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

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 5-01-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **05-01-2016**. This week's study is long, but important. We challenge our readers to stick through it as we think that you will find great rewards in following the study.

The first reading from Acts we look at records the findings of an important meeting in the church called the Jerusalem Council. After this, we continue the study in Revelation in which we see how God presents a new, perfect Holy City that was made in heaven for the saints to dwell in forever. Then we close with the Gospel of John in which we see Jesus' foretelling of the promise to send the Holy Spirit to live in the hearts of all believers.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Acts and records the event known as the Jerusalem Council. Leading up to the reading Paul had endured some tremendous persecution to the extent that while in Lystra he was stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:19-20). It's possible that during this time Paul experienced his visions of heaven (2 Corinthians 12:1-6). After Paul's miraculous recovery, he traveled with Barnabus back to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch and "appointed elders for them in every church" (Acts 14:23). Here Paul said, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (v. 22c). Thus, Paul continued his leadership of the Gentile church and next journeyed to Jerusalem for

a very important ecumenical council, meaning a gathering of all of the church leaders from both the Gentile and Jewish realms.

First Reading:

Acts 15:1-2 NAS95 1 Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." 2 And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.

[If you would like to read the section that was omitted it is included at the end of this week's study.]

Acts 15:22-29 NAS95 22 Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas–Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, 23 and they sent this letter by them, "The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings. 24 Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls, 25 it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will also report the same things by word of mouth. 28 For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: 29 that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell."

As the reading opens, Doctor Luke records how some men from Judea began teaching that as Christians they must adhere to the practices of the Mosaic Law especially concerning the matter of circumcision (v. 1). This was the reason that Paul and Barnabas went down to Jerusalem, to discuss this extremely important issue. (The complete text of the ecumenical council meeting is included at the end of this study in the "Going Deeper" section). Evidently, James was the leader of the meeting; this is the James who wrote the biblical Book of the same name and a relative of Jesus. His leadership is implied since, at the conclusion of the council, he stood up unopposed and made the pronouncement that we see in verses 22 – 29. While this was an important finding of the council, we must remember the occasion that led to the initiation of the important gathering as well as the culture in which the events happened. Without saying it, James' bottom line gave believers confidence that they did not have to be circumcised according to the Mosaic Law. But they were to hold to other "essentials" including abstaining from food sacrificed to idols, from the eating of blood, eating of meat from animals that had been strangled, and from the sexual sin of fornication (v. 29). These things were so repulsive to Jewish Christians who had just come out of Judaism that the Gentile believers were asked to be considerate in these ways for the sake of unity. Obviously when we read over this list, we understand the degree to which the Jewish and pagan cultures clashed and

the context in which the early believers were immersed. This cultural context greatly influenced the findings of the leaders in the meeting. If converted Jews and pagans were going to get along in the family of God, these bare essentials would help them achieve unity. We know later, Saint Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 8 that eating food sacrificed to idols was acceptable only if it did not violate one's conscience and that of those around them (1 Corinthians 8:10-13). The principle elicited by Paul in First Corinthians would seemingly also apply to the practices of eating strangled food and blood. However, the prohibition of sexual sin stands out on the list as a universal principle for believers of all time (for Old Testament believers and New Testament believers).

One of the big ideas in the reading is how God entrusted the ministry of the church to frail, imperfect believers to safeguard the treasury of truth with great diligence. The leaders of the church back then in this very crucial era in which the New Testament Scriptures were recorded were tasked with many great responsibilities. They were responsible for both keeping the church pure from false teachings while at the same time balancing the important cultural factors of their day including the movement of the church away from a purely Jewish organization to one containing a large proportion of Gentiles. The findings of the Council were important because it showed how the church leaders were willing to subjugate the Mosaic Law through their acceptance of Jesus' fulfillment of it through His death and resurrection. Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17). To the extent that the Law served to safeguard the conscience of the Jewish believers, it was important to them for conscience sake, but they were not to foist these legalistic practices upon the Gentile church.

Some application points that you could consider are regarding how cultural "baggage" affects our Christian walk and how that influences other believers. In what ways do we foist a list of requirements upon other believers around us who don't come from exactly the same cultural context as ourselves? Perhaps a good case would be a Christian who worships in a way that is different than your style (maybe they raise their hands, maybe they pray a spontaneous prayer) or a believer who votes for a different political candidate than you do. Is it possible to still be united in Christ, but differ on some of the unique expressions of faith? A good principle to follow, coined by St. Augustine in this matter: "in essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity."

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from the continuing study of the Book of Revelation. The context of the reading is after the conclusion of Jesus' one thousand year (millennial) reign on earth, a period during which Satan will be bound. Just prior to Jesus beginning this reign on earth, some three and one half years before, He had returned to the earth in fulfillment of Acts 1:11 and gathered all of the believers both living and dead with him to heaven. Believers that were already dead were rejoined with their bodies and given new glorified ones. Believers alive at Jesus' coming were gathered to Jesus in their living bodies after which they received their glorified bodies as well. Jesus had told His disciples, "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:3). It's evident that the New Jerusalem is the

place that Jesus went to prepare and this perfect city is now being presented to the believers of all time as an eternal dwelling place. After the return of the Lord Jesus all believers now have real (but glorified), physical bodies so they require a real place to live. In contrast, when saints die in the current age they go to heaven without their physical bodies and without the need for physical lodging. Therefore, Scripture seems to indicate that God provides them the New Jerusalem as their dwelling place from the moment they receive their glorified bodies at the time of the return of the Lord Jesus to earth. In summary, people with only a spiritual body in heaven rest in that spiritual place, whereas when they rejoin their physical bodies they will again require a physical resting place. This is in spite of the fact that the New Jerusalem is somehow built in heaven!

After Jesus' thousand-year reign on earth, Satan was released from his bonds and allowed to lead one last rebellion against God. In this huge battle of Gog and Magog (Revelation 20:8), he allied himself with the non-believers who had secretly held out during the millennial reign of Christ on earth. As these demonic forces surround the great city (Jerusalem), fire came down from heaven and devoured them (v. 9). Afterwards, every non-believer in the universe from all time stood before the "great white throne judgment" (Revelation 20:11). First, the devil joined the beast and the false prophet who were already in the lake of fire. Then the Scripture makes a very sobering statement concerning the universal judgment of non-believers, "And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:15). The lake of fire is called "the second death" (v. 14) about which Jesus said in the next chapter, "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8). God describes everyone who fails to trust in the Lord Jesus for salvation by these characteristics, regardless of how "good" they may have perceived themselves to be before the judgment against God's standard of perfection. As believers we understand that our perfection comes only through our acceptance of Jesus' finished work on the cross for us.

As the cataclysmic events grind to a sudden halt John records how the earth as we know it will be destroyed and replaced by a new creation in which there will no longer be any sea (Revelation 21:1). At this point one of the angels that poured out the last seven plagues introduced the bride of Christ, the group that we know as the church (v. 9). Today's reading opens with the New Jerusalem descending from the sky down towards the new earth. How the New Jerusalem that descends from the sky and the new earth relate to one another is unknown. We don't know if the city "touches down" or remains a heavenly dwelling place but within sight of the new earth, a form of "satellite city" in the sky.

Second Reading:

Note: Verses 24-27 which were omitted are included below.

Revelation 21:10-14 NAS95 10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, 11 having the glory

of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper. 12 It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. 13 There were three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west. 14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

Revelation 21:22-27 NAS95 22 I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 23 And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. 24 The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. 25 In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed; 26 and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; 27 and 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.

John described the New Jerusalem coming down out of the sky as a city with twelve gates marked by the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, signifying that the Old Testament pointed the way to this eternal city. The foundation of the city, though, was laid by the "twelve apostles of the Lamb" (v. 14) identifying that this beautiful city was built on the testimony of the New Testament disciples (learners), who later were called apostles (sent ones). In the intervening verses that were omitted from the reading (vv. 15-21) John provides greater details about the gates of the holy city, the walls as well as the size, some fifteen hundred miles square (v. 16). He described the street of the city as "pure gold, like transparent glass," (v. 21) something which is hard to understand. How can gold be like transparent glass? Suffice it to say that our categories of beauty can't contain the world that is to come.

Rejoining the reading in verse 22, John describes how there is no need for a temple in the New Jerusalem because, "the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." In verse 24 the Gentile nature of the church is specifically mentioned when John says, "The **nations** will walk by its light, and the **kings of the earth** will bring their glory into it," something about which we read in the first reading. The city is by definition a pure place in which "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" (v. 27). We saw a similar list of prohibited people in the introduction. The principle of repetition marks this as an important point. "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8) The "holy city, Jerusalem" (v. 10) will be just that, holy, forever and nothing unholy will enter it forever.

We can find rest in the fact that in spite of the current difficult circumstances we may be

experiencing, or the haunting memories of things that have happened to us in the past, we will find eternal rest in a perfect place prepared by God for us. We will never again have to question whether someone is walking with the Lord, for everyone will be in perfect harmony with God. We won't be living in some ephemeral city consisting of wafting clouds as depicted in the media about heaven, but rather we will live in a perfect, physical city with a perfect, holy God forever. In this place we will find perfect fellowship with people from all walks of life, both Jews and Gentiles, and this will mark the perfect end of discrimination forever in ways that the civil laws could never do.

An important take away point is for us to remember that this world is not our home and it's not all there is. The world will tell us that the one with the most toys wins, but we are not playing their "game." We are live with an eternal perspective that is not satisfied with the finite and dead end satisfactions of this world. When these things are in their right place, we can enjoy them. What is eternal about this world is the human soul. That is why it is important to settle the question of our eternal destiny now. This passage tells us how we can know if we are permitted into the New Jerusalem, God's eternal city. "Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life" will be allowed to enter. How do we know if our name is written there?

The Bible tells us that it is the Lamb's book, which is significant. Who is the Lamb? None other than Jesus Christ (John 1:29 tells us that Jesus is the Lamb of God, who takes away sins of the world). When sin entered the world through Adam, a blood sacrifice was required for the forgiveness of sin (Hebrews 9:22). All through the Old Testament, lambs were sacrificed in place of the person who deserved to die for the sins they committed. Jesus' death and shed blood, as the Lamb of God, was the final and complete sacrifice to provide forgiveness for sins (Hebrews 10:12). First Peter 1:3-5 and 1:18-21 explain the importance of Jesus' sacrificial death for the salvation of our souls:

1 Peter 1:3-5 NAS95 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

1 Peter 1:18-21 NAS95 18 knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, 19 but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. 20 For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you 21 who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

Therefore, you can have assurance that your name is written in His book of life if you are trusting in the Lamb of God to take away the penalty for your sin and looking to Him to give you a new life that is eternal. If you have not consciously made this choice to trust in Jesus' sacrificial death to cover the payment for your sin, you can pray right now to tell Him that you would like this free gift, which

provides forgiveness of the debt you owe God and assurance that your name is written in the Lamb's book of life.

The Gospel reading will teach us more about belief in Jesus, for Jesus told His disciples about how they could demonstrate their belief and love for Him.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from John chapter 14. Jesus had just told His disciples that He was going away to prepare a place for them (John 14:3), which was mentioned in the discussion on the second reading. Jesus also told His disciples that He wouldn't leave them as orphans, that He would come to them through the promise of a Helper, "that He may be with you forever" (John 14:16). In today's reading, we learn about this Helper Jesus promised to the disciples and to all believers who trust in His name. This discussion was prompted by the question in 14:22: "Lord, what then has happenedthat You are going to disclose Yourself to us and not to the world?"

Gospel Reading:

John 14:23-29 NAS95 23 Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. 24 He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me. 25 These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you. 26 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. 27 Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful. 28 You heard that I said to you, 'I go away, and I will come to you.' If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced because I go to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. 29 Now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe."

The reading opened with Jesus clarifying why He is disclosing certain things to the disciples and not to others. Jesus explains that those who love Him will keep His commandments (v. 23a). He is telling those closest to Him, the twelve disciples, these things so that they might no longer be slaves, but instead, be intimate, like friends, knowing the will of God (John 15:15). He says, *IF* you love me, then you will keep my word (meaning obey Him from the heart and have His value system become your value system). Loving God naturally leads us to keeping the commandments of God; it is love in action: loving God leads to godly actions. It seems that one of God's love languages is following Him, instead of following our own inclinations and misguided desires.

Next, Jesus, who had just told His disciples that He was going away to prepare a place for them, told them how both the Father and the Son would "make Our abode with him"—him being the one who loves Jesus and keeps His word (v. 23d). So while Jesus was predicting His physical departure from this world, He reassured His disciples that He would still be with them, by making their hearts His new home.

He would make their hearts His home by sending the Holy Spirit to live inside of them. Jesus reminded them that this promise of the sending of the Holy Spirit weren't just His words, but the Word of the Father Who sent Him (v. 24), therefore all three Persons of the Godhead were involved. Jesus' promise was that He would send the Holy Spirit to them to "teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you" (v. 26). This was to comfort them and bring them peace (v. 27) because He had earlier told them that He was going to be leaving them (John 14:3). Looking back on what Jesus said, it is important to note that the Holy Spirit can't teach us all things or bring things to our remembrance if we are not putting His Word in our heart. We know that the Holy Spirit is the person who inspired the Bible, since Saint Peter said, "for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:21). We cooperate with God's work in our lives when we read, study and integrate the truth of God's Word in our daily lives.

Jesus told them all of this ahead of time so that when the Holy Spirit came, they would remember His promise of sending Him to them and be comforted. This is exactly what we find in the Book of Acts. After Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension, many of His followers were confused and discouraged. But then, the promised Holy Spirit came, launching the Church in Jerusalem during the feast of Pentecost. The disciples, who had cowered in an upper room a few weeks earlier were now emboldened and spoke new and unlearned languages to preach the good news of salvation through Jesus. Such strange things were happening that Peter had to give an explanation to a large crowd who had gathered inquiring about the disciples. Peter's explanation was that Jesus had sent the promised Holy Spirit. Jesus, sending the Holy Spirit, was the "culprit" for these signs and wonders: "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear" (Acts 2:33). The 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) and that the Holy Spirit would teach them and bring to remembrance all things. He stands ready to do the same for us. The Holy Spirit is the Person of the Godhead who empowers believers for ministry.

The big idea in the reading is that Jesus promises not to leave any of us as orphans; but rather, He promises to give us peace through the presence of His Holy Spirit. We cannot overstate the importance of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives as believers in Jesus Christ. The Spirit's ministry to the hearts in whom He dwells is important 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. There are many Christians who are trying to live the Christian life on their own strength, living as an orphan. That is not God's intention. He specifically tells us that we are to rely on the Spirit to live the Christian life. If we don't know how to do this, we can ask Him to teach us. When we read Scripture, we can look for what it tells us about walking in step with the Spirit (Galatians 5:18) relying on the Spirit to produce the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), being filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), and having our mind set on the things of the Spirit (Romans 8).

There are manifold ministries of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer; here are just a few of the

things the Holy Spirit gives us:

- A second birth, a spiritual birth, making us "born from above" or "born again" (John 3:3) with a regenerated soul (Titus 3:5).
- Confirmation that as a believer we are an heir of God and fellow heir with Christ (Romans 8:15-17).
- Membership in God's universal church, which is baptism with the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13).
- The ability to understand and apply the Scriptures to our lives (1 Corinthians 2:12).
- Intercession on our behalf in prayer (Romans 8:26–27).
- A seal or guarantee until the day that we are redeemed in heaven (Ephesians 1:13-14).

We encourage you to look up each of the verse references and ponder how the Holy Spirit empowers you to accomplish God's purposes in your life.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the first reading we considered how one's cultural background impacted their Christian beliefs and how these beliefs affected the other believers around them. When was there a time in which you met another Christian from a much different cultural context than your own? In what ways did you need to reexamine your core beliefs in order to provide them with the grace or leeway to accept them as brothers or sisters in the Lord?

2. In what ways can you identify with Jesus' disciples who were discouraged when He said He was going to leave them? How have you felt like an orphan? Identify which characteristics of living as an orphan or living as a child of God in the table below resonate with you. Talk to God and other solid Christians about your desire to be shored up in the areas you are still living like an orphan. Praise God for the confidence He has given you as a child of God.

Orphan	Child of God
Anxious and worried about needs: no sense of God's infinite resources. It feels like I have to make life work on my own and who I am is not enough.	Content about God's provisions: Has a sense that my God shall supply all my needs according to His riches in glory (Phil. 4:11-19).
Infused with a sense of conditional love and acceptance; you're only as good as your last performance.	Infused with a sense of unconditional love and acceptance; failure is not fatal (1 John 3:1).

Highly defended from a sense of vulnerability; needs to be safe, secure and right. Criticism either demolishes me or propels me to show them wrong. Either way, I protect myself from the gnawing voices of criticism. Shrinks back in fear and resists taking God-directed risks.	Learns that feeling inadequate is a natural consequence of the Fall. Instead of turning to self-protection, I try to find my adequacy in Christ (2 Cor. 3:5). This allows me to be realistic about my weaknesses and honest about my vulnerabilities with God and others. It allows me to overcome fear and take God-directed risks.
Prays when "on" or in crisis.	Prays throughout the day, knowing that the Spirit dwells in me and wants to relate to me (1 Thess. 5:17).
Uses "Christian freedom" to indulge the flesh, such as biting and devouring each other, being conceited, provoking and envying others. Gal. 5: 19-21 says: "The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality,impurity and debauchery;[20] idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions[21] and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like."	Uses "Christian freedom" to "serve one anotherhumbly in love" (Gal. 5:13). Starting to see the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23): [22] "But the fruitof the Spirit is love,joy, peace,forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,[23] gentleness and self-control." These are coming from the inside of my being, not just being imposed from the outside or merely trying to conform to Christian standards.
Needs to be in control and persuade people to see things my way. I am controlled by a need to impress people.	Becoming Spirit-controlled, which frees me up to submit to God-given authority, to let other people be "right" and to care more about incarnating Christ than impressing people.

3. Review the list of the ministries of the Spirit given in the Gospel lesson. How does the Holy Spirit help you overcome your feelings of separation and loneliness?

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass, visit this web site:

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/050116.cfm

Sixth Sunday of Easter Lectionary: 57

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Keywords:

Ecumenical Council, lake of fire, Great White Throne Judgment, circumcision, eating of food sacrificed to idols, Gentile Church, New Jerusalem

Going Deeper:

The following is the text of the ecumenical council event that was omitted from the reading.

Acts 15:3-21 NAS95 3 Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren. 4 When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. 5 But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses." 6 The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter. 7 After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. 8 "And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; 9 and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. 10 "Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? 11 "But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are." 12 All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. 13 After they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, "Brethren, listen to me. 14 "Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name. 15 "With this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written, 16 'AFTER THESE THINGS I will return, AND I WILL REBUILD THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID WHICH HAS FALLEN, AND I WILL REBUILD ITS RUINS, AND I WILL RESTORE IT, 17 SO THAT THE REST OF MANKIND MAY SEEK THE LORD, AND ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME,' 18 SAYS THE LORD, WHO MAKES THESE THINGS KNOWN FROM LONG AGO. 19 "Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, 20 but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood. 21 "For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath."

List the important truths this council tells us about the following:

- God
- Gentiles

- Jews
- Salvation

Mass-Study-Notes-for-Sunday_05-01-2016.pdfDownload

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 4-24-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **4-24-2016**. This week we begin with a reading from the book of Acts. The full title for the book is The Acts of the Apostles, relating the beginnings of the church that Christ established. Today's reading involves a portion of one of the Apostle Paul's missionary journeys. By contrast, the second reading is from the next-to-the-last chapter of the Bible, Revelation 21, which gives us exciting information about the new heaven and earth that God will bring into existence. The final reading, from John's Gospel, relates important words of Jesus on the night before His death, words that are intended to give us a means by which we can be known as His disciples.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Missions has always been at the heart of the ministry of the church. Just prior to His return to heaven, Jesus had told his disciples that they were to be his witnesses (Acts 1:8). He had commissioned them to make disciples, to baptize believers, and to teach new Christians to obey all that Jesus had taught (Matthew 28:19-20). The Apostle Paul and Barnabas had set out from Antioch to do exactly that, and they found a mixed reception wherever they went, first reaching out to the Jews.

In the previous chapter Paul and Barnabas had come to the city of Lystra in their journey. They healed a lame man, and the crowd thought they must be gods. But some trouble makers from out of town came and incited the people against the missionary team. As a result Paul was stoned and left for dead. He was raised up, however, and the next day moved on to the city of Derbe. Our reading begins with the report that their preaching in that city had "made many disciples."

They then began a return journey to Antioch, their starting point, and along the way they "strengthened" and "encouraged" their converts to "continue in the faith." They made it clear, however, that the spiritual journey is often through times of tribulation and difficulty. As the Lord's representatives, they appointed leaders in the various churches and entrusted them to the Lord to give them guidance. After stops in a few other cities, they arrived back in Antioch to the church that had commissioned them to missionary service (Acts 13:2-3).

Paul and Barnabas gave to their home church a full report of all that "God had done with them." They recognized, as all of God's servants must, that anything of eternal value that is accomplished through their ministry is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit. It's what God does through his disciples that is critical, not what the disciples themselves may do. Their report included a new idea that later was to cause a great deal of disturbance among some of the Jewish-Christians. They reported that God "had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles." That was a new and troubling thought to many of their audience. They had thought that Jehovah was the God of the Jews exclusively. They were to learn, and Paul was the chief conveyor of this new truth, that God's redemptive plan is to include all nations and peoples on the basis of faith not ethnic or religious origin.

Although Paul was to continue in further missionary journeys, he remained in Antioch for "a long time," no doubt teaching and encouraging the saints in this new perspective of Jesus' church.

First Reading:

Acts 14:21-28 NAS95 21 After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." 23 When they had appointed elders for them in every church,

having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. 24 They passed through Pisidia and came into Pamphylia. 25 When they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. 26 From there they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished. 27 When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. 28 And they spent a long time with the disciples.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The preceding chapters in this final revelation from God included word-pictures of cataclysmic events in the heavens and on earth. God's wrath against sin and rebellion is clearly evident in his judgments against evil empires and the devil himself along with his angels and those he has put in power. When we come to chapter 21, however, the final judgment has occurred and all those who have rejected God's offer of salvation through faith in Jesus are cast into the Lake of Fire along with the devil and his angels for whom the lake was intended. What remains in this final book reveals more of God's gracious plan for His own redeemed people.

The use of symbols and figures of speech throughout the Revelation leave the reader enthralled with the splendor of God's future provision for the church. John, the human writer of this book, sees "the holy city, the new Jerusalem" coming down from heaven. He sees the city as "a bride adorned for her husband." This is clearly a reference to the church that is often described in the New Testament in terms that clearly define "the bride of Christ." (See, for example, Ephesians 5:22-32 and Revelations 19:6-9.)

John uses the term "tabernacle of God" to describe God's presence among men. Tabernacle basically means "dwelling." As God "dwelt" symbolically among His people in the Old Testament tabernacle in the Shekinah glory above the Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place, so His presence will be known as He dwells among His people in a permanent relationship in eternity.

If all that is true, it is no wonder, then, that there will be no tears in heaven, no death, no mourning, crying, or pain. The ruler (Jesus, the promised Messiah or anointed one), sitting on His throne, says, "Behold, I am making all things new." And John indicates that he has been instructed to write these words because they are "faithful and true." We can count on them.

Second Reading:

Revelation 21:1-5 NAS95 1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, 4 and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." 5 And He who sits on the

*throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He *said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true."*

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

What someone says just before he dies is most often regarded as extremely important. The night before Jesus was crucified, He had close, personal fellowship with His disciples at what we refer to as the Last Supper. In addition to having a meal with them, reminiscent of the original Passover in Egypt, and washing their feet in a new picture of His servant nature and the ministry of cleansing that He continues for His followers yet today, Jesus made three significant statements.

First, He said that the Son of Man (His most frequent reference to Himself) and God the Father are glorified in Him. Isaiah wrote of this feature of Christ, and, no doubt, it refers specifically to His death in which God's marvelous plan of redemption is made possible, ultimately to bring great glory to Jesus and the Father.

In the next chapter of John (14:1-3), Jesus makes it clear that He is to leave His disciples to return to heaven. Here, He seems to be speaking more directly of the experience of His death and separation from the Father, which is a path the disciples cannot follow. The Apostle Peter tells us that Jesus, during those three days His body lay in the tomb, actually visited where the devil's angels suffered, and He preached, revealing to them their doom as a result of His sufficient sacrifice on the cross.

Finally, Jesus offers what he calls a "new commandment": they are to love one another. The standard for such love is "as [Jesus] loved" them. Previously He had repeated the Old Testament commandment about loving God and your neighbor (Matthew 22:37-39; see Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18). His final statement in this passage is significant, as well. He says that His followers will not be known by their doctrinal knowledge, astute learning, or their following of religious ceremonies and rites. Rather, they will be recognized as His disciples when they practice His kind of unselfish love to their brethren. Such a lifestyle will draw others to the One who can give that kind of love to His people.

Gospel Reading:

John 13:31-35 NAS95 31 Therefore when he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him; 32 if God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and will glorify Him immediately. 33 Little children, I am with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, now I also say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' 34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

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1. These readings offer a call to self-examination. In what ways is your heart open to receiving fellow believers into your company regardless of ethnic origin, gender, or previous religious background? When are several times which your heat was darkened?

2. List two ways in which you demonstrate that you love your fellow believers as Christ loves you, seeking to encourage and build them up in their faith?

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass, visit this web site:

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/042416.cfm

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Source(s):

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

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 4-17-2016

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **4-17-2016**. This week we will study readings from the Book of Acts, Revelation and the Gospel of John. We will go into some great depth on the first two readings. We hope that you both enjoy and learn something this week from our study and that you are forever spoiled for the ordinary.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Acts. Paul and Barnabus were on their first missionary journey to share the Word of God in the Jewish synagogues (Acts 13:4). So much happened in Jerusalem that they wanted others to know – Jesus Christ's death, resurrection and ascension had defined the Jewish faith in a whole new way. The Holy Spirit had been sent to the believers to empower them to be witnesses all over the world (Acts 1:8). Paul's and Barnabus were "set apart" to be witnesses to Who Jesus what and what He had taught them (Acts 13:1-3). They were also sent to help those who were lost in darkness such that they could see the light of the Good News that their sins could be forgiven and a new relationship with God could be established through faith in Jesus (Acts 13:38-39).

On their travels they often went to the Jewish synagogue to share how Jesus was the fulfillment of the promised long awaited Messiah (Acts 13:33-39). They gave convincing evidence to the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles that Jesus matched the description of the One from God Who would provide salvation. Jesus had risen from the grave, therefore, sealing the case that He was the Christ (Acts 13:32-33). In today's reading, we find Paul and Barnabus being invited back to the synagogue to continue sharing their insights about God's work through Christ.

First Reading:

Note: Paul's speech in Antioch was omitted from the reading. If you would like to read the speech it is included at the end of the study in the "Going Deeper" section.

Acts 13:14 NAS95 14 But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.

Acts 13:43-52 NAS95 43 Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God. 44 The next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord. 45 But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming. 46 Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. 47 "For so the Lord has commanded us, 'I HAVE PLACED YOU AS A LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES, THAT YOU MAY BRING SALVATION TO THE END OF THE EARTH.'" 48 When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. 49 And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region. 50 But the Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. 51 But they shook off the dust of their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. 52 And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

As a result of Paul's speech the previous week, a large group from the city gathered such that they didn't miss Paul's second address. The Jews received this second message of Paul very jealously which resulted in them instituting persecution of Paul and Barnabus by "incit[ing] the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city" (v. 50) such that they were driven out of the city. However, many of the Gentiles in the mixed crowd heard Paul's speech and responded in faith (v. 48). Paul and Barnabus did as Jesus had commanded the disciples (Matthew 10:14) and shook the dust of the feet in protest while they left that city and went on to Iconium (v. 51).

The reading marks the transition point of Paul's ministry from the Jews to the Gentiles (v. 46) which then became his primary ministry (see Galatians 1:16, Romans 15:15-16). Paul said later about this in Romans, "But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous" (Romans 11:11b). The outpouring of God's Spirit on the Gentiles was something that the prophets predicted long ago. Isaiah said, "I will make you a light to the Gentiles, and you will bring my salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6). This marks the dawn of a new and unseen era, the church age. Paul spoke about this later in his ministry:

25 Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God,

26 that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints,

27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. (Colossians 1:25-27).

The big idea in the reading is that in the midst of rejection and persecution, the Word of the Lord is still able to penetrate and transform hearts.

Next, we move onto the second reading in which we will see the eternal impact of Paul's ministry on the eternal lives of believers from around the world.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The context of the reading from the Book of Revelation is a "parenthesis," or pause in John's revealing of the seven seal judgments being unveiled by Jesus. We cannot overstate the importance of understanding the context of any reading, but especially when we are dealing with the end-time events portrayed here in the Book of Revelation. When reading Revelation one has to understand that the story moves between visions of events happening on earth to things happening in heaven. Along the way there are frequent pauses in the action, or "parenthesis," where the vision shifts from earth to heaven or vice versa.

Looking back from today's reading in chapter 7, beginning in chapter 6 Jesus pours out a series of judgments on the earth (Revelation 6:1-17). With the unleashing of the sixth seal, great signs are seen in the sky (Revelation 6:12). This accords with what Jesus spoke about in Matthew 24:29-30. John said, "I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood" (Revelation 6:12). Jesus said about this in Matthew, "But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (Matthew 24:29). The next verse in this section of Mathew provides is with strong clue as to the overall context of the signs as it relates to Jesus' promised return (Acts 1:11). Jesus said, "And **then** the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory" (Matthew 29:30, emphasis added). Jesus said that He would return after the display of the signs in the sky, which is just before the seventh seal judgment is poured out on the earth. This brings us to the parenthesis in the text from which we find today's reading, after the revelation of the six seal, but before the return of the Lord Jesus and the unveiling of the seventh seal.

The event that happens before the parenthesis of today's reading is another tangential pause in which John records the gathering of 12 groups of elect saints (meaning believers) from within Israel. John records the details of this event in the opening of chapter 7:

1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. 2 And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, 3 saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads." 4 And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: (Revelation 7:1-4).

The angels divinely mark 12 "tribes" of Israelites consisting of a large number of 12,000 from each group. The value of 12,000 is perhaps not a literal number but rather indicative of the fullness or total completion of the task. Regardless, this marking is such that these people are set apart in a way that they receive God's divine protection during the balance of the tribulation period, some three and half years. John makes this clear later in Chapter 12. "But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent" (Revelation 12:14). This "sealing of the bondservants of our God" is also indicated in the parallel passage in Matthew. Jesus says in that Gospel about this event, "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other" (Matthew 24:31). This divine sealing, marking or protecting occurs just before Jesus' return and the unleashing of the final judgements upon the earth including the seventh seal, seven trumpet judgements and seven bowl judgments. The bowl judgments conclude the wrath that God has stored out to pour out upon the unbelieving world at the end of the age. "Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished" (Revelation 15:1).

After the divine "sealing" is completed, the story moves to John's parenthetical vision of a large group of believers in heaven, which is where we pick up at today's reading.

Second Reading:

Note: Verse 13, which was omitted from the reading, is included separately.

Revelation 7:9 NAS95 9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands;

Omitted verse:

Re 7:13 ¶ Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?"

Revelation 7:14-17 NAS95 14 I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. 16 They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; 17 for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes."

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

The big idea in the reading is that even though this world does not recognize and treat God's people (saints) well, these verses reassure us that there will be justice and provision in the life to come with a sense of eternal comfort. We see how Jesus acted as the divine Shepherd of His sheep in heaven. As we move onto the Gospel reading, we will see how Jesus portrays Himself as the Shepherd of His

sheep on earth.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from Saint John. The Book of John casts Jesus as the Son of God and speaks of eternal life in terms of knowing Him. The context of today's reading is Jesus' teaching on His role as the Shepherd of the true sheep in contrast to the false sheep and false shepherds that abounded in Israel during this time of extreme satanic activity surrounding Jesus' ministry.

Gospel Reading:

John 10:27-30 NAS95 27 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; 28 and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one."

The big idea in the reading is that God offers security to believers through the Great Shepherd Jesus Christ. Throughout the Scripture, the Lord God pictures Himself as the "Shepherd of the Sheep," and this occurs early in the Bible. The first time this concept appears is back in the Book of Genesis when Jacob was prophesizing about the twelve sons (and tribes) of Israel, this time about Joseph. "Joseph is a fruitful bough, A fruitful bough by a spring; Its branches run over a wall. The archers bitterly attacked him, And shot at him and harassed him; But his bow remained firm, And his arms were agile, From the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel)" (Genesis 49:22-24). The shepherd theme is reminiscent of the opening of Psalm 23, "The LORD is my Shepherd, I shall not want" v. 1). As we examine today's reading we find additional insight into the identity of this Shepherd of Israel. He emerges as a Shepherd-King figure Who has a special relationship with the LORD. This is none other than the Lord Jesus Himself, the about whom Jesus says of Himself, "I and the Father are one" (v. 30).

As believers in Jesus, we can find great comfort from John's writing. First, God will never lose any of His sheep, meaning that God Himself places a calling upon our lives to come to faith in His Son Jesus Christ (v. 28). Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:44). Second, we can trust that God will take care of us in the same way that a Good Shepherd takes care of His sheep. Finally, although we may feel judged by worldly people in this age, the only real judgment that counts is our True Judge the Lord Jesus Himself. We can trust that God's judgment will be correct in that as we enter eternity He will judge between the lost sheep and evil shepherds in our land and differentiate between the ones that do good in serving Him.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. How does the reading from the Gospel of John give you assurance that you are one of God's sheep? Some characteristics of His sheep are:

- His sheep hear His voice,
- Jesus assures us that He knows us, and
- His sheep follow him.

How can you use this Scripture to help you know that you are in the sheepfold and to counteract the doubts that the enemy uses against you to make you question your faith.

2. Looking at the first reading, how does the fact that Paul and Barnabus were met with rejection and violence while at the same time experiencing a degree of welcome give you an interpretative framework for your own experiences of sharing the Word of God with others?

Going Deeper

The following is Paul's speech to the Jews and Jewish converts (proselytes, Acts 13:43) in Antioch:

Acts 13:15-42 NAS95 15 After the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, "Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it." 16 Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, "Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: 17 "The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He led them out from it. 18 "For a period of about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness. 19 "When He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land as an inheritance–all of which took about four hundred and fifty years. 20 "After these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. 21 "Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. 22 "After He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, 'I HAVE FOUND DAVID the son of Jesse, A MAN AFTER MY HEART, who will do all My will.' 23 "From the descendants of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, 24 after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. 25 "And while John was completing his course, he kept saying, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not He. But behold, one is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.' 26 "Brethren, sons of Abraham's family, and those among you who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent. 27 "For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning Him. 28 "And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed. 29 "When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb. 30 "But God raised Him from the dead; 31 and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people. 32 "And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, 33 that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU.' 34 "As for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: 'I WILL GIVE YOU THE HOLY and SURE blessings OF DAVID.' 35 "Therefore He also says in another

Psalm, 'YOU WILL NOT ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY.' 36 "For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay; 37 but He whom God raised did not undergo decay. 38 "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, 39 and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses. 40 "Therefore take heed, so that the thing spoken of in the Prophets may not come upon you: 41 'BEHOLD, YOU SCOFFERS, AND MARVEL, AND PERISH; FOR I AM ACCOMPLISHING A WORK IN YOUR DAYS, A WORK WHICH YOU WILL NEVER BELIEVE, THOUGH SOMEONE SHOULD DESCRIBE IT TO YOU.'" 42 As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging that these things might be spoken to them the next Sabbath.

Study Questions:

1. Trace the history of God's work in the world to bring people to reconcile people to Himself. For example:

- God chose the Jews and made them great in a foreign land (v. 17)
- . . .

2. List all of the evidence given by Paul in this passage to prove Jesus' Messiahship.

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass, visit this web site:

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/041716.cfm

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 4-10-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **4-10-2016**. This week we will examine the readings first looking at how the apostles were energized through God's power in the Book of Acts. We will see in the Gospel reading how Jesus restored Peter's position after his denial of Him during his trial. We will also examine a reading from the Book of Revelation and give some good context to help frame the reading.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Acts. The context is just after the story of Ananias and Sapphira both of whom attempted to lie to the Holy Spirit of God and were struck dead. God used this event to reveal the necessity of purity in the early, vibrant and growing church during a time when "many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles" (Acts 5:12). These events revealed how the church was both pure and powerful, like God. Just before today's reading the apostles were gathered in an area of the Jerusalem temple called Solomon's Portico (v. 12). All of the commotion going on eventually brought the attention of the high priest, who arrested the apostles and put them into prison (vv. 17 – 18). Next, "during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out" (v. 19). At daybreak the apostles reentered the temple portico and began teaching again (v. 21). Then the high priest convened "the counsel and all the senate of Israel" (v. 21b) meaning the Sanhedrin. At this point, the officers found the apostles

missing from the prison while its doors remained secured (vv. 21c – 24). During this same time the apostles remained teaching in the temple (v. 25). Next, the officers brought the apostles voluntarily to appear before the council (vv. 26 – 27) where today's reading begins.

First Reading:

Note: Verses 33 – 39 which were omitted from the reading were included below.

Acts 5:27-41 NAS95 27 When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them, 28 saying, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." 29 But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. 30 "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. 31 "He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. 32 "And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him." 33 But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and intended to kill them. 34 But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people, stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men outside for a short time. 35 And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men. 36 "For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. But he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. 37 "After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census and drew away some people after him; he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered. 38 "So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown; 39 but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God." 40 They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them. 41 So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.

An import point that comes out in the reading is about Peter, who during Christ's arrest denied Him three times, was willing to die rather than to forsake his Lord again. This is indicative of the power of the Holy Spirit working to energize him in his role in leading the emerging church. Later in the Gospel reading, we will see how Jesus forgave and restored Peter to his position. Peter was energized by the power given to him by God. After the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2), the apostles ministered boldly and powerfully to all who would listen. Their ministry emphasized "teaching," notice that this word appears twice in verse 28. This gives evidence to the importance of the teaching going on in the church, exactly what the Jews had earlier warned them not to do. The apostles were confronted by Rabbi Gamaliel, "a teacher of the law" (v. 34a), who was none other than the Rabbi who taught Saint Paul (Acts 22:3). This teacher possessed great wisdom, to such extent that the council accepted his profound advice (v. 40). Perhaps Gamaliel recognized the

miracle that occurred when the apostles were delivered from with the locked prison. Whatever happened, after the Council accepted the Rabbi's advice even though the apostles were not charged with a crime they were still flogged in clear violation of the Jews own law. This was done because they had disobeyed the previous order from the high priest not to teach (v. 28).

What are some ways that we can apply this reading to our lives? We cannot and should not expect miracles in the same way that they happened in the early church. We should not expect to be delivered from conflicts arising either with civil or religious authorities. We can however expect to experience miracles in other ways. We can expect to see God working in miraculous ways in our lives and in the lives of those to whom we are ministering around us. We can expect miraculous answers to our prayers in ways that we may not expect. We can expect miraculous delays in God answering our prayers. How among us hasn't proclaimed, I am glad that God didn't answer that prayer right away or in the way I expected? Second, Just because a religious group grows and succeed doesn't mean that it is a movement of God. Gamaliel mentioned the cults of Theudas and Judas of Galilee from his time. There are many examples in our era including the Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, and Islam. Any movement of God will survive at least to the extent this His purposes are accomplish through the particular movement. God's purpose through the church will not be thwarted, and He will continue building movements of His Spirit until the Lord Jesus returns. Third, we are called to obey God rather than humans. We can expect to experience cases in our life when we will need to follow the commandments of God and not the commandments of man. This may mean that we will bump up against the civil authorities when they establish laws that are clearly against both biblical absolutes and biblical principles. Finally, we must remember the urgent call of evangelism as elicited in these passages and in the closing words of our Lord to His apostles in the Great Commission. Our primary ministry should be to, "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" (Mt 28:19-20, emphasis added).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from the Book of Revelation. The context is after the message given in chapters 2 and 3 to the literal seven churches of Asia Minor in existence at that time. In these messages, we find many similarities to the various churches that exist in our era. The conclusion of the messages to the churches marks the beginning of the revelation to John regarding the things which "what must take place after these things" Revelation 4e), meaning after the conclusion of the church age. John receives these messages "in the spirit" while appearing before the throne of God in heaven (Revelation 4:2). These messages continue until the end of the Book. Chapter 5 opens with the gradual unsealing of a divine "scroll," something that we can regard as being the title deed of all the earth. This title deed is gradually unfurled, and as this is done a series of judgements are revealed including seals judgements, trumpet judgements, and bowl judgements. The scroll marked with the seven seals can be thought of as the overall container for all of the judgements. The "unfurling" of the scroll by the sequential breaking of the seals reveal the seal judgments that

thereafter release the trumpet and finally the bowl judgements. This symbolic expression is a handy metaphor that God used to display the pouring out of the judgements upon the world in a way that early and especially Jewish Christians immersed in the Roman society would understand. People in this society would understand how an important document like a deed would be sealed by a person in authority concerning that document and how each seal would have to be broken in order for the full content of the document to be revealed. In the case the title deed scroll is marked on both sides (Revelation 5:1) which indicates perhaps that not all of the content is secret except for the material contained behind the portion obscured by the rolled up area held in place by the seals. John was sad that nobody was worthy to open the seals on the scroll, but the "elder" revealed to him that the Lord Jesus alone was worthy, "the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David" (v. 5). Next four spiritual creatures, seemingly types of angels, along with 24 elders (likely 12 from Israel and 12 representing the church) exclaimed a victory song about Jesus and the priestly power of His believers. "And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth" (Revelation 5:9 – 10). This leads us to verse 11 with which we open today's reading.

Second Reading:

Revelation 5:11-14 NAS95 11 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." 13 And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." 14 And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshiped.

The big idea in the reading is that the Lord Jesus, the "Lamb that was slain" (v. 11) is worthy of worship, whether it comes from angelic beings (four living creatures), or people, or every created thing (v. 13). The Scripture is clear that "EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD" (Romans 14:11, Isaiah 45:23). In the reading the text uses the term "myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands" (v. 11) was meant to portray the largest number that could possibly be expressed in the Greek language. The fact that God has so many creatures worshiping Him should remind us of the fact that He is worthy of our worship! The reading said about Jesus that He is worthy "to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing" (v. 12). As a divine human, Jesus is worthy of our worship, and not just ours but all of creation. We need to keep Jesus' rightful position as the only One worthy to open the seals in the forefront of our minds as we remember our own weaknesses as well as those of the servants of the Lord throughout the Bible. Jesus came the first time as a sacrificial Lamb, which is the good news of the Gospel. However, when He returns He will be the bearer of bad news for those that

don't believe. Jesus is the only One that can unveil the judgments of the seals, trumpets and bowls. Saint Paul said, "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom" (2 Timothy 4:1).

John's vision of the exalted Lord Jesus leads us to the Gospel reading in which we will see Jesus while He was still on earth just after His resurrection.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from John. After Jesus' resurrection, Thomas had missed the first meeting of the apostles when they gathered in a locked room only to be surprised by Jesus' entrance. However, eight days later Jesus appeared again, at which time Thomas saw and believed. Jesus told Thomas, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed" (John 21:29). Today's reading opens with another appearance of the Lord to the apostles this time along the Sea of Galilee.

Gospel Reading:

John 21:1-19 NAS95 1 After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested Himself in this way. 2 Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. 3 Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will also come with you." They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing. 4 But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5 So Jesus said to them, "Children, you do not have any fish, do you?" They answered Him, "No." 6 And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch." So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish. 7 Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped for work), and threw himself into the sea. 8 But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net full of fish. 9 So when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire already laid and fish placed on it, and bread. 10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have now caught." 11 Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples ventured to question Him, "Who are You?" knowing that it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise. 14 This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead. 15 So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My lambs." 16 He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." 17 He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved

because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep. 18 "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." 19 Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me!"

There are two main reasons why John includes this story in the Gospel. The smaller story is about Peter's three statements, the larger one is about John's description of who Jesus is after His resurrection from the dead. Let's unpack the smaller story about Peter first.

As you may recall, one of Peter's last encounters with Jesus before His dead was when he denied Jesus three times. Jesus had warned Peter that this was going to happen (Luke 22:34) but in spite of this Peter still failed to stand up for his friend. You can imagine that Peter felt pretty awful letting Jesus down during His time of need (Luke 22:62). Although Peter had an encounter with Jesus in the upper room in Jerusalem, the issue of his betrayal had not specifically been addressed which is why today's story is so important. In the reading, we see how Jesus asked Peter three times, "if he loved him." This corresponded to the three times in which Peter denied the Lord Jesus on the night of His betrayal by Judas Iscariot. In Jesus' kindness, He gave Peter the opportunity to publically express his loyalty to Him thereby reinstating their relationship. Interestingly, Peter and some of the other disciples had returned to their fishing career, which was then interrupted by Jesus' appearance along the shore with the purpose of appointing them to career ministry. Similarly, when Jesus first encountered Peter, He called them out of the fishing industry into becoming a fisher of men. Jesus was now reinforcing Peter's primary calling. Peter was now being called to "shepherd" (or lead) the early church. Jesus used this occasion to publically reinstate Peter back into right relationship with Him and to reestablish his leadership in ministry.

The larger reason why this Gospel story is important for the early church is that John wanted believers to know that Jesus manifested Himself as a real person multiple times after His resurrection. He did so in ways that showed both His humanity and His divinity. We see Jesus' humanity in that He was a real person that they could see (not a ghost), and He ate food with the disciples. Even after Jesus' resurrection, we see Jesus still serving His disciples by preparing them breakfast beside the Sea of Galilee. We see His divinity is the way in which He directed the disciples to cast their net on the other side of the boat and obtain a miraculous catch. On top of that, another miracle was that the net didn't break even with such a large number of fish (v. 11). We see a sign of Peter's reverence for Jesus in that he dressed himself before he jumped into the water to be with the Lord. Another expression of Jesus' divinity was His prophecy of how Peter would eventually die a martyr's death (v. 18). You can imagine that this gave Peter some comfort and boldness in later years because he knew that Jesus had placed this mark upon his life. We saw this very clearly in the first reading in which he appeared before the council (Acts 5:27). Peter could have thought in later years something like, if I am going to die a martyrs death why be timid in my ministry? Additionally, since Peter knew that Jesus had predicted his martyrdom there is a certain amount of comfort that

comes from "knowing that Jesus knows." We see in this a very intentional sense of God's sovereignty over Peter's eventual death. We too can find comfort in difficult circumstances through knowing that God is sovereign over everything that comes along.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Jesus offers this same reinstatement to everyone who has denied the Lord. His death was the payment for the penalty that we all deserve to pay for the times in our lives in which we have denied God's ownership over our lives. What do you see in Jesus' treatment of Peter that you can apply in your own relationship with Him? List a few ways in which you tend to be like Peter and how you can receive Jesus' forgiveness as well.

2. Of what importance does the humanity and divinity of Jesus hold for believers today? Consider this in light of the following verses.

Heb 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

Romans 8:32-34 NAS95 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? 33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass, visit this web site:

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/041016.cfm

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 4-3-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **4-3-2016**. This week we open with a reading from the earliest history about the church, the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, relating their ministry in the very first weeks of the newly created Church after Pentecost and the Holy Spirit's descent upon those earliest believers. The second reading is from the very latest book of the New Testament, the Revelation of Jesus as given to the last of the apostles, John. John records the vision he received of the Lord Jesus, which serves both as a warning to the Church of Jesus Christ and as an introduction to the revelation of the final events in earthly history and into eternity. The Gospel reading, interestingly enough, is from the same author who recorded the Revelation. The chapter in this week's assignment includes the miraculous appearance of Jesus and significant teaching about faith and believing in Him.

Introduction to the First Reading:

By chapter 5, the early Christians (and the number had grown to the thousands, Acts 2:41, 47) were demonstrating the love that Jesus said would be the mark of His disciples (John 13:34). They met together for worship, and they gave generously to the needs of others in the Christian family. Today's portion tells of the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit working through His chosen people.

First Reading:

Acts 5:12-16 NAS95 12 At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico. 13 But none of the rest

dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem. 14 And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number, 15 to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them. 16 Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed.

"Signs and wonders" were miraculous events that not only brought healing to many but, more importantly, served to authenticate the authority of the apostles, those who were sent by God to do His work and to lay a foundation for the establishing of His church on earth, the body of called-out believers (that's what the New Testament word for church means). The early Christians "were all with one accord" meeting near the Temple. Jesus had prayed (John 17) that His followers would be united, would be as one as He and the Father are. Nothing has hurt the image of the church so much as its disunity over the centuries of its history and even today.

Verse 13 is perplexing. Perhaps it suggests that non-believers did not associate with believers, though they highly respected them. Maybe they knew about the couple, earlier in chapter 5, who tried to deceive the apostles, claiming to give the gains from the sale of their property to the needy while keeping a part for themselves. They were stricken to death immediately, and the church learned the seriousness of deceitfulness and lying. That could explain why non-believers stayed away.

The remaining verses testify to the miraculous healing power of the apostles. Throughout the Book of Acts, these men of God gave testimony time and again that the power was not theirs but was the work of the Jesus whom the religious leaders had rejected. Succeeding chapters will reveal the great price true believers often had to pay to remain true to their faith. Yet, they counted it as nothing compared to what they had in Jesus and would ultimately enjoy with Him (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

John is the last of the apostles who had traveled with Jesus, witnessed His crucifixion, and fellowshipped with Him after His resurrection. In exile, John received a vision of the Lord Himself. What he writes is so important that Jesus told him, "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it." That in itself is enough reason to study this book, for it reveals the concluding events in God's ultimate plan of redemption. The details of John's vision are complex and confusing, and a thorough knowledge of the rest of God's revelation (the Bible) is helpful in understanding the unfolding of the plan. John addresses his writing to "the seven churches that are in Asia." Those geographical sites in Asia Minor were in what is now Turkey, real places in real time.

Second Reading:

Note: Verses 15 – 16 which were omitted from the reading are included below.

Revelation 1:9-19 NAS95 9 I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, 11 saying, "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea." 12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; 13 and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. 14 His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. 15 His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. 16 In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. 17 When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18 and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. 19 "Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.

John is in exile "because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus," verse 1. The other apostles have all been killed, but John remains to hear this final revelation of Jesus. He hears a voice that instructs him to write in a book what he is about to see and hear and send it all to seven existing churches where the Gospel has been preached and received. What he sees in his vision is overwhelming. First he sees someone "like a son of man" in the middle of seven lampstands. The description of the man clearly pictures the Lord Jesus, perhaps in a glorified, majestic state. "Son of man," by the way, is the title that Jesus most often used to refer to himself. Each of the descriptives about this man is of interest and no doubt reflects something of His divine nature and activity. Of special interest is the reference to "a sharp two-edged sword" out of His mouth. It reminds us of the statement in Hebrews 4:12, "The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword . . . discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." The reference is not just to the written Word of God, the Bible, but any and every word from God.

John's reaction was similar to Isaiah's in Isaiah 6 when he saw the Lord "high and lifted up" and Job when he finally encountered God in person (chs. 40 & 41). God's presence causes one to fall upon his face in an abject sense of his own unworthiness and in recognition of the worthiness of God.

The response of the "Man" to John in verse 19 is insightful. It likely provides a key to the understanding of the relation he is about to record. He is to write about three topics: 1) what he "has seen," no doubt the revelation of the Son of God; 2) "the things which are," referring to the character and action of the seven churches to which he is to send the letters (chapters 2 & 3), and 3) "the things which will take place after these things." Chapter 4 begins, then, the revelation of what is yet to come in God's completed plan.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Chapter 20 of John's Gospel is a highlight. It begins with the discovery of the empty tomb, confirming the miraculous resurrection of the Lord Jesus! It includes several appearances of Jesus to His disciples and some significant statements to be considered. And John concludes the chapter, telling us that there were many other signs that Jesus performed. He has chosen only certain ones to relate that are given to bring his readers to faith.

Gospel Reading:

John 20:19-31 NAS95 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." 24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." 26 After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." 28 Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." 30 Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

The first event in today's reading must have been a shock to the disciples who were meeting privately, probably in secret, in a closed room. It's the same day of the resurrection, and Peter and John had already observed the empty tomb. Mary had actually had a personal encounter with the risen Jesus, at first thinking he was the gardener. Apparently, the disciples were confused, not having understood Jesus' teaching them in advance about these events. All of the sudden, Jesus appears in their midst. He knows of their fear and encourages them with "Peace be with you." The next words in this first of several significant statements in this encounter are surprising: "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." They will likely not fully understand this instruction until they have further teaching before His return to heaven and the events of the Day of Pentecost. Then they disperse over the world to preach the gospel.

Another noteworthy word from Jesus bestowed the promised Holy Spirit on them. From this point

on, they would carry the message of the Gospel with the clear offer of the forgiveness of sins to all who will hear them and respond to the truth in faith, acknowledging Jesus as Lord.

We're all familiar with the doubts expressed by the disciple Thomas. Like many of us "seeing is believing" to Thomas. He was not present on this occasion and when the others tell him about what happened, he simply cannot believe it. A week later, Thomas is given just the opportunity he thought he needed to believe; the proof stands before him. Immediately, he recognizes the truth; his doubts depart, and he worships, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus then offers another important statement: "Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." How blessed we are today to know of the work of Jesus to be our sacrifice for sin and give us the faith to believe when we have not seen with our eyes, but realizing instead that "believing is seeing."

Finally, note that John says that Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples that John does not write about. He chose only seven great signs which prove Jesus' claim to be the Son of God, and he recorded them "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that believing you may have life in His name."

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In what ways does John's message in Revelation resonate with you during your own trials and tribulations (revelation 1:9)? How does reading his revelation of the Lord help you through these things?

Challenge: Have you read the Book of Revelation? This Book promises a blessing to those who read it (Revelation 1:3). We urge you to read through this important Scripture, taking into account the Old Testament references that are noted in your Bible.

2. In what ways does Thomas' experience give you hope as one who may have never seen the Lord Jesus? (We qualify this because of some of the events we have heard about in Islamic regions where the Lord has appeared in dreams and visions).

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass, visit this web site:

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/040316.cfm

Source(s):

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Mass Study Notes for Easter Sunday, 3-27-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **3-27-2016, Easter Sunday**. Happy Easter! On this joyful day of celebration we remember how God raised His Son, our Savior, Jesus from the dead. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, we have eternal life through faith in His finished work on the cross. Accordingly, this week's readings answer some of the most important questions that humans have ever asked about eternal life. The first reading is a message from Saint Peter that explains the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection that has been provided for all humankind. The second reading from Saint Paul's Letter to the Colossians provides the implications of what believing in Jesus looks like in the life of the believer. Finally, we conclude with the glorious story of Jesus' resurrection from the Gospel of Saint John.

Throughout my earlier years, our family always held a special celebration of Jesus' resurrection on this important day of Easter Sunday. Our festivities included a delicious dinner with special people including my grandmothers, grandmas, aunts, uncles, and of course my brothers and sisters. Back

then, I understood that Jesus' resurrection from the dead was very important. As I grew into adulthood, I came to a much fuller understanding of the meaning of Easter Sunday and I am learning how to live in the reality of Jesus' resurrection for every day of my life. My prayer is that through this study you, too, will come to a deeper appreciation of what Jesus did for us and live in His resurrection power all throughout the days ahead.

First Reading:

The first reading this week is from the Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 10. The context of this section is Saint Peter's address to Cornelius, the gentile Centurion from Caesarea. A Centurion was a roman military leader who led 100 men. The story of what we are about to read happened a few days after Peter had seen a vision of a huge sheet lowered to the ground containing a variety of animals, including ones that the Jews were forbidden from eating according to the Old Testament Law. God revealed to Peter that he was no longer bound by these dietary food laws, and by extrapolation, that the proclamation of the Gospel was being opened to the Gentiles. God told Peter, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy" (Acts 10:15b-ff). At the same time that Peter had his vision of accepting Gentiles, Cornelius, a God-fearing Gentile, had a vision in which an angel of God spoke to him about salvation. He sent messengers to Peter in Joppa with orders to bring him to his home in Caesarea. Because Peter had been convinced in this vision about associating with Gentiles, he agreed to travel to Cornelius' home. When Peter arrived Cornelius fell at his feet and worshiped him, but Peter stopped him. Peter then said, "Stand up; I too am a man" (v. 26). He addressed the crowd that Cornelius had gathered by saying, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean" (v. 28). Then Cornelius explained that he had seen a vision of an angel who told him to send for Simon Peter at the home of one Simon the tanner who lived by the sea (v. 32). It was at this point that we join Peter's address to Cornelius along with his relatives and close friends (Acts 10:24).

Now let's read the text, noting that some of the omitted verses were included in order to provide the full context.

Acts 10:34-43 NAS95 34 Opening his mouth, Peter said: "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, 35 but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him. 36 The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all) — 37 you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. 38 You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. 39 We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. 40 God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, 41 not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. 42 And He ordered us to preach to the people, and

solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. 43 Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins."

Peter said quite an earful; his message encapsulated almost the entirety of the Gospel. He told the gentile Cornelius and his family the Good News regarding the forgiveness of sins offered to anyone who believes, Jew or Gentile alike (v. 34), through faith in Jesus Christ (v. 43). Peter, fresh from his vision of the animals coming down in the large sheet, affirmed that God was no respecter of persons; this salvation was available to everyone (vv.34 – 35). Peter provided a high-level narrative to Cornelius of his personal, eyewitness testimony concerning the events about Jesus Christ. He said that Jesus:

- Was anointed by God with power (v.38),
- Ministered to the people by healing and opposing the devil (v.39),
- Was crucified by the Jews in Jerusalem (v.39b),
- Was raised by God on the third day (v.40),
- Was made visible to select witnesses after His resurrection (v.41), and
- Provided the disciples with specific instructions regarding preaching the truth about Jesus being the divinely appointed Judge of the living and the dead (v.42).

Peter confirmed that Jesus was the fulfillment of the testimony given by all of the Old Testament prophets. Finally, Peter announced the best news of all, that **anyone** who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of their sins (v.43). What, though, does "believing in Jesus" mean? For many believe that Jesus existed or that He was a good teacher. When the Bible talks about believing in Jesus, it means having a personal, experiential trust that we put in Jesus for our salvation. We all know that we have done evil things and thought wrongly about people. These wrong behaviors and mindsets are what the Bible calls sin. Because of our choices to sin, we each have a debt that we owe to the Holy God, our Creator who designed us for Himself. By sinning, we basically declared cosmic treason. This sin debt will need to be paid. The question is, who will pay? We have two payment options: 1. an eternity in hell, or 2. belief in Jesus' payment for our sin. All of the best deeds in the world do not cancel out our sin debt. The Bible is very clear about this, for it says, "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Death, meaning eternal separation from God, is the payment for sin. And that is why Jesus' death on the cross is so important. Here is where He made the payment for my sin and your sin. This payment is offered to us as a free gift of eternal life. Therefore, belief in Jesus is accepting this gift of Jesus' payment for your sin debt and trusting in Him for eternal life. This is why the celebration of Easter (Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday) is such a glorious memorial in the Christian church.

Second Reading:

Understanding Peter's testimony in the first reading that anyone who believes in Jesus receives the forgiveness of their sins, provides a convenient gateway to the second reading where we see that

humans cannot attain to God through their own efforts. This reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Colossians, chapter 3. This Book is one of the biblical books known as the "Prison Epistles" named because Paul wrote them while he was in prison in Rome. The reading today opens with the word "therefore" in verse one. Any time we see that word (as you may have noted in previous editions of Mass Notes) we have to ask, "What is it the 'therefore' there for?" The "therefore" in 3:1 refers to what Paul said in the previous chapters. In order to give the passage more context, we will explore this in much further detail below.

Stepping back to look at the big picture, Paul's overall purpose in the Epistle was to correct heresy that was being taught in the church. The heresy had four elements that Paul addressed in chapter 2. These false beliefs included the denial of the sufficiency and preeminence of Jesus Christ (2:8), the exaltation of Jewish ritualism (2:11, 16-17), the teaching of the extreme denial of the flesh as a way of getting closer to God (known as "asceticism," 2:20-23), and the ungodly practice of worshiping angels (2:18). All four teachings clearly contradict the Scriptures. Paul corrected their misunderstandings early in the second chapter by making some clear statements to help them stand in the midst of false teaching. Paul said, "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Colossians 2:8-9). This statement addressed elements of all four of the heresies that were being taught and practiced by certain members of the church.

With this context in mind, let's read from Saint Paul's Letter, the second reading in the Mass today. As you read, keep in mind the sufficiency that we as believers have through faith in Jesus Christ.

Colossians 3:1-4 NAS95 1 Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

Paul said, "<u>if</u> you have been <u>raised</u> up with Christ. This has a threefold meaning. First, he meant this in the sense that **<u>if</u>** we have believed in Jesus' death and resurrection, then we are in a sense crucified with Him and therefore "raised up" on the cross with Him. Paul said in Galatians, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Galatians 2:20). Second, we have been "raised up" in the sense that, if we believe, we have been "born from above." This is something that Jesus tried to explain to Nicodemus (John 3:3), the man who evidently did later come to believe in Jesus since he came to help prepare Jesus' body for burial after He was crucified (John 19:39). Jesus used a Greek word "anothen" which had a dual meaning, above and again. Jesus taught Nicodemus that he had to born from above spiritually, and that he had to be born a second time spiritually in a process distinct from his physical birth. The instant a person "believes" they are "born from above," meaning that they received the gift of eternal life and the Holy Spirit of God now lives inside of them. The third meaning that Paul had in mind regarding

being "raised up" with Christ is that in a spiritual sense after we die we will be "raised up" to a much greater authority in order to reign with Jesus Christ. Paul said, "If we endure, we will also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us" (2 Timothy 2:12).

Here is another important insight from the reading. Paul said in verse 4, "When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory." Notice the repetition of the word "revealed." We spoke about one aspect of Christ's revelation last week in the Palm Sunday readings when we discussed His triumphal entry to Jerusalem. However, in this reading Paul wasn't referring to Christ's exaltation as King when he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. Rather, he was referring to Jesus' Second Coming at which time He will return in glory to judge the world. As we said last week, Jesus came the first time as a humble, unblemished Lamb (Revelation 13:8). However, Jesus will return the second time as the glorious Lion of the Tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5). He will return as the Almighty Warrior on a white horse, not a donkey (Revelation 19:11). Jesus **was revealed** as the King of the Jews when he entered Jerusalem on a donkey. He **was revealed** as the King of the universe when he rose from the dead, this is what we are celebrating today. Finally, Jesus will be revealed when He comes again in glory with all of His believers in tow, that is us, His saints (Revelation 19:14, 1 Corinthians 1:2, Acts 9:13, Acts 9:32, Acts 26:10, Romans 16:2).

As we conclude the second reading and discussion, it may be helpful to rephrase the flow of thought before the first few verses. After the three verses of the reading, a capstone statement provides my personal summary of the reason why we must set our minds on things above:

Keep in mind the correction given to us regarding the false teaching that depends on self-effort, and realize we **have been** crucified with Christ, we **have been** born from above, and we **will be** exalted to participate in reigning with Jesus Christ. Since God **has** granted us all of these incalculable gifts, **THEN** let us "*Set [our] minds on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For [we] have died and [our lives are] hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then [we] also will be revealed with Him in glory*" (vv. 2-4). We are called by God to do the latter (vv. 2-4) because the teachers of the theological heresies were attempting to bring Jesus down to their level by falsely thinking they could reach up to heaven by practicing manmade religion.

I hope that this illustrates the importance of reading the context of the verses from the reading. The big idea is that humans cannot attain fellowship with God in heaven through religious rituals, ascetic practices (like starving the body), or the worship of angels (see Luke 4:8, Matthew 4:10, and especially Revelation 22:8-9 where the practice is expressly forbidden). The only way that humans can attain eternal life and fellowship with God is through faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, believing that Jesus atoned for our sin (Romans 10:9-13).

Alternative Second Reading:

This week's readings included an alternative to the second reading. This optional passage was from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. The context is Paul's confrontation of a certain church

member who was having an immoral relationship with his stepmother. In verse one of this chapter he said, "It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife" (1 Corinthians 5:1). Paul was upset with the church because rather than disciplining the one that was involved with this sin, the church acted as if this was an acceptable practice for a believer in Jesus. The Corinthian church failed to exercise these proper steps of church discipline that could have eventually led to the restoration of the man that was trapped in this sexual sin. This would have included first calling the person to repentance and separating him from the church. Paul's confrontation is strong, but it is based in the power of the Gospel, Jesus' sacrifice for sin.

1 Corinthians 5:6-8 NAS95 6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? 7 Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. 8 Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

The root of the issue was that this young church was flaunting the freedom that they had in Christ. Paul explains this by using imagery drawn from the Old Testament Feast of Passover. In verse 6 Paul referred to the Jewish religious practice of purifying their home from yeast (leaven) during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exodus 12:15). Every Jewish home would have to get rid of yeast and bake unleavened bread during this season. He uses this imagery to provide a metaphor for the purity that God requires in the church. Paul's point was that the "leaven" of the man's sin permeated throughout the church, in the same way yeast permeates dough (v. 6). It was bad enough the church tolerated this sin amongst them, but they even boasted about it (v. 6).

As we celebrate Jesus' resurrection today on Easter Sunday, this passage helps us to recognize God's calling to live holy and pure lives. This is especially true in our culture that is filled with temptations to be drawn into sexual sins, something with which the ancient Corinthians also struggled. Today we can celebrate that Jesus fulfilled once and for all the repetitive, annual practice among the Old Testament Jews to sacrifice their Passover lamb (Hebrews 10:10). We can turn to the victorious One in prayer to deliver us from our temptations (Matthew 6:13), even difficult things such as sexual sin. Jesus calls us to "confess our sins one to another" (James 5:16) meaning that we can turn to a fellow Christian to ask for their intercessory prayer on our behalf when we encounter struggles that we are unable to overcome through our own prayer and obedience. Paul calls believers to celebrate the feast with sincerity and truth before God and our community. What better day to contemplate making some serious changes in our life than on Easter Sunday?

Gospel Reading:

As we move onto the Gospel reading from Saint John Chapter 20 we will see the "reason for the season" of Easter. Throughout the Lenten period, we have looked forward to the celebration of this glorious day. Before you read, say a short prayer asking God to show you what the resurrection

means for your life.

John 20:1-9 NAS95 1 Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone already taken away from the tomb. 2 So she ran and came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." 3 So Peter and the other disciple went forth, and they were going to the tomb. 4 The two were running together; and the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first; 5 and stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings lying there; but he did not go in. 6 And so Simon Peter also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he saw the linen wrappings lying there, 7 and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. 8 So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed. 9 For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.

The narrative continues beyond what was covered in the reading:

10 So the disciples went away again to their own homes. 11 But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; 12 and she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. 13 And they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." 14 When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, "Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away." 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means, Teacher). (John 20:10-16)

Can you imagine being one of the disciples who watched Jesus die on the cross? Then all of a sudden news reaches you that Jesus' body is not in the tomb. You run to the tomb on Sunday and realize it is empty. What are the options? Maybe someone had taken the body or maybe Jesus' prediction that he would rise again really did come true. It would have been confusing, mind-blowing and extremely scary, for those who sought to kill Jesus were still feeling emboldened to snuff out any memory of Jesus.

Mary Magdalene believed and was the first person to see the risen Lord alive. She received confirmation that since God raised Jesus from the dead, she would one day be raised herself.

We can also have assurance of salvation which leads to eternal life by trusting in what the Scripture says about how a person does make it to heaven when they die. The first reading brought up the idea of "belief in Jesus." Let's recap what this means, for this is the foundation of our faith. First, God says that all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). God says that because of our sin the payment we will receive without some outside intervention is death, meaning

eternal separation from God (Romans 6:23). In that same verse, God says that the outside intervention has been given as a free gift: Jesus died on the cross for the payment of our sins. This good news can also be found in the famous verse that is often seen printed on cardboard signs held up at sporting events. "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" (John 3:16). Saint Paul said, "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" (Romans 10:9).

Does this sound like something that is simple to achieve? It is simple, but if it's not necessarily easy. If it were easy then everyone in the world that ever heard the Gospel would become a believer. Peter said in Acts 2:38 that belief is intricately tied to repentance. When we believe in Jesus, it is because we are convicted of our need for a Savior. This leads us to repent of (or turn away from) our sins. This means that we have come to agree with God about our sins, and recognize them for what they are, deadly (Romans 6:21). The Bible says that even one single sin would keep us from entering heaven – forever (James 2:10). So repentance of sin, turning away from the destructive forces that once ruled our lives, is an on-going part of exercising faith in Jesus. One preacher said, "If your faith hasn't changed you, it probably hasn't saved you." This is not to imply that works are necessary for salvation. But it is to say that true faith is manifested in our lives being oriented around the values that Christ had, because He is our life (Colossians 3:4). Jesus' death and resurrection were given as a gift to all, to cover our sin and provide us with the right to be accepted into heaven. As we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday, keep in mind the simplicity of this Gospel message that Jesus gave to the world.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. We covered a great deal of ground today in our study. The main point that we ask you to consider in light of your study is, what difference does the resurrection of Jesus Christ make in **your** life? Contemplate this question in light of the following contexts.

A. What difference does Jesus' resurrection make as I move about in many relational networks where I rub shoulders with people who don't all believe that faith in Jesus is the only pathway to God? How does my life reflect the power of Jesus' resurrection and become an apologetic for His life-transforming presence?

B. What difference does Jesus make if you find yourself in an unhappy situation this Easter? How does the knowledge that Jesus rose from the dead give you hope through these difficulties?

2. Perhaps you don't completely understand the meaning of Jesus in your life. Have you received the forgiveness of your sins through the only method possible: faith in Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection from the dead? Do you want to be with God and know that you will make it to heaven when you die? Let's pray to affirm or reaffirm our belief in Jesus this Easter.

Dear God, I recognize that I am a sinner, and that because of my sin I deserve death and eternal

separation from You. I believe that Jesus died for my sins as payment of the penalty I owed. I believe that You raised Him from the dead and that He will come again in glory. I want to have this gift of eternal life that the Bible talks about through faith in Christ. I repent of my sins and ask You, in the name of Jesus, to empower me to set my sights on spiritual things above, not on earthly desires that have separated me from You. I pray this in Jesus' Holy name, Amen.

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass, visit this web site:

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/032716.cfm

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 3-20-2016

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



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **3-20-2016, Easter Sunday**. This week we open the reading with the procession of the palms. Then we move to the first reading that gives us a glimpse of the Suffering Servant, the Messiah. The second reading shows the humility of Jesus, who came to fulfill the Old Testament prophecy of the Messiah having to suffer. Finally, we conclude with the Gospel account of Jesus' passion, our Messiah, Who paid the penalty for our sin.

Reading at the Procession of the Palms

Luke 19:28-40 NAS95 28 After He had said these things, He was going on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. 29 When He approached Bethphage and Bethany, near the mount that is called Olivet, He sent two of the disciples, 30 saying, "Go into the village ahead of you; there, as you enter, you will find a colt tied on which no one yet has ever sat; untie it and bring it here. 31 "If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' you shall say, 'The Lord has need of it.'" 32 So those who were sent went away and found it just as He had told them. 33 As they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?" 34 They said, "The Lord has need of it." 35 They brought it to Jesus, and they threw their coats on the colt and put Jesus on it. 36 As He was going, they were spreading their coats on the road. 37 As soon as He was approaching, near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen, 38 shouting: "BLESSED IS THE KING WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" 39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples." 40 But Jesus answered, "I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!"

The time around Passover was a season of messianic expectancy, and there were many pilgrims in

the city for the celebration. One of the issues that was fresh in the mind of the people was Jesus' raising of Lazarus from the dead just shortly before this last Passover (John 11:1-45). This would have played into His sudden popularity and for the people's desire to see Him. In messianic form, Jesus directed His disciples with exact precision, and when they followed His orders, everything worked out exactly as Jesus had said. Jesus asserted His authority over Jerusalem by riding into the city on a colt (v. 30, Mark 11:4), not a mighty stallion as would have been done by kings. This was in fulfillment of a prophecy from Zechariah (Zechariah 9:9). Evidently, according to Saint Matthew's narrative, Jesus rode on the colt and the donkey (it's mother) walked alongside.

The procession of the palms dealt with Jesus' first coming. As we look forward to the celebration of Jesus' resurrection on Easter Sunday, let's look briefly at Jesus' second coming. The Book of Revelation revealed some of the details about Jesus' physical return to the earth at the end of the Great Tribulation period. Jesus entered Jerusalem during His First Advent on a donkey. Read what the Scripture says about how He will return the second time.

11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. 12 His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. 13 He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. 15 From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. 16 And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS." (Revelation 19:11-16).

Jesus came the first time as a humble, unblemished Lamb (Revelation 13:8). However, Jesus will return the second time as the glorious Lion of the Tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5). He will return as the Almighty Warrior on a white horse, not a donkey as happened the first time. At His First Coming, many people missed His appearance. According to John, at His Second Coming He will not be missed. John said, "BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen" (Rev 1:7). When the "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" (v.16b) returns, He will come in judgment to a people living "as in the days of Noah" (Matthew 24:37) expecting things to continue as they always have in the past. Since God has given us this warning, we must ask ourselves "How now shall we live?" While ignorance seems to be bliss, it does not lead to eternal life.

This Sunday as we celebrate Jesus' triumphal entrance in Jerusalem at His First Advent, we can celebrate that we are among those that did, in a sense, welcome Jesus to Jerusalem as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We can celebrate that we are not among those who missed His first coming. As we hold our palms, we can proudly celebrate our belief that King Jesus will one day return to the earth he created. In our waving of the palms, we can lift them up as white flags of surrender to the

King who deserves our whole lives.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading after the procession of the palms is from Isaiah 50. The context is just after Isaiah told about how God had disciplined the northern tribes of Israel (Isaiah 50:1-3). We see that God judged Israel's sinfulness, but then also provided a way for salvation in this prediction of the Messiah. The picture painted in the verses leading up to today's reading is one of temporarily setting aside this group of God's chosen people until they come to believe in God's sending of the Messiah. The prophecy shifts to the personalization of the Messiah's suffering, which we will also be reading about in greater detail during the Gospel narrative covering the Passion of Jesus Christ.

First Reading:

Isaiah 50:4-7 NAS95 4 The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of disciples, That I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple. 5 The Lord GOD has opened My ear; And I was not disobedient Nor did I turn back. 6 I gave My back to those who strike Me, And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting. 7 For the Lord GOD helps Me, Therefore, I am not disgraced; Therefore, I have set My face like flint, And I know that I will not be ashamed.

In this reading, the Prophet Isaiah speaks of himself as a "type" of Christ. Christ the Messiah has been given the Word of God, something that "sustains a weary one with a word" (v. 4). The Messiah is obedient (v. 5), even giving His back to those who strike Him and His "cheeks to those who pluck out [His] beard" (v. 6). God darkened the skies during the spiritually dark event of Jesus' suffering, and Jesus "set [His] face like flint" and wasn't ashamed (v. 7) to fulfil God's will in giving His life for us. Later in the Gospel lesson, we will read about the fulfillment of the suffering of God's servant (Is. 50:6 "scourged" and "spat upon") in great detail.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The predicted suffering from Isaiah is also the backdrop for the second reading, which was probably sung as a hymn in the early Church about the great lengths that Jesus went to in order to fulfill the Father's plan for our salvation.

Second Reading:

Philippians 2:6-11 NAS95 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11

and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This passage continues the sharp contrast that the Bible portrays between Jesus' first Advent and His second coming. The first advent He came as a humble servant. In this act of the incarnation and His death, He not only served His Father, but he served us. Humankind was in desperate need of a Savior, owing a sin debt beyond the ability to repay. So He became the suffering Servant "for the joy set before Him" (Hebrews 12:2), paying our debt on the cross. By being obedient to the Father, He will come again in exaltation and power (as we saw in Revelation earlier). The second coming will be very different from the first Advent. In addition to every eye seeing his second coming, this passage informs us that every knee will bow, voluntarily or involuntarily. The choice is ours to make. We can voluntarily bow our knee to the Messiah now, or we can harden our hearts against Him, only to involuntarily bow when He returns.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel Reading is Luke's account of the passion, which includes the betrayal, arrest, trial, torture, humiliation, crucifixion and burial of Jesus.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 22:14 – 23:56 NAS95 14 When the hour had come, He reclined at the table, and the apostles with Him. 15 And He said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; 16 for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." 17 And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He said, "Take this and share it among yourselves; 18 for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes." 19 And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 20 And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood. 21 "But behold, the hand of the one betraying Me is with Mine on the table. 22 "For indeed, the Son of Man is going as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!" 23 And they began to discuss among themselves which one of them it might be who was going to do this thing. 24 And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest. 25 And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.' 26 "But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. 27 "For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves. 28 "You are those who have stood by Me in My trials; 29 and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you 30 that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 31 "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; 32 but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." 33 But he said to Him, "Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison

and to death!" 34 And He said, "I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me." 35 And He said to them, "When I sent you out without money belt and bag and sandals, you did not lack anything, did you?" They said, "No, nothing." 36 And He said to them, "But now, whoever has a money belt is to take it along, likewise also a bag, and whoever has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one. 37 "For I tell you that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me, 'AND HE WAS NUMBERED WITH TRANSGRESSORS'; for that which refers to Me has its fulfillment." 38 They said, "Lord, look, here are two swords." And He said to them, "It is enough." 39 And He came out and proceeded as was His custom to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples also followed Him. 40 When He arrived at the place, He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." 41 And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to pray, 42 saying, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done." 43 Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him. 44 And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground. 45 When He rose from prayer, He came to the disciples and found them sleeping from sorrow, 46 and said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not enter into temptation." 47 While He was still speaking, behold, a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was preceding them; and he approached Jesus to kiss Him. 48 But Jesus said to him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" 49 When those who were around Him saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" 50 And one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. 51 But Jesus answered and said, "Stop! No more of this." And He touched his ear and healed him. 52 Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders who had come against Him, "Have you come out with swords and clubs as you would against a robber? 53 "While I was with you daily in the temple, you did not lay hands on Me; but this hour and the power of darkness are yours." 54 Having arrested Him, they led Him away and brought Him to the house of the high priest; but Peter was following at a distance. 55 After they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter was sitting among them. 56 And a servant-girl, seeing him as he sat in the firelight and looking intently at him, said, "This man was with Him too." 57 But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know Him." 58 A little later, another saw him and said, "You are one of them too!" But Peter said, "Man, I am not!" 59 After about an hour had passed, another man began to insist, saying, "Certainly this man also was with Him, for he is a Galilean too." 60 But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." Immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed. 61 The Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, "Before a rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times." 62 And he went out and wept bitterly. 63 Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking Him and beating Him, 64 and they blindfolded Him and were asking Him, saying, "Prophesy, who is the one who hit You?" 65 And they were saying many other things against Him, blaspheming. 66 When it was day, the Council of elders of the people assembled, both chief priests and scribes, and they led Him away to their council chamber, saying, 67 "If You are the Christ, tell us." But He said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe; 68 and if I ask a question, you will not answer. 69 "But from now on THE SON OF MAN WILL BE SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND of the power OF GOD." 70 And they all said, "Are You

the Son of God, then?" And He said to them, "Yes, I am." 71 Then they said, "What further need do we have of testimony? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth." 1 Then the whole body of them got up and brought Him before Pilate. 2 And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King." 3 So Pilate asked Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And He answered him and said, "It is as you say." 4 Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no guilt in this man." 5 But they kept on insisting, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching all over Judea, starting from Galilee even as far as this place." 6 When Pilate heard it, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. 7 And when he learned that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who himself also was in Jerusalem at that time. 8 Now Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus; for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some sign performed by Him. 9 And he questioned Him at some length; but He answered him nothing. 10 And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing Him vehemently. 11 And Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate. 12 Now Herod and Pilate became friends with one another that very day; for before they had been enemies with each other. 13 Pilate summoned the chief priests and the rulers and the people, 14 and said to them, "You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined Him before you, I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him. 15 "No, nor has Herod, for he sent Him back to us; and behold, nothing deserving death has been done by Him. 16 "Therefore I will punish Him and release Him." 17 Now he was obliged to release to them at the feast one prisoner. 18 But they cried out all together, saying, "Away with this man, and release for us Barabbas!" 19 (He was one who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection made in the city, and for murder.) 20 Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again, 21 but they kept on calling out, saying, "Crucify, crucify Him!" 22 And he said to them the third time, "Why, what evil has this man done? I have found in Him no guilt demanding death; therefore I will punish Him and release Him." 23 But they were insistent, with loud voices asking that He be crucified. And their voices began to prevail. 24 And Pilate pronounced sentence that their demand be granted. 25 And he released the man they were asking for who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, but he delivered Jesus to their will. 26 When they led Him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, coming in from the country, and placed on him the cross to carry behind Jesus. 27 And following Him was a large crowd of the people, and of women who were mourning and lamenting Him. 28 But Jesus turning to them said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, stop weeping for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. 29 "For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.' 30 "Then they will begin TO SAY TO THE MOUNTAINS, 'FALL ON US,' AND TO THE HILLS, 'COVER US.' 31 "For if they do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?" 32 Two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with Him. 33 When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. 34 But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves. 35 And the people stood by, looking

on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One." 36 The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine, 37 and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!" 38 Now there was also an inscription above Him, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS." 39 One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" 40 But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41 "And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." 42 And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" 43 And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise." 44 It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour, 45 because the sun was obscured; and the veil of the temple was torn in two. 46 And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT." Having said this, He breathed His last. 47 Now when the centurion saw what had happened, he began praising God, saying, "Certainly this man was innocent." 48 And all the crowds who came together for this spectacle, when they observed what had happened, began to return, beating their breasts. 49 And all His acquaintances and the women who accompanied Him from Galilee were standing at a distance, seeing these things. 50 And a man named Joseph, who was a member of the Council, a good and righteous man 51 (he had not consented to their plan and action), a man from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who was waiting for the kingdom of God; 52 this man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 53 And he took it down and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid Him in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever lain. 54 It was the preparation day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. 55 Now the women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed, and saw the tomb and how His body was laid. 56 Then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

We read this account of Jesus' crucifixion ever year but sometimes the meaning of it can get lost in the routine. It is important for us to understand the implications of the death of Christ in our own lives. Jesus endured a horrible death for one important reason: to bring sinful human beings back into right relationship with the Father. Saint Paul said, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23) and "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a). Jesus paid the penalty required by the Father for our sin. Saint John said, "and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). Propitiation is a word that means, "The offering which appeases the wrath of one against whom an offence has been committed" (American Tract Society Dictionary). The appeasement of the Father's wrath through Jesus' death on the cross is God's invitation to you to be in right relationship with Him. While it is a free gift (meaning you don't have to earn it), you do have to unwrap the gift. This means that you have to receive the gift through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. John said, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13).

If you have not received Jesus into your life, you can do that by speaking to Him in prayer. There are

not any magic words, just tell God about your belief that Jesus died for your sins. Ask Him to empower you to accomplish His work in your life through the Holy Spirit living in you. If you prayed this prayer, you are entering into a relationship with God the Father through Jesus. As with any relationship, there are certain sensitivities that we extend to the other person. When you find out what the other person values and loves then you cooperate with their plan especially when you know that they have your best interests in mind. That is how it is with God in our relationship with Him. You study the Bible to get to know who He is. You go to church to find more about His heart. You give up destructive habits that lead you away from God. Another important part of relating to God is learning to walk in step with His Spirit. Every believer has been given the gift of the Holy Spirit Who lives inside of us. To walk in step with the Spirit is to cooperate with God on a daily basis. All of these things are how we grow in our relationship with God.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. What is one thing from these readings that helps you to trust in how Jesus is working in your life?

2. How have you personalized the story of Jesus' crucifixion?

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass, visit this web site:

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/032016.cfm Palm Sunday

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 3-13-2016

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



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **3-13-2016**. This week we open with the Old Testament reading from Isaiah in which we see his foretelling of an aspect of the New Covenant. In the second reading, we learn about Paul's passion in running the race for Jesus in opposing the false teachers of his era. We close with the story of the woman caught in adultery from the Gospel of John.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Let's review the background of the Prophet Isaiah from which the first reading was taken. Isaiah was a prophet to the Southern Kingdom of Judah shortly after the Northern Kingdom (called Israel) was conquered by Assyria in 722 BC. Isaiah brought a dire message to Judah that God was going to use a foreign nation to judge them, like what had just happened to Israel. He also proclaimed a message of hope and restoration including a promise that a Messiah would come to restore all that would be taken from God's chosen people. He is one of the most important prophets because of all of the information he provided regarding the coming Messiah. He said regarding this future Ruler, "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel" (7:14). He continued, "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace" (9:6). His writings then moved onto the near term prediction about the coming invasion by Babylon and closed with a series of messages with a very long range view including the time during which Jesus will reign on earth during the Millennial Kingdom.

Today's reading is from a section in which we see how God reminds the people of Judah about God's greatness as well as His sovereignty. Chapter 43 opens with, "But now, thus says the LORD, your

Creator, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel, Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine!" (Isaiah 43:1). God reminds the people of His unique covenantal relationship with them. He shows how He is with them during their hardships that He allowed to overtake them in order to accomplish His purposes. The second verse in the chapter says, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, Nor will the flame burn you." We see similar wording in today's reading.

First Reading:

Isaiah 43:16-21 NAS95 16 Thus says the LORD, Who makes a way through the sea And a path through the mighty waters, 17 Who brings forth the chariot and the horse, The army and the mighty man (They will lie down together and not rise again; They have been quenched and extinguished like a wick): 18 "Do not call to mind the former things, Or ponder things of the past. 19 Behold, I will do something new, Now it will spring forth; Will you not be aware of it? I will even make a roadway in the wilderness, Rivers in the desert. 20 The beasts of the field will glorify Me, The jackals and the ostriches, Because I have given waters in the wilderness And rivers in the desert, To give drink to My chosen people. 21 The people whom I formed for Myself Will declare My praise.

Isaiah is providing comfort to those in the future who will return from the Babylonian Captivity some 150 years in the future. He reminds them of who God is because it will be hard for them to understand God in the midst of their discipline that came about through the exile. God reminds them of He acted powerfully during the first Exodus under the direction of Moses (vv. 16 – 17). Moses was the one to whom the Law was given (Mosaic Covenant). The Mosaic Covenant included the Ten Commandments and the other requirements, which the Jewish people had to fulfil in order to show their covenant relationship with God. Isaiah brings out a contrast in the next verses. In other words, he is saying something like, "if you through the Exodus was amazing just wait until you see what I do in the future." To which future event is Isaiah be referring, has it already happened or is it yet to transpire? Here are some characteristics of this future event.

- It comes on suddenly (v. 19b).
- It is undetected (v. 19b), the Jewish people will miss it.
- It is something supernatural because it defies the natural order of things (streams in the desert, v. 19c).
- Everything and everyone will praise the Lord, right down to the wild animals, jackals and owls (v. 20).
- It will completely satisfy people's spiritual thirst (v. 20, see also Isaiah 55:1-3).

Based on what Isaiah predicted, it becomes clear that he was referring to the New Covenant inaugurated by Jesus. This is a new and better deliverance (and "exodus") which outshines the original Exodus from Egypt and the Mosaic Covenant. It started at Jesus' First Advent (His death and

resurrection), but it will be fully realized at His Second Advent when everything will be made right.

In the New Testament, the author of Hebrews made the superiority of Jesus very clear as we see in the following verses.

Hebrews 10:12-18 NAS95 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. 15 And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying, 16 "THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART, AND ON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM," He then says, 17 "AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE." 18 Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.

What does this mean for our lives? Since God has been powerful and trustworthy in the past, we can trust Him to be powerful and trustworthy in the future. Even if our circumstances seem to be a desert experience, He will sustain us and eventually make all things right but it may not happen during our natural lifetime. As part of God's family through which we have been in-grafted (Romans 11:17) we can bring praise to God (v. 21) as we trust Him and sense Him working in our lives.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Philippians, one of the "Prison Epistles" since it was written while Paul was under house arrest (Philippians 1:13) in Rome (Acts 28:16). Paul viewed this time of captivity as a special ministry of service to Jesus Christ as we see especially in Philippians 1:12-14. Paul said there, "Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel" (v. 12). Today's reading is from chapter three in which Paul discusses the great value of following his leader Jesus through the use of an athletic metaphor.

Second Reading:

Philippians 3:8-14 NAS95 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, 9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. 13 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul surrendered everything that he had on earth in order to serve Jesus Christ (v. 8). Paul was clear that even his most admirable achievements fell far short of earning his way into the kingdom of heaven, this came only through faith in the Lord Jesus (v. 9). This revealed Paul's heart for the people to find their true righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ alone which comes not by striving but through God's power (v. 9). This was in contrast to the false teachers plaguing the church (see Philippians 2:21, and Philippians 3:2). These "dogs" as he called them in 3:2 just before today's reading, were those who interfere with spiritual matters about which they didn't have true knowledge. These "Judaizers" sought to impose the Old Testament Law upon the Gentile church, something which Paul wrote an entire epistle against in the Book of Galatians. The bottom line is that it is a distortion of the true gospel of grace given by Jesus Christ when anyone attempts to impose requirements for salvation outside of faith in Christ alone. In contrast to the false teachers who hoped in obtaining power and success in this life, Paul looked toward the eternal future. His hope was in gaining perfection through his personal resurrection from the dead (vv. 11-12), the first fruits of which we see in Jesus' resurrection from dead.

Beginning in verse 12, Paul used an athletic metaphor in saying that while running towards the future he was striving to forget what was behind him while racing ahead towards this future hope of resurrection "for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (v. 14). Paul frequently used such terminology in his letters as a means of connecting with his readers with symbolism with which they would have been familiar. He liked the Christian life as a race towards the finish, rather than a walk in the park in which we slouch our way towards the finish that is coming upon us whether we want it to or not. As an athlete, we take an active role in running the race, and are not just spectators on the sidelines as the others run by us.

What does this mean for us today? We are not to look to things like what the New Testament Jews desired like political power. We are also not to think that we can find righteousness through good works in obedience to an elevated (and false) interpretation of the Scriptures, as did the Pharisees. Believers are called to shift their focus not upon the things of this world but to "press on" in order to accomplish God's purposes. All the while we have to remember that the righteousness that we do finally obtain is from God, not our works. Paul said clearly in Ephesians, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). We are to take our Christian lives seriously in the same ways that an athlete competes in a race. Although we can cheer others as they run, we too are called to compete in the event of the Christian life. During the race we can remember that Christ is the One from Whom comes our power, as Paul said "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from John chapter 8 in which we see Jesus' interaction with the woman caught in adultery. The event happened in the temple court after Jesus began to teach there early in the morning (John 8:2-3). As you will see in the reading we are not told about that other half, the man

involved in the adulterous affair. In the early New Testament culture, the society tolerated a larger degree of sexual sin among men. In our day we might say something like, that is what men do. In that day we would expect more scrutiny upon the sexual sin of woman, especially one in Jerusalem that was outside of the sexual activities considered normal in the cults of the Roman pagan culture. So it is in the reading that the sin of the woman is brought front and center to Jesus who is placed in a kind of judge position, something for which Jesus was appointed before the creation of time.

Gospel Reading:

Note: This particular section of the Gospel of John is not found in the earliest manuscripts of the New Testament and was first added to by Jerome in the year 382. If you are interested, we encourage you to research the findings on this matter.

John 8:1-11 NAS95 1 But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2 Early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people were coming to Him; and He sat down and began to teach them. 3 The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the center of the court, 4 they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act. 5 "Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?" 6 They were saying this, testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground. 7 But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." 8 Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. 9 When they heard it, they began to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones, and He was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the center of the court. 10 Straightening up, Jesus said to her, "Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?" 11 She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more."

The two opposing groups known as the scribes (the scholars and lawyers) and Pharisees (legalistic lay people) had strong evidence against the woman, the evidence revealing that she was "caught in the very act" (v. 4). Jesus doesn't question the weight of evidence that they have against the woman. However, rather than responding to their legal question which was nothing more than an attempt to trap Him, Jesus simply stoops downs again begins writing on the ground "v. 6). Evidently He had changed his risen from His earlier seated position, since it says in verse 2 that "He sat down and began to teach them." One can imagine Jesus in a submissive, kneeling position with His head held low such that he could reach the ground on which to write. We are not told what He wrote on the ground, but it seems evident from the reaction of His listeners that it affected them deeply. The scribes and Pharisees expected an answer, and evidently grew impatient when Jesus failed to answer. After the lawyers questioned Him a second time, He responded by straightening up and saying, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (v. 7), after which He went back to His writing. This was the answer to their question regarding what should be done with the woman caught in adultery. The oldest in the crowd responded first by leaving, until one by one Jesus was left alone with the "convict." Jesus then admonished her to leave and "sin no

more" (v. 11). The completely vulnerable woman who had previously surrounded by a covey of rapt prosecutors bearing overwhelming evidence which would certainly have convicted her was set free by the supreme judge of all the universe (2 Timothy 4:1).

The reading makes it clear that when we examine our lives we understand that we too are sinners in need of Jesus' forgiveness. We have committed adultery of the heart by going after things other than God in which we find our pleasures. Saint Paul said, "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Sin is a serious matter, and God teaches us that the natural end of a non-believer living out their life of sin is death. Paul said, "for the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a).We can identify with the woman caught in adultery; a person who in that society stood condemned and squarely caught in her sin. We can heed Jesus' warning to her in which he says, "From now on sin no more" (v. 11c). We don't naively think that the woman left the interaction with Jesus and become the most saintly figure in Jerusalem. However, we can imagine that after being set from the consequences of her sin that she was deeply affected by the "Word of God." During those times in which the Spirit of God indict us for our sin, we too can find healing from the eternal consequences of sin even if God doesn't deliver us from the temporal ones. In each incident in which we find ourselves confessing the depth of our sinfulness we can celebrate that as believers in the Lord Jesus we will be delivered from the eternal consequences of our sin.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. When was there a time in which you were caught in the very act of sin? Based upon what you learned in the Gospel lesson, how can you imagine that Jesus would have addressed you?

2. In what ways does the story of the woman caught in adultery help you to avoid your own sin? What about certain besetting sins that you keep committing, a cycle of sin / repent / sin?

3. How does the following verse speak to you about your own sin?

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass, visit this web site:

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/031316-fifth-sunday-lent.cfm

Source(s):

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Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 3-6-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **3-6-2016**. This week we open with a reading from Joshua. The successor to Moses, Joshua was one of only two of the original multitude that left Egypt who entered the Promised Land. The conquest of the land was accomplished under his leadership with victories, defeats, and noted events. The Apostle Paul's second letter to the church in Corinth is the source for the second reading. These verses reveal God's wonderful plan of reconciliation (a big theological term) in its twofold aspect: for ourselves and through us for others. The final reading from Luke's Gospel includes stories of losses, a sheep, a coin, and a wayward son. The emphasis is on what we refer to as the "Prodigal Son." From all three readings we can learn a lot about God and His loving relationship with His people.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first five books of the Bible are sometimes referred to as Law. The sixth book introduces the historical books, capturing the continuing story of Israel from their entrance into the Promised Land (under General Joshua) to their captivity and removal from the Land. In this first history book, Israel is taken into the Land, experiences ultimate victory (with significant defeats along the way), and

comes into a period of rest. Chapters 1-4 detail the crossing of the Jordan River and the initial arrival in the land of Canaan. Today's reading reports on a divine encounter with God and the renewal of certain rituals.

First Reading:

Joshua 5:9-12 NAS95 9 Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." So the name of that place is called Gilgal to this day. 10 While the sons of Israel camped at Gilgal they observed the Passover on the evening of the fourteenth day of the month on the desert plains of Jericho. 11 On the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. 12 The manna ceased on the day after they had eaten some of the produce of the land, so that the sons of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate some of the yield of the land of Canaan during that year.

God appears to Joshua in this passage to encourage him. Having completed the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, Joshua is fully aware that only he and Caleb were among the original emigrants from Egypt. The long wilderness journey was as a result of the sin and disobedience of God's people, particularly their refusal to enter the Land when they first arrived there. What a tragedy! Literally hundreds of thousands of Israelites died on the journey. God in verse 2 seems to be telling Joshua that now the reproach of Egypt's opposition and the sin of the people were all in the past. The name "Gilgal" in the Hebrew language sounds like "roll." So their formal reproach was rolled off. This was a new, fresh start for His people.

Two startling events occur next. First, the people observe Passover. The Passover celebration is a vivid reminder of the deliverance of the people from Egypt. You can read about it in Exodus 12. God sent the death angel to kill the firstborn of the Egyptian families and their cattle. The Israelites were *passed over* if they splashed a bit of the blood of a slain lamb on the door posts and lintels of their houses. It's a magnificent illustration of the ultimate sacrifice that Jesus would make as the Lamb of God when He gave His life for the salvation of all who will by faith accept His work on their behalf and commit their lives to Him.

The second startling event occurred on the very next day. You will recall that for their entire wilderness journey, the people were provided manna (and later quail) for their daily food. It was a marvelous provision for the people, but how tedious it must have been to have the same diet day after day after day! So, here the people are finally in the Promised Land that was said to be a land of "milk and honey." On this day they were able to eat of the fruit of the land they were given. After that, the manna ceased, and from then on they could enjoy the produce of their new homeland.

How wonderful is God's provision for those who trust Him! More than mere physical food, He offers a personal relationship with Him that is made possible by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. Trust Him!

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians dealt with numerous problems that had arisen in the young church: disunity, sin, false teaching, to name a few. This second letter, in part, is a defense of his apostleship, for there were some who questioned his authority. He also writes to encourage the faithful and to strengthen their faith. The earlier portion of chapter 5 includes important teaching regarding the trials of life now for the Christian but the wonderful expectation for the future. Although we may struggle and ultimately die, he notes that "to be away from the body [is to be] at home with the Lord" (v. 8). Then today's passage takes us into some deep but precious truths.

Second Reading:

2 Corinthians 5:17-21 NAS95 17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. 18 Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Paul's statement that anyone in Christ is "a new creature" is astounding! He goes on to explain why that is true. The person who is "in Christ" is one who has confessed Jesus as lord and has by faith accepted His finished work on the cross as sufficient to cover his sin and make him right with God. Elsewhere Paul wrote, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." So, the believer is not only "in Christ," but Christ is in him. The born-again Christian (John 3:3) discovers that the things of his old life are no longer of dominant interest. Everything is seen in a new light; everything has changed.

As mentioned earlier, the next verses reveal God's wonderful plan of reconciliation (a big theological term) in its twofold aspect: for ourselves and through us for others. The term is more easily understood if we think of the frequent practice of reconciling our bank statement. The bank reports our balance is X number of dollars, but our checkbook may show a different number. We have to bring those figures into balance; that's called reconciliation. Verses 19 and 20 tell us how it has happened when we are reconciled with God. He did it through Christ. We had a debt to pay because of our sin. ("All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," Paul wrote in Romans 3:23). Jesus paid that debt by accepting the punishment due us and satisfying God's demand for justice, so that he is "not counting [our] trespasses against [us]." So, we can be reconciled with God when we accept God's gracious provision.

Paul continues to show us that, having been reconciled to God, we now have the responsibility of

taking that message of reconciliation to those who have not yet been restored to God by faith. He says that message has been "committed" to us. In fact, he calls us "ambassadors for Christ." When we share God's truth with others, we are officially representing God; we are authorized and commissioned to do so. It is not a responsibility we can shirk or take lightly.

The final statement in today's reading is mind-boggling. The whole matter of reconciliation (or salvation in the broader sense) is because of the willingness of Jesus to "be sin on our behalf." It's beyond human imagination: the perfect, sinless, holy Son of God, who experienced life as we do but without sin, was willing to take our sin, bear it and its penalty for us so we can experience God's righteousness. If you have not yet accepted this gracious gift of God, do so now and begin living as that new creature he spoke of earlier.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Luke 15 includes three parables, all about lost things. Parables are stories with familiar images and characters that illustrate important truths—truths that are made clear by the telling of a simple story. Often, no interpretation is necessary; the application is obvious. At other times Jesus uses parables that are understood by His disciples but are not clear to hearers who are not sincerely looking for truth. Note that in this instance, Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees and scribes who were complaining that Jesus "receives sinners and eats with them." They were the audience that Jesus taught using these three stories.

Gospel Reading:

Note: Verses 4 – 10 that were omitted from the reading are included below for context.

Luke 15:1-32 NAS95 1 Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. 2 Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." 3 So He told them this parable, saying,

4 "What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? 5 "When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 "And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' 7 "I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. 8 "Or what woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? 9 "When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!' 10 "In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

11 And He said, "A man had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them. 13 "And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. 14 "Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. 15 "So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 "And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him. 17 "But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! 18 'I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men."' 20 "So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21 "And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 "But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; 23 and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate. 25 "Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 "And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. 27 "And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.' 28 "But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him. 29 "But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; 30 but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.' 31 "And he said to him, 'Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 'But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.'"

The first parable is simple to understand. For a shepherd to lose one of his flock is disastrous. He will go to almost any length to find that single sheep. When he finds it, he rejoices and calls his friend together to rejoice with him. Jesus makes an interesting application to the story. He likens it to the rejoicing in heaven when a single sinner repents and is reconciled to God.

The second story has a very similar concluding statement: "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." In this story a woman has lost one of her ten coins, perhaps the total of all her assets. Like the shepherd, she goes on a serious search, checking every nook and cranny of her house until she finds the missing coin. She, also, calls her friends to come and celebrate the find.

One can readily conclude from these two stories that God is in the search-and-rescue business. As Peter put it, God does not want "anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). All of heaven's beings rejoice when a rescue is successful and a lost one repents and returns to God. But Jesus tells one more story, this one in great detail that emphasizes God's great love for a lost one. It is commonly referred to as the story of The Prodigal Son.

The reader is probably familiar with the story. The younger of two sons asks his father for his inheritance. He doesn't give a reason, but the succeeding events indicate that he wanted out from the confining influences of home so he could live life as he wanted to. Surprisingly, perhaps, the father gives him what he asks and does the same for his older brother who remains at home and continues his usual life working the homestead with the father. The younger son goes far from home geographically and in every other sense, as well. He spends his inheritance in "loose living," wasting it all on his selfish desires. His dream of fun and fulfillment was burst by his wastefulness that became acute in the midst of a famine in the land he had fled to. Life became a nightmare, and he was disgraced to take a job feeding pigs (exceedingly distasteful to faithful Jews).

"When he came to his senses," he realized that the servants at his father's house had it much better than he was experiencing life, so he vowed to return home, humble himself, and beg to live as a servant. Apparently, he had come to a full appreciation of what he had lost and that it was his own sinful pride, greed, and desire for the "good life" that had brought him down to the gutter. We can't be sure about what he expected of his father. Surely, he hoped for acceptance back onto the farm as a lowly servant, but he probably would not have anticipated the response of his father to his return.

What follows is an amazing illustration of the unfathomable love and grace of God. It seems that the father had been on the lookout for his son, and he hastened to greet him, to welcome him, and to present him with multiple tokens of his love and forgiveness. And like the first two stories, a celebration follows the son's return, and there are a banquet, gifts, forgiveness, and rejoicing. Oh, but there's a catch—not everyone rejoices. Now we are re-introduced to the elder son, who, perhaps, is the real prodigal. He has been faithful in his work for the father, but apparently, his heart is not open to receive or forgive his brother. The elder brother had enjoyed his home and work, and he had his inheritance. Why should he be upset? Why couldn't he rejoice at the return of his brother? Perhaps Jesus was drawing a verbal picture of some in His audience that day. Was He thinking of the Pharisees and scribes, who like the older brother were deceived in their own self-righteousness?

The three parables clearly illustrate the value of every human being. Like the sheep, the coin, and the son, God highly values the lost ones, and he deeply loves those who have not yet repented and accepted His gracious offer to reconcile them to Himself.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. With which of the sons in the story of the prodigal son do you identify with most, the elder or the prodigal himself? Why?

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2. How do you feel about the reaction of the father upon the return of his youngest son? Do you feel that the youngest go what he deserved, or what he didn't deserve? In what ways does the father's love for his son(s) emulate the characteristics that we see of God the Father in the Scriptures?

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass, visit this web site:

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/030616-fourth-sunday-lent.cfm

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 2-28-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **2-28-2016**. Why do bad things happen to "good" people? In the Gospel reading today Jesus addressed a related question posed to Him by the crowd

except with a twist. Their question was whether when bad things happened to people were they worse sinners than the ones who avoided the same fate? We will see how Jesus cut to the heart of the matter, the people's universal need for repentance and faith for the forgiveness of sin. This week we also look at a story of Moses in the Book of Exodus and a passage from 1 Corinthians which relates another story from Exodus.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Exodus. The context of the reading is Moses' calling by God to lead the Hebrews out of their captivity under the Pharaoh. In chapter 1, after the Israelites had settled in Egypt under Joseph's guardianship (in the seven-year famine), "there arose a new king in Egypt who did not know Joseph" (Exodus 1:8). After Moses saw the injustices being done against his people, he killed an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrews (Exodus 2:12). After he fled from the Pharaoh who found out about it, he helped Jethro's daughters water their flock (Exodus 2:17). Afterwards, Jethro, "the priest of Midian," gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses as his wife (v. 21). Thereafter he had his first son Gershom there in the land of Midian during this time of his first "exodus" because of his flight from the Pharaoh. All of this is leading up to today's reading in chapter three which begins the period of time known as "The Exodus" during which Moses under the direction of God led the Hebrew people out of Egypt. In today's reading we see Moses' first recorded experience with a divine revelation from God which happened during his stewardship of his father-in-law's flock.

First Reading:

Note: Verses 8b – 12 that were omitted from the reading have been included below.

Exodus 3:1-15 NAS95 1 Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. 3 So Moses said, "I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up." 4 When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." 5 Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 6 He said also, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. 7 The LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. 8 So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. 9 Now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have

seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them. 10 Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt." 11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?" 12 And He said, "Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain." 13 Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?" 14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" 15 God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations.

In the reading, we see Moses receiving direct revelation from God, first in the form of a sign (a bush burning but not consumed) and then in the form of the voice of God calling him by name (v. 4). This was the formal calling of the prophet Moses for the specific purpose of delivering the people from their oppression in Egypt (v. 10). Moses questioned God as to how he, as a humble man, could ever accomplish such a great task (v. 11). In contrast to the proud characteristics often exhibited in leaders such as the Pharaoh, we see in Numbers 12:3 how Moses was called the most humble man on the earth. God answered Moses by giving him a sign, saying that once he led the people out of Egypt that he would worship Him again at this same mountain (v. 12). Again, Moses questioned God asking what he should tell his people about the Person from whom he received his commission to deliver them from their oppression. God answered, ""I AM WHO I AM" (v. 14) and to tell them that "I AM has sent me to you" (v. 14). Finally, God connected His "I AM" name, the self-existent One, to the lineage of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (v. 15). In addition to the introduction of the "I AM" designation for God, in verse 2 we also see the use of the word "LORD." This word when used in all capitals denotes the Hebrew word (without vowels) "YHWH," the "tetragrammaton," often translated Yahweh. The first occurrence of this word is found back in Geneses 2:4 and then in 15:6 in which it says about Abraham, "And he believed the LORD and it was counted to him for righteousness." "YHWH" is a reflection of God's divine being, His self-existent nature, something made clear in His words to Moses. This bounding of the reading by opening and closing it with the word "LORD" (v. 2, 15) and the introduction of the heretofore unknown name for God of "I Am" indicates a very strong expression of the sovereignty of God in directing the affairs of Moses to accomplish God's purposes. Moses was to be God's chosen agent to affect the freeing of the Hebrew Nation, the one through whom God would pour pronouncements of blessings to those who obey and curses for those who didn't.

There is plenty that we can we learn from the reading that we can apply to our lives. God works through the lives of frail, imperfect people, like Moses. Although Moses sinned in the killing of the Egyptian (Exodus 2:12) God used him in spite of his sin. If God can use a humble man like Moses to accomplish His purposes, we should assume that God would use ordinary people like ourselves in

working out His plan. Second, when God places a specific calling upon our life He expects our obedience, but it's okay to seek answers to our questions. In our day and age, we can seek guidance from a variety of sources when we sense that God has placed a specific calling upon our lives. These include direct statements from Scripture, principles from Scripture, counsel from godly people (especially those with whom we collaborate in praying), and sensing the circumstances that God has placed in our lives. In the reading, we saw how God used Moses' circumstances to lead him to the exact spot to which he needed to be.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

In this reading, Paul sheds light on these allusions from Israel's past for those of us who are reading this as Gentiles, without the history of the Jewish people as our backdrop. He gave an explanation about the water, manna, and the people's unbelief using a quote from the Old Testament Book of Exodus from which we read in the first reading. Paul's readers would have been familiar with the Old Testament events surrounding the Exodus. Keep in mind the context of chapter 10 in that it follows Paul's explanation of the legitimacy of his apostleship, having just confronted the Corinthians over a very serious matter of sin in their church (see 1 Corinthians 5:1).

Some background on the manna is helpful to understand the big picture and the application to Jesus Christ. The word "manna" in Hebrew means "what is it." As you can imagine, this was an extraordinary way for God to provide for His people. God seems to work in very unexpected ways. In the desert, the Hebrews collected the manna for the first five days of the week that then went bad overnight. However, on the sixth day God provided a double amount of a special type that was preserved for a two-day period in order to provide for a Sabbath rest day. In the spiritual sense Jesus is our special manna, the one who provides our eternal Sabbath rest (Hebrews 4). Yet, like us, the people God led out from among slavery during the Exodus sinned. Yet, this wasn't an isolated instance of grumbling. It says in Exodus, "The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness" (Exodus 16:2). In spite of their hard hearts, God heard the people and answered by telling Moses that He would "rain bread from heaven for you" even in the case when they did not obey Him (Exodus 16:4), which He knew they wouldn't. Moses explained to them that their complaints weren't against him but against God (Exodus 16:8). God made a special provision to provide for the Sabbath by making the manna quantitatively different (a double portion) on the day before as well as qualitatively different – it would not spoil during the Sabbath rest day. God then announced the miracle to Moses through the appearance of the Shekinah glory, which the people saw (Exodus 16:10, c.f.). In the meantime, in the evening before the raining of the manna from the sky began, God sent quail to the people (Exodus 16:13). The text concluded with the people seeing the manna and not recognizing what it was until Moses explained it to them (Exodus 16:15).

Second Reading:

Note: Verses 7 – 9 that were omitted from the reading are included below.

1 Corinthians 10:1-12 NAS95 1 For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; 3 and all ate the same spiritual food; 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. 6 Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. 7 Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY." 8 Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. 9 Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. 10 Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 11 Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. 12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.

Paul wanted New Testament believers to understand the spiritual heritage and to learn from the mistakes that led to disbelief and rejection of God's provision for their lives. Had the people not been so hard hearted they could have better understood God's provision through the spiritual "manna" that was Christ (v. 4). Yet the Hebrew people in the desert continued to sin, and the sin had dire consequences for them. The heart of the matter was this. "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall" (vv. 11-12).

There are many spiritual parallels in this reading between the provision of God through the manna and the person and work of Jesus Christ who, called Himself "the bread of life" (John 6:35). In spite of the fact that the people grumbled against God He still provided food for them. The parallel in the New Testament is that in spite of the fact that most of the people didn't accept Jesus as their Messiah, God still provided salvation through Him. The manna was a very unique provision that was done only by God and could not come about by any natural means. In the same way, Jesus was God's supernatural provision and also did not come about by natural means but was instead born through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Another point in the reading concerns Paul's use of the term "spiritual rock" (v. 4). When Paul said "they were drinking from the spiritual rock" and "the rock was Christ" (v. 4) both times he used the word "petra." Jesus was the foundation stone, the One Who provided sustenance to the Hebrews escaping from the Pharaoh during the Exodus. Jesus Himself explained the necessity of a sure foundation in Luke Chapter 6. " Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house on the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great" (Luke 6:47-49).

Finally, Paul stated, "*these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. 12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall*" (vv. 11 – 12). The meaning of this is self-evident. We should take great pains to 1. Become familiar with Scripture so that we even have the principles to apply, and 2. Actually, apply them to our lives by learning from those that went before us. Why do we continue to sin when we know so much? Perhaps a better question is, why does God continue to use sinners like us? We know that He does, but this doesn't lessen the call of holiness that God has placed upon our lives.

As we transition to the Gospel lesson, we will learn about the ultimate consequence of the unforgivable sin, the forsaking of repentance of sin and belief in the forgiveness offered only through faith in Jesus Christ.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is chapter 13 of Saint Luke. The context is after Jesus' long discourse on the truths of the good news of the Gospel in contrast to the heresies and legalism taught by His antagonists the Pharisees. Jesus told them to "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (Luke 12:1b). The Pharisees thought that they had contrived the secret code for living a faith-filled life, which at its root was hypocrisy (Luke 12:1). In contrast to the Pharisees' law code derived in secret, Jesus taught publicly. Jesus said, "But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known" (Luke 12:2). He told them not to fear those that could kill their bodies (i.e. the Pharisees), but to fear the One that could after they were killed cast them into hell (i.e. God). They were not to fear the Pharisees and their hypocritical legal code, a portion of which we will see in today's reading.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 13:1-9 NAS95 1 Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. 2 And Jesus said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? 3 "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. 4 "Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? 5 "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." 6 And He began telling this parable: "A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any. 7 "And he said to the vineyard-keeper, 'Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?' 8 "And he answered and said to him, 'Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; 9 and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.'"

Jesus confronted the people's false doctrine that bad things happened to bad people because of their

sin. He did this by giving them the truth of the Gospel. The big idea in the reading is that the people whom the tower fell weren't worse sinners, but that **everyone** was in need of repentance and finding faith in Jesus Christ as the only means of forgiveness for their sin. Jesus told them, "unless you repent, you will all likewise perish," (v. 3), meaning spiritual not physical death. Scripture tells us, "it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). Jesus was clear that He was the only way to God, and He said this using the same language about Himself that we saw in the first reading, meaning Jesus is God. He said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). Jesus closed the reading by revealing God's patience in waiting for His people to bear fruit, meaning to repent of their sin and come to the knowledge of eternal life (vv. 6 – 8). Scripture tells us that "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Although there may be points of light in all religions, the only way to God is through faith in Jesus Christ – exclusively by becoming a Christian. This may not jive with the politically correct culture in which we find ourselves today, but the fact remains that this is the truth of God.

We shouldn't dismiss the fact that God judges sin, whether it's in the life of a believer or a non-believer. In our day, God operates according to the New Covenant in which he prunes believers during their earthly lives (John 15:2) while storing up His judgement for unbelievers largely until the end of their lives (John 15:6, "cast in the fire and burned"). Even during the Old Testament times, God revealed His grace for the unbelieving world by lavishing His material blessings upon them, although their eternal destination was hell. This is very clear from both Psalm 37 and Psalm 73. God calls us to remember those who went before us, such as the story of Ananias and Sapphira in the Book of Acts (Acts 5:1-11), or Paul's teaching about some being sick and some have died because of their unholy behavior in the love feast and communion meal (1 Corinthians 11:30). A key point that we need to see is that there are consequences for sin, but not in perhaps the ways we can imagine or according to the ways the people (including the Pharisees addressed in the adjacent verses) contrived.

As Christians just because we do everything right doesn't mean that we will be blessed in the earthly sense in which we might expect, including material blessings and protection from sudden death. Instead, God allows challenges in our lives to lead us to a fuller relationship with Him including the death of loved ones (our ourselves) in order to accomplish His purposes. Our Christian lives are not like baking a cake. We can't just put together the exact right ingredients using a measured formula and follow the recipe exactly and have the cake turn out perfectly well each and every time. Sometimes God throws a monkey wrench into our plans in order to achieve His purposes. What's more, we may not even know or understand these purposes during out natural lifetimes. Unlike the Pharisees who taught salvation by works and outward obedience to their own set of laws, God calls us to walk in faith alone while behaving in ways as directed by the Holy Spirit. This does include closely understanding the biblical principles taught in the New Testament and the Ten Commandments of the Old. However, we should not live our lives formulaically, doing things for God and expecting Him to "bless" us on our terms. He will surely bless us, but His definition of

blessing is a lot broader than our limited perspective. May we learn to walk by faith and not our feelings or our sight.

Many of us have had nice young men dressed in white shirts wearing nametags and backpacks knock on our door. The Mormons, although very well intentioned, teach a doctrine similar to that confronted by Jesus in the Gospel reading today. Would you recognize false doctrine when it knocked on your door? As we ponder what Jesus said about those that perish, we have to remember that we are not just talking about the false doctrine of Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses and Muslims, but anyone who holds the doctrine that good works cause salvation rather than flow from it (Ephesians 2:8-9). Jesus taught us not that we shouldn't judge but rather than when we do judge we are to use a righteous standard (John 7:24, Matthew 7:2). Jesus was clear that belief in Him is the only way to God, and that many would not travel this road. Less we think that those in our community are immune, we can say that many who claim Christianity truly live as practical atheists except they go to church on Sunday while negating Christian principles and practices during the week including prayer, fellowship with other Christians, study Scripture, following God's calling for them (Ephesians 2:10). Jesus told this group, "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles? And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS'" (Matthew 7:21-23).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. We saw in the Gospel reading how Jesus upended the people's beliefs about sin and salvation. How can you be part of bringing a message of hope and light to people who are approaching God with an expectation of God being a genie on demand (and often being disillusioned with God's unexpected ways of interacting with them)? Are there areas of your own life that you need to work through disillusionment with the Lord's unexpected ways so that you can be freed up to minister to others authentically in their own struggles with surrendering to God?

2. The "bigger" idea in the Gospel reading is evangelism, reaching out to those trapped in false belief systems with the truth of the Gospel. What are two practical ways in which you can begin to reach out to those holding false beliefs? If you pray for God to change a person's heart (an important first step), will you be confident in how you speak to them about Jesus? What verses will you have them read in order to begin to show them the truth of the Gospel?

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass, visit this web site:

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/022816-third-sunday-lent.cfm

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Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB