome for those who don't partake of God's blessings through faith in Jesus Christ? In what ways does this empower you in light of what you learned in the Gospel reading?

2. In what ways do you find yourself as a harvester in God's field of the world?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 167: 06-07-2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. The focus of this week's readings is the background and importance of communion. We open with a reading from Exodus in which Moses recounts God's provision of manna to the Hebrew people during their desert wanderings. Then we move to Saint Paul's Letter to the Corinthians with some teaching on the communion meal and then conclude with the Gospel lesson from John in which Jesus taught the people that He was the "bread that came down from heaven" (John 6:51). As you study this week, keep in mind Saint Paul's admonition to examine ourselves before we partake of communion that will be covered in the reflection questions.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Deuteronomy 8. The context is God's giving of the Law to Moses after they

had escaped the wrath of Pharaoh and had struggled for forty years in the desert. The main audience Moses addressed was those who were either born during this 40-year period or under twenty when it began. This was because all adults 20 years and older at the time of the Exodus perished, except for Moses, Joshua, and Caleb (Numbers 14:29). The context of today's reading is Moses' final address to the people about to enter the Promised Land. "Then Moses summoned all Israel and said to them: 'Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the ordinances which I am speaking today in your hearing, that you may learn them and observe them carefully'" (Deuteronomy 5:1). He continued in the next chapter, "Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the LORD your God has commanded me to teach you, that you might do them in the land where you are going over to possess it (Deuteronomy 6:1). He then proceeded to recount the main points of the Law.

The reading that follows includes all of the verses that were skipped in order to provide the full context and to illuminate the complete meaning of the text.

First Reading:

> *2 You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. 3 He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD. 4 Your clothing did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. 5 Thus you are to know in your heart that the LORD your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son. 6 Therefore, you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him. 7 For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills; 8 a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; 9 a land where you will eat food without scarcity, in which you will not lack anything; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. 10 When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you. 11 Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; 12 otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, 13 and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, 14 then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the*

> *house of slavery. 15 He led you through the great and terrible wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water; He brought water for you out of the rock of flint. 16 "In the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end. (Deuteronomy 8:2-16)*

Moses' purpose of this address was to remind the people of God's miraculous provision and protection of them during their desert wanderings (v. 2). First, Moses recounted God's provision of clothing that did not wear out (v. 4a) as well as protection from injury (v. 4b). Second, Moses reminded the people that they were disciplined by a loving God in the same way that a father disciplines his child (v. 5). He reminded them of the manna that God provided (v. 2) a food that pointed to God's supernatural provision as well as to looking forward to His coming Son the Lord Jesus who called Himself the "Bread of Life" (John 6:35) that we will talk about later in this study. Next, Moses gave the people some insights into the nature of the Promised Land that they were about to enter (vv. 7-9) and warned them about the dangers of forgetting the Lord and His commandments (v. 11). He said that if they forget the Lord by not keeping His commandments their hearts would become proud in spite of His supernatural provision (v. 14). Finally, he reminded them of how God had delivered them from the fiery serpents (v. 15) provided water for them in the desert (v. 15), and fed them manna from heaven (v. 16). Both the manna and the incident of the people with the fiery serpents prefigured the Lord Jesus Christ. The latter incident was recorded in Numbers 21 in which Moses instructed the people to construct a bronze image of a fiery serpent and place it on a stick. When the people looked in faith to the healing power provided by God through the symbol, they were saved from the danger inflicted by the snakes (Numbers 21:8). Jesus said about Himself, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up" (John 3:14). People who looked at the bronze serpent with faith in God were healed. In a similar way, those who look to Jesus in faith are forgiven of their sin and given eternal life as a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-9). In both cases, people were (or are being) saved by God's grace through faith in God.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

As we saw in the first reading, the Old Testament provided many important parallels for the disciples and the first Christians to recognize Jesus as the fulfillment of God's predictions concerning the Savior. As we move to the second reading, we will see how Saint Paul spoke against the idolatry that was prevalent among the people of Corinth in the First Century. Paul reminded the people about the curse that was placed on God's people for grumbling against God, as recorded in the Book of Exodus. Paul said, "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction" (1 Corinthians 10:11) and urged the people to flee from idolatry (v. 14), "Therefore,

my beloved, flee from idolatry." The issue he was confronting here was the objection of some to eating food that had been sacrificed to idols (1 Corinthians 10:18-33). The reading today is sandwiched right in the middle of this important discussion.

It is important to understand the context of the Book of 1 Corinthians. Paul wrote this Letter to a church filled with disharmony and division. This particular passage is part of how he sought to unite the weak and immature Corinthian church. He focused on the fact that they were all one through Jesus' sacrificial death, which leveled the playing field, making all equal because of the cross.

Second Reading:

> *16 Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? 17 Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread. (1 Corinthians 10:16-17)*

Paul said that in order to partake of the communion service, we must be in unity together and in fellowship with God. Matthew Henry said it this way. "By partaking of one broken loaf, the emblem of our Savior's broken body, who is the only true bread that came down from heaven, we coalesce into one body, become members of him and one another." Unlike the pagan sacrifices which were repeated and never brought redemption to those participating, Jesus' single sacrifice resulted in salvation for all those who believe (1 Peter 3:18). Also, unlike the continual sacrifices offered by the Jews that looked forward to Jesus, Jesus can never be sacrificed again because after he made one sacrifice for sins forever He sat down at the right hand of God (Hebrews 10:12). "By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10:10). When we celebrate communion we remember the single, final sacrifice that Jesus made for us on the cross (Luke 22:19). We celebrate the fact that when we share in the communion cup and the bread we unite in the belief that Jesus poured out His blood and allowed His body to be broken to pay the penalty for our sin.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson is from John Chapter 6. The context of the reading is after Jesus went from

Jerusalem where He had healed a paralyzed man, to the "other side of the Sea of Galilee" (John 6:1). It was here on the east coast of the lake that Jesus went up on the mountain near Bethsaida to teach His disciples and was followed by a large crowd (v. 2). He evidently ended up teaching this discourse in the synagogue in Capernaum (John 6:59). Jesus opened this section of teaching with a bold statement regarding His deity. He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life" (John 6:47). This is the core of the Gospel message, the Good News, that anyone who believes in Jesus as his or her Savior has eternal life. Next, Jesus made another of His bold statements that He was God in the flesh, the manna sent from heaven, when He said, "I am the bread of life" (v. 48). The Jews would have clearly understood His use of the Greek phrase "ego eimi," translated in English "I am." Jesus is the eternal God, the preexistent One, the "bread of life" sent by God the Father (John 6:46), the supreme and final sacrifice for sin (Hebrews 10:12).

As you read, notice Jesus's additional use of the "I am" phrase, and how Jesus used this to confirm His identity as God in the flesh.

Gospel Reading:

> *51 "I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh." 52 Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" 53 So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. 54 "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. 55 "For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. 56 "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. 57 "As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me. 58 "This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever." (John 6:51-58)*

Jesus again affirmed His divinity when he said, "I am the living bread that came down out of heaven" (v. 51a). Next, He said that the way to eternal life was by partaking of His body (v. 51b), something which was a stumbling stone to the religious Jews and Pharisees (v. 52b). Jesus answered their objection by telling them that although their forefathers ate the bread of God (manna, see Exodus 16:1-36) and later died (v. 58b), anyone that partook of belief in Jesus would have eternal life. Jesus said, "he who eats this bread will live forever" (v. 58c). In the Jewish world, there was a high emphasis given upon the value of community that occurred around a meal. What Jesus said was that

in order to partake of Jesus, the bread of life, you must commune with Him. One way we, as believers, commune with Jesus is through the communion meal.

This reading follows a train of thought in which Jesus explains and defends His deity to both seeking and skeptical people. The disgruntled and skeptical Jewish leaders ask Jesus in John 6:42 how He could claim to be the contemporary version of God's "bread of heaven" when they knew both of his parents and had seen Him grow up as any normal boy and become a carpenter like his dad. Jesus, therefore, refers to their common knowledge of how God worked in the Old Testament, when he provided food from heaven called "manna." Instead of being physical bread, which had to be eaten regularly in order to live, Jesus referred to Himself as spiritual or "living" bread that came down uniquely from heaven. Jesus invited them to "eat of this bread" in order to live forever.

What does it mean to eat of His flesh and to drink His blood? We often focus on the communion service as the answer to this question. While participating in communion is a righteous, sacred ritual, we must not replace the ritual with the intended outcome. A better question is, what is the intended outcome of communion? Jesus partially answered these questions in the reading. "Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in Me, and I in him" (John 6:56). Abiding in Jesus, relating to Him, doing life with Him, is the end goal of communion. So, if we are not being drawn closer to daily trust and mindful awareness of Jesus' presence in our lives, something is wrong with our participation in the Lord's Supper.

What do the teachings from the readings and Gospel lesson 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), just 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).

Reflection Questions

1. In First Corinthians 11, beyond what we read in the second reading today, Saint Paul called for believers to make a serious self-examination before partaking in communion. "But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup" (1 Corinthians 11:28). He warned, "Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord" (v. 27) and even went so far as to say that "For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep" (v. 30).

If you take communion this week, ask yourself the following question. What does it mean to "examine yourself" before communion? What are two or three things that you could bring before God in prayer this week, prior to communion?

2. Read the following quote from Jesus that He said in the Sermon on the Mount.

"Therefore, if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. (Matthew 5:23-24).

What are some ways in which this verse speaks to the practice of examining ourselves before communion?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 164: 05-31-2026

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we open with the narrative of Moses' encounter with God on Mount Sinai. This is where God gave Moses the 10 Commandments, which are still guiding lawmakers today. Then we move to the New Testament, where we will see the outworking of a higher law, the law of Love. It is God's love for us that allows a new way of living to emerge in us.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Exodus 34. The backdrop to this story is shame and glory, as Moses receives the law from God for the second time on Mount Sinai. The first time ended in shame, for he came down from the mountain to find the people of God worshiping a golden calf (see Exodus 32). The second time ended in glory, for Moses asked to see God's glory, and this is what God revealed. The new stone tablets and God's patience with His people are indications of His character, as this passage describes.

First Reading:

> *4 So he [Moses] cut out two stone tablets like the former ones, and Moses rose up early in the morning and went up to Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and he took two stone tablets in his hand. 5 The LORD descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the LORD. 6 Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; 7 who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations." 8 Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship. 9 He said, "If now I have found favor in Your sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go along in our midst, even though the people are so obstinate, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Your own possession." (Exodus 34:4-9)*

The importance of this passage may be missed by its brevity and simplicity. But let us not underestimate the foundational nature of this revelation of God's character to His people. Remember, the newly released Hebrew people had just been delivered from being ruled by the Egyptians as slaves. You can take the slave out of Egypt, but something internal has to happen in order to take the mentality of a slave out of the person of God. A revelation of God's true nature would be the antidote to the slave mentality. Here is what we learn about God from this passage:

- God is a self-disclosing, self-revealing God. He desires to make Himself known to His people. Without God first revealing Himself to people, humans would have no way of knowing Him. The Hebrew people were his special chosen people to reveal His character. How would they reveal His character without knowing Him? The self-revealing nature of God is the foundation of a relationship with God for all people. This is His grace.

- The word "LORD," which is used as His special "covenantal" name for the Jewish people, means "I AM". This reveals that God is ever-present and absolutely existent. The Hebrew people needed to know that the God of their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, was also their ever-present Father as well.

- God is compassionate and gracious. These words are packed with depth, and the rest of the Bible should be understood in light of God's character of compassion and grace. Here are some helpful definitions. Compassionate: refers to deep love (usually of a superior to an inferior) rooted in some natural bond (i.e., Mother to child; Father to child). Compassion is the deep feeling one has for another who is totally helpless, and usually results in providing aid to the one who is in need. Mercy and forgiveness go hand in hand with compassion.

Gracious: unmerited favor, the root word depicts a heartfelt response by someone who has something to give to one who has a need; it is an adjective that describes the generous acts of Yahweh. It is generous in the sense that it is not deserved. Mercy is when you don't get the bad that you deserve; Grace is when you get the good that you don't deserve. God demonstrates both compassion and grace toward us: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

- God is slow to anger: contrary to popular belief, He is not capricious in His display of anger, nor is He looking to burn people up with His wrath. He is patient and wants people to repent, not desiring that any should perish (1 Timothy 2:4).

- God is abounding in love and faithfulness. Abounding connotes the overflowing and abundant nature of God's love and faithfulness. He's not going to run out! The word for "love" used here means "loving-kindness". The two characteristics put together mean that God is fiercely loyal to His children. We can count on Him to love and to forgive.

- God is also just. He will punish the sin of the guilty who have not brought themselves to Him in surrender. It would be unloving for God to allow injustice to prevail. So even in His punishment of wickedness, God is exercising His loving faithfulness.

In this passage, we also learn some things about people and the proper response to God as seen in Moses:

- When God's glory is revealed, the only appropriate place for humans to be is to bow to the ground and worship.

- When God's glory is revealed, Moses wanted God to go with him and the people. He could not envision being alone in this world. God's presence is appealing; we do not have to protect ourselves from getting "too much of God."

- When God's glory was revealed, Moses recognized the sinful state of himself and the people. God's glory makes us more self-aware of our own shortcomings. Our shabby excuses don't really hold up in God's presence; we must rely on God's grace in order to stand in His presence.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Saint Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians, Chapter 13. This is the close of Saint Paul's letter and serves as a reminder of the sort of people that God calls us to be now that we have entered into a relationship with Him. Since we know Him to be compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love, we can be people who are growing to look more and more like Him.

Second Reading:

> *11 Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. 12 Greet one another with a holy kiss. 13 All the saints greet you. (2 Corinthians 13:11-13)*

Paul has had a tenuous relationship with the Corinthian believers, with multiple visits and letters aimed at pointing them to what it looks like to live differently from the pagans. The relationship one has with Christ as Savior ushers us into a new way of life that does not operate according to the

world's system. Therefore, he summarizes his message with instructions for living out the Christian life.

- "Brethren": shows that those who are in Christ are in a family relationship. The laws that govern a family are higher than a government-enforced system. Family relationships are governed by the higher law of love.

- "Rejoice": why must Paul command the Corinthians to rejoice? He must know that it is easier for humans to be critical and despair over life than it is to rejoice. We must be reminded that we have a lot to be thankful for.

- "Be made complete": reminds us of the believer's status in Christ. We are positionally complete in Christ (for Jesus cried, "It is finished" from the cross), but it takes some effort on our part to live out the reality of this new status.

- "Be comforted": Paul began this letter by telling the Corinthians that the God of all comfort would comfort them in their troubles (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). He closes it by encouraging them to appropriate the comfort that only God can give.

- "Be like-minded and live in peace" means that Christians should seek to live in an understanding way with each other, allowing the Truth to unite us.

- "and the God of love and peace will be with you": Is He not with us when we are living contrary to these commands? Well, in a way, yes. It is true that God is omnipresent. His love and peace is available to all people at all times. But the difference between having God's love and peace and not having them is the choice we humans make to accept or reject who God is in our lives. If we live contrary to His ways, His love and peace will not be in us. If we want the God of love and peace to make His presence known to us, we simply have to ask and receive, making room for Him to manifest Himself in us and through us. We can't have His love and peace without having Him.

- "Greet one another with a holy kiss": this practice may not be common in our churches anymore, but we have similar expressions of fellowship, such as shaking hands, giving a hug, or smiling across the aisle at someone. The idea is to be welcoming and inclusive toward others who are in fellowship with us in our local places of worship.

- "All the saints greet you": this closing phrase gives Saint Paul's theology of sainthood. He frequently uses the word "saint" to describe genuine believers in Christ (1 Cor. 1:2, 2 Cor. 1:1; Philippians 1:1). He opened the letter to the Ephesians by saying: "To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 1:1). God gives the status of saint to all who have bowed their knee to Jesus as Lord, for now Christ's righteousness is credited to our account (2 Corinthians 5:21). That is what makes us a saint before God.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from John Chapter 3. Verse 16 is the famous verse often seen printed on signs and waved by people at various sporting events. The context of this section is the conclusion of a meeting at night between Jesus and Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews (John 3:1), meaning he was a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council. Evidently, Nicodemus feared the Jews' reaction, so he met with Jesus secretly. Later in John's Gospel, Nicodemus came with Joseph of Arimathea to prepare Jesus' body for burial (John 19:39), an act that revealed his willingness to make a bold, public statement of his identification with Jesus.

Gospel Reading:

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

We see in this passage once again that God's love is the foundation of eternal life. It is God's love

that moved Him to give His one and only Son. "Begotten" is a translation of a Greek word that has the connotation of being unique. So, to clarify, John is saying that no one else is like God's Son, Jesus. He is the only one of His kind, and He was given to us to provide the one and only way to eternal life. As we said earlier, God does not want people to perish (1 Tim. 2:4). His love compelled Him to send His Son into the world to be our Savior. So, what separates those who have eternal life from those who are perishing? Belief in Jesus Christ. Belief is a robust word that connotes trust, relationship, and knowledge that is applied to one's life. As we grow in our belief in Jesus, we must clarify whether we truly believe. We must have a place of entry into the life of Christ. Do we want Him or not? If we reject Him, then we stand condemned already. Our unforgiven sin leaves no other option than to be judged by God at the end of our lives. But if we turn to Jesus in faith and rest our hope for salvation in Him, then we are saved. That is why He came to this world, to save. Have you entered into the life of Christ by putting your faith in His atoning death on the cross and receiving His resurrection power for daily living? If you want to do so, you can make that decision right now and talk to God about putting your faith in Christ. The following prayer may help you to express your heart to God:

> *Dear God, your word says that you loved the world, and I trust that that includes me. In your love, you gave your one and only Son, Jesus, to bring me eternal life. I realize that without the gift of Your Son, my life will end in eternal death, it will perish. I need Jesus to be my Savior. I want to believe in Him. And even though I don't know exactly what that means or entails, I trust that you will show me how to enter into His life and be saved. I trust in Jesus to save me from the eternal consequences of my sin. I believe in You, Jesus, and I receive Your free gift of eternal life. Now, please help me to walk in the light of your Truth and love. Change me into the saint that the New Testament declares your people to be. I am Yours, Lord. Amen.*

Please consider sharing the testimony of your journey to faith in Jesus with me. If you want, I can post it on this website even with real names removed. Follow this link if you would be willing to write something up for our testimony section.

Reflection Questions

1. We saw God's love in a myriad of ways in this week's reading. Go back through each passage and write out in your own words below some of the ways that you see God's love.

Exodus 34

2 Corinthians 13

John 3

2. How does the description of God's love in His Word differ from your own understanding of God? What false notions do you need to reject, and what truths do you need to ask God to help you keep in mind?

3. How is God calling you to live in light of His love? Choose one of the points of application below or write out your own:

- To receive His free gift of eternal life by believing in Jesus
- To receive His forgiveness for a particular sin that you previously thought was too big for God to forgive
- To treat another Christian as a brother/sister
- To recognize your identity as a saint and make choices based on this
- To be "like-minded" with other Christians over the truth
- To be comforted by the God of all comfort

- To let God's compassion and grace be your interpretive framework for the circumstances of your life

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 63: 05-24-2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for Pentecost Sunday. We open with the first reading from Acts that chronicled the Day of Pentecost, when God sent the Holy Spirit to indwell the believers in the early church. Then we move on to the second reading from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians and discuss the gifts of the Spirit. We conclude with the Gospel lesson from Saint John, where we will examine what it means when Jesus said, "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained" (John 20:23).

Introduction to the First Reading:

The theme of this week's readings is this: In the first reading, we see God's sending of the Holy Spirit to the church. In the second reading, we see the revelation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Finally, in the Gospel lesson, we find the Holy Spirit's commissioning of all believers to spread the Gospel message. Let's begin with the first reading from the Book of Acts. This is the record of the momentous day on which God sent the Holy Spirit to indwell the believers, fulfilling Jesus' promise (John 14:17). This event occurred fifty days after Jesus rose from the dead and ten days after Jesus returned to heaven.

First Reading:

> *1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance. 5 Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. 6 And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language. 7 They were amazed and astonished, saying, "Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? 9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs–we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God." (Acts 2:1-11)*

God's sending of the Holy Spirit fulfilled what Jesus had predicted when He said that he wouldn't leave the believers as orphans (John 14:18). The Holy Spirit is the Person who empowered the disciples to turn from hiding in the upper room to being bold speakers in the name of Jesus. Notice how the first ministry of the Holy Spirit was to cause the disciples to speak in various languages in such a way that the Jews from around the world heard them in their own language (v. 6). It's not known whether each of the disciples spoke a different foreign language or if they spoke some holy tongue that the foreigners were able to understand. Jesus had earlier told the disciples, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you" (John 14:26). This first ministry of the Spirit was to spread the Gospel to the foreign Jews gathered for Pentecost by allowing them to hear the Gospel

message in their own language. They testified that "we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God" (v. 11).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

We cannot overstate the importance of the Holy Spirit's ministry in the lives of believers. His ministry through the believers in whom He dwells is essential not only for spreading the Gospel around the world, but also for empowering us to accomplish all of the purposes of God in our lives. As we move to the second reading from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, we see some of the gifts the Holy Spirit has sent us. Note that this week's reading skipped verses 8 -11; these are included to clarify Saint Paul's instruction properly.

Second Reading:

> *3 Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. 4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. 6 There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. 7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. 12 For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:3-13)*

In this reading, Paul cataloged some of the gifts of the Spirit and said that the purpose of the gifts was "for the common good" (v. 7). Although this was not an exhaustive list of the gifts (see also Ephesians 4:7-13 and Romans 12:3-8) they included wisdom and knowledge (v.8), faith (v.9a), healing (v.9b), miracles (v.10a), prophecy (v.10b), discernment of spirits (v.10c), speaking in tongues (v.10d), and interpretation of those speaking in tongues (v.10e). Later in the reading, Paul stated

that although the gifts of the Spirit were diverse with everyone having a different gift, they were delivered by God in such a way as to work perfectly together in the whole body of the church (vv. 11-13). Even though not everyone would have the same gift, the diversity of gifts among the believers would accomplish God's purposes through the unity of the believers (v.13). For example, only certain people were given the gift of prophecy, meaning either the ability to foretell future events or more prominently in the New Testament context to forth tell through the preaching of the Scriptures. In today's age, some of the gifts that Paul listed are more prevalent than others. During the early church, immediately after God sent the Holy Spirit, certain gifts, such as tongues and healing, were significant "sign gifts" that significantly increased the spread of the Gospel to a culture thoroughly immersed in the worship of idols. As seen in the first reading, God powerfully used these sign gifts to empower the disciples to speak various languages.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

As we move on to the Gospel lesson, we will see how God the Holy Spirit commissioned the early church believers to spread the Gospel. The context of the reading from John Chapter 20 is the evening of the first Easter Sunday, when Jesus first appeared to the disciples gathered in the upper room with the doors locked. This didn't stop Jesus, who could walk through the wall or door by exercising His divine power with His new glorified body. Only ten of the disciples were present, as Thomas "The Twin" didn't see Jesus until the next time the whole group was gathered together (John 20:26), and Judas had already given up hope and killed himself.

Before we read the text, since the central focus of the lesson will be the concept of the forgiveness of sin, let's review what God's Holy Word says about this crucial subject. First, God says that everyone, except for Jesus, is a sinner. Paul said in Romans, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Second, God says that because of our sin, we deserve the penalty of death, having sinned against a Holy God who is entirely separate from sin. Paul said, "For the wages of sin are death" (Romans 6:23a). We can never enter into the presence of our Holy God because we are sinful. The only way that we can enter into a relationship with God and be in His presence when we die is to have our sins forgiven by God. Third, there is good news. Paul continued in Romans 6:23, "but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23b-ff). Finally, only God can forgive sin. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus was confronted by the Pharisees after he proclaimed the forgiveness of a paralyzed man's sin, and they challenged Jesus' authority to forgive sin. In response, Jesus said, "Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins have been forgiven you,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But, so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, –He said to the paralytic—'I say to you, get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home'" (Luke 5:23-24). Though Scripture tells us to "confess our sins one to another" (James 5:16), only God can forgive sin. Jesus

came to the earth as God in the flesh for the express purpose of dying on the cross for our sin (Romans 4:25). "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Paul explained later in Romans Chapter 10 how to receive the free gift of eternal life through the forgiveness of our sin:

> *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; 10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. 11 For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; 13 for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED." Romans 10:9-13*

We see that the forgiveness of our sins is a free gift of God, given to us by believing the good news of the Gospel. Jesus gave the disciples, and by application, every Christian, what is called the Great Commission to preach this message about the forgiveness of sin. Jesus said, "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). This is the Gospel, meaning good news, that Jesus instructed his believers to preach to the world for the forgiveness of sin.

Now, with these things in mind, let's read what happened that Sunday evening when Jesus made a surprise visit to the disciples gathered in the upper room.

Gospel Reading:

> *19 So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 So Jesus said to*

> *them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." 22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained." (John 20:19-23)*

What did Jesus mean when he said in verse 23, "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained"? The key to understanding Jesus' teaching in verse 23 is the previous two verses. Jesus said, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (v.21b). In verse 22, He promised that God would send the Holy Spirit. This "sending" or "commissioning" of the disciples (and all believers) is one of the primary purposes of the church as expounded in the 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). The binding and unbinding of sin is found in the gift of faith (Ephesians 2:8-9) when a person comes to the knowledge of Jesus Christ as their Savior. Jesus said, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" (John 3:36). Jesus instructed these ten men that anyone who believes in Him through the preaching of the Gospel will be saved, just as we saw in Romans Chapter 10. The interpretation of Scripture must always be consistent with the whole counsel of God's Word.

What do today's three themes we discovered in the readings mean in our lives? First, God sent the Holy Spirit to indwell His believers to accomplish His purposes. He sent diverse gifts to diverse people in such a way as to compel the Church to work together as the Body of Christ. Second, God commissioned all believers, not just the ten disciples gathered at Pentecost, to fulfill His Great Commission. This means that everyone who believes is to work to spread the Gospel and disciple believers, recognizing that not everyone will be gifted in either area. Some will be called to teach, and some to evangelize. You can rest assured that if you truly commit your heart to the Lord, He won't automatically call you as a missionary in Africa. But you can be assured that God will call you to use whatever spiritual gift(s) He has given you to your fullest ability.

I remember how often I saw my neighbor returning to work after dinner to call people he knew would only be at home in the evening. One night, I was driving home from the local lake after spending a couple of hours windsurfing, one of my favorite pastimes. As I turned the corner on the road leading up to our house at around 7:00 pm, I recognized my neighbor as he drove me back to work at our local Christian college. Although he goes to work at 8:00 in the morning, he usually returns after dinner. Although God has gifted this man in various ways, faithfulness is one of his preeminent qualities. His example has genuinely inspired me to be faithful as well. Although God

doesn't call everyone to work 10 or more hours each day on a fixed salary, as my neighbor does, He does call us to be faithful in using the gifts He has given us.

Reflection Questions

1. God provides us with a list of spiritual gifts in three passages: Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28-30, and Ephesians 4:11. We looked at part of the list from First Corinthians today. Read each of the other passages and see if you can locate some of the other spiritual gifts, including Administration, Knowledge, Apostleship, Leadership, Discernment, Mercy, Evangelism, Miracles, Exhortation, Pastor/Shepherd, Faith, Prophecy, Giving, Serving/Ministering, Healing, Teaching, Interpretation of Tongues, Tongues, and Wisdom. As you read these verses, think about how you serve God.

> *Romans 12:6-8 NAS95 6 Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; 7 if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; 8 or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.*

> *1 Corinthians 12:28-30 NAS95 28 And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. 29 All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? 30 All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?*

> *Ephesians 4:11 NAS95 11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,*

2. What is your spiritual gift? One of the best ways to understand your gifting is to ask other believers. Another way is to use one of the various online spiritual gifts tests. See, for example:

https://giftstest.com

How are you using your particular gift to serve God? How does understanding your spiritual gift(s) help you better serve God?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 58: 05-17-2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. Today we celebrate the ascension of our Lord Jesus, remembering how He returned to heaven and to God the Father before commissioning His church to spread the good news of the Gospel throughout the world until He returns.

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Introduction to the First Reading:

The Book of Acts continues Doctor Luke's chronicle of the life and legacy of our Lord Jesus. This Book picks up after the closing of the Gospel of Luke, in which, right before Jesus ascended into heaven, He promised the eleven that they would be "clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). The Gospel of Luke closed with Luke's telling of Jesus' ascension. "50 And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. 51 While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven. 52 And they, after worshiping Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy, 53 and were continually in the temple praising God" (Luke 24:50-53). Interestingly, the eleven disciples obeyed Jesus by staying in Jerusalem and were "continually in the temple" in spite of the fact that the Jewish leaders there were the ones responsible for His crucifixion.

First Reading:

> Acts 1:1-11 NAS95 1 The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, 2 until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. 3 To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. 4 Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." 6 So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" 7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; 8 but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." 9 And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10 And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. 11 They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."

This opening section of Acts recounts how Jesus reaffirmed His commissioning of the church to be His witnesses not only to the Jews but to the entire world (v. 8). The question at hand of the disciples was whether Jesus would immediately bring in His kingdom on earth and overtake the oppressive

Roman rule (v. 6). Jesus didn't deny that He would establish such a rule in the future but rather told them that the timing was not for them to know, but was a mystery reserved only to the Father God (v. 7). At the conclusion of His message, Jesus was taken up in a cloud, meaning that the Skekinah Glory of God had appeared in contrast to some sort of rainstorm. The closing verse was a message, presumably from two angels, not men, commanding them to get busy with Jesus' business, which He had just directed them to.

Today's reading marks the unfolding of the mystery of the church, something that was not foreseen even by the Disciples. We will see that in the Gospel reading where it says that "some were doubtful" (Matthew 28:17). The mystery deepened as Jesus left the disciples to build His kingdom, but without His physical presence. Although His disciples certainly knew the Scriptures, they didn't yet understand many aspects of how they related to this future kingdom ministry. Remember how Jesus explained to some of them on the Road to Emmaus that the Scriptures spoke of Him and that He had to be killed for the next phase of God's plan to unfold (Luke 24:25-27).

A key point to remember from this reading is that Jesus didn't leave his disciples powerless; he promised to send them God's Holy Spirit, which would empower them. God's. God's "dynamite" power would enable the disciples to unveil this new mystery of the church through various miraculous gifts, which set fire first to Jerusalem and then to the entire world. As Christians, we have the power of God the Holy Spirit living within us. He empowers us to accomplish God's work in His kingdom until the time that He returns.

Second, the two men in white robes (presumably angels) said how Jesus would return in the same way that He had left them (v. 11). In other words, when Jesus returned, He would come by descending in a cloud of God's glory in physical form downwards from heaven. The men asked the disciples why they were staring up into the sky. Obviously, angels had much more information about Jesus' kingdom, and had we been there, we too would have been staring up into the sky, wondering what had just happened!

One day, my wife and I were walking along a nature trail and heard the rapid fluttering of a bird as it flew away. Had we been looking up instead of down at our feet in order to keep from tripping on the rocky trail, we would have been able to spy a bald eagle as it roosted in the tree shortly ahead of us. Instead, we only saw the white tail feathers of this beautiful bird flying away from us; we had missed the opportunity to have the much fuller experience of its presence. After several events like this, we learned to be more careful, look further ahead, and keep looking up to have a chance to see

things ahead that we otherwise would not have seen. We had previously said something like, had I been looking up (or ahead), we would have seen it before it flew away. Now, our mantra is to look up so that we don't miss important things ahead. So it is in our spiritual lives. God calls us to "look up" and anticipate His imminent return. We are called to go about accomplishing His business and keep our eyes focused upon Jesus.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

In the reading from Saint Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, we will see the unveiling of some details of Jesus' kingdom reign in heaven. Jesus rules during the church age from His throne on the right hand of God the Father (Mark 16:19). Jesus rules from heaven where He "sat down at the right hand of God." We see this most clearly in the Book of Hebrews.

> *"11 Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; 12 but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, 13 waiting from that time onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET. 14 For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:11-14).*

Second Reading:

> *Ephesians 1:17-23 NAS95 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might 20 which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 22 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.*

Paul provided many insights into Jesus' kingdom, and asked the Ephesian believers to pray for wisdom so that they too may experience "the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of

His inheritance in the saints" (v. 18). Paul himself prayed they these believers' eyes would be opened to see and understand this treasure (v. 18a). He reminded them of how God through his mighty power raised Jesus from the dead and seated Jesus at the utmost highest throne in the universe (vv. 20-21). He closed with a marvelous statement about how God had given Jesus total rule over all things through His rulership over the church (v. 23). Here the word translated "church" doesn't refer as much to the technical translation as a religious assembly, but rather something fuller, more spiritual and mysterious since we see how Paul equated it to Jesus' body (v. 23a).

The church on earth is God's body of believers, set apart to do His will until Jesus returns. As Jesus' body is the church, we are in essence part of Jesus' body. We are God's special agents commissioned on His behalf. Our ID card is that of the Holy Spirit living within us. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is the great power that lives within us.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

This short reading from John Mark's Gospel records what is called the "Great Commission," in which Jesus commands his followers to do several things until His return.

Gospel Reading:

> *Mark 16:15-20 NAS95 15 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. 16 He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. 17 These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; 18 they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." 19 So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. 20 And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed. And they promptly reported all these instructions to Peter and his companions. And after that, Jesus Himself sent out through them from east to west the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.*

Jesus commanded His followers to preach the good news (the Gospel, v. 15) and told them that certain powerful "sign gifts" would accompany them as they set about accomplishing this mission.

To a large extent, these "sign gifts" were temporary, intended to prove the truth of the Gospel through powerful miracles, as we see throughout the Book of Acts. Mark records how they set out to do just that, and how they "confirmed the word by the signs that followed" (v. 20). Interestingly, even though we see in verse 19 that Jesus had ascended back up into heaven, the reading says that He worked alongside the disciples, "while the Lord worked with them" (v. 20). In the closing portion of this verse, the Lord Jesus Himself commissioned the growing group of disciples to accomplish His worldwide mission in proclaiming eternal salvation. Even though Jesus has ascended back to heaven, He is still active in the lives and ministries of His believers.

What does the ascension of the Lord Jesus mean for us as believers today? With Jesus' return to heaven (from where He came), we also receive the promise that He will one day return (Acts 1:11). Regardless of how bad things get down here, we can count on the fact that one day Jesus will return and set everything into perfect order as it was intended before Adam (and Eve's) sin through the world into chaos. Although most of us are not able to practice the same type of "sign gifts" we read about in the Gospel today, we can still present other powerful signs to the nonbelievers in our lives. Foremost among those gifts is the evidence of changed lives. Nonbelievers recognize the crucial differences between our behavior and that of the non-Christians around us. Although we may not be able to handle deadly snakes without harm, we can powerfully express the difference that Jesus has made in our lives by forsaking the ways of the world through the daily choices we make.

I remembered back many years ago when a friend of mine called to ask me to go out on the town with him while his wife was out of town. Just before his invitation, another friend called to say he had a high fever. I knew that nothing good would come from a night of partying, so I made the obvious choice to take my sick friend to the hospital. It would have been easier for me to just bow to peer pressure and party with my friend, but somehow, I felt that Jesus was calling me to a different path that evening. Jesus calls us to make these kinds of moral choices, and even though we may not recognize it ourselves, people are watching. These are the people who understand that we are somehow different, and it is this difference that may eventually lead someone to repent of their sin and trust in the only method of forgiveness through faith in the Lord Jesus.

Reflection Questions

1. When you reflect upon the Great Commission of spreading the good news of the eternal Gospel, in what ways are you accomplishing this mission?

2. How does living in anticipation of Jesus' imminent return (looking up) help you to accomplish the Great Commission? What are one or two things that you could change this week in your life in order to more fully accomplish one or more aspects of God's plan for you?