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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday Lectionary 10: 12/21/2025



Like last week, this week, as we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ, we will be studying some important prophetic voices from the Old Testament. We will also be reading from the Gospel of Saint Matthew to hear how he confirmed that the coming birth of Jesus would fulfil these predictions made centuries earlier.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Before we turn to the first reading from Chapter 7 in Isaiah, we need to explain the personality of King Ahaz, the King of the Southern Tribe of Judah, about whom Isaiah will speak. Ahaz was King Jotham's son, the latter of whom was Judah's godly ruler. King Ahaz came into power when he was 20 years of age, and he went bad immediately at the beginning of his reign. Second Chronicles provides an essential insight into the personality of the King. "But he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel; he also made molten images for the Baals" (2 Chronicles 28:2). Not only was Ahaz an

idolater who caused the circulation of idols to the god Baal, but he even burned his own children as sacrifices to false gods. The Scripture said, "But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and even made his son pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had driven out from before the sons of Israel" (2 Kings 16:3). He went from bad to worse after the attack of the King of Assyria who had already overtaken the Northern Tribes.

> *20 So Tilgath-pilneser king of Assyria came against him and afflicted him instead of strengthening him. 21 Although Ahaz took a portion out of the house of the LORD and out of the palace of the king and of the princes, and gave it to the king of Assyria, it did not help him. 22 Now in the time of his distress this same King Ahaz became yet more unfaithful to the LORD. 23 For he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus which had defeated him, and said, "Because the gods of the kings of Aram helped them, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me." But they became the downfall of him and all Israel. (2 Chronicles 28:20-23)*

As if that wasn't bad enough, Ahaz then went on to block the entrance to the temple to prevent the true worship of God (2 Chronicles 28:25). King Ahaz started out bad and continued in his ungodly rule until the very end of his life without ever having a change of heart or repenting of his sin. It's with this understanding of the king that we turn to the text of the first reading from Isaiah.

First Reading:

> *10 Then the LORD spoke again to Ahaz, saying, 11 "Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; make it deep as Sheol or high as heaven." 12 But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!" 13 Then he said, "Listen now, O house of David! Is it too slight a thing for you to try the patience of men, that you will try the patience of my God as well? 14 "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. Isaiah 7:10-14*

The Lord allowed King Ahaz to trust in Him by asking for a sign. Instead of asking for a sign, King Ahaz spoke out of pride and self-reliance in his heart, which displeased the Lord. God had given him an invitation, and he refused to accept it. This "tried" the patience of the Lord because he persisted

in his independence and refused to trust in God's provision of a sign to assure him. God used this event of obstinate disobedience to foretell the Messiah. This prophecy was ultimately fulfilled through the birth of Jesus by the Virgin Mary.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Because the Gospel reading relates to the prophecy of Isaiah from the first reading, we will consider that passage next. This reading is from the first chapter of the Gospel of Saint Matthew.

Gospel Reading:

> *18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. 19 And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her, desired to put her away secretly. 20 But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for that which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 "And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins." 22 Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, 23 "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD, AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US." 24 And Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took her as his wife, 25 and kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus. (Matthew 1:18-25)*

While many of us are already familiar with the narrative concerning the birth of Jesus, this passage highlights essential truths for our lives. First, Saint Matthew revealed that Jesus was born not through natural human relations but through the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit. This is important because, since God is without sin, this was the only way the sinless God-Man could come into the world. Second, since the virgin birth fulfilled biblical prophecy, we can trust other prophecies that speak to areas of our life and ministry. This includes things like how the Lord's

second coming will play out and how the world will be eventually unified under Jesus' earthly reign. Third, Jesus was sent to save His people from their sins. This is God's special invitation to counteract the destructive nature of sin to stand before a Holy God and not be rejected at the judgment. This is not only "a" plan for salvation, it is "the" plan. Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Matthew's Gospel also brings out an essential prophetic fulfillment regarding the title of Jesus as Immanuel. This title means "God with us," a crucial relationship aspect of the Messiah's advent. The Messiah reveals the heart of God as One who lives among us. The implications of Jesus being called Immanuel are twofold. First, Jesus came so we might come to the Father through Him. Second, Jesus moved into the neighborhood to stay to show us God's love so that we might live eternally with Him. Christianity is the only belief system that purports that God became a man and died for our sins. That is the powerful implication of Immanuel, God with us.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

In the second reading from Romans, Saint Paul also confirmed the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies regarding Jesus. While these are introductory remarks and salutations, many meaningful truths are contained here.

Second Reading:

> *1 Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, 2 which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, 3 concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, 4 who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, 5 through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles, for His name's sake, 6 among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; 7 to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 1:1-7)*

It would be easy to read this passage casually and gloss over the deep insights, but Paul confirmed the following truths about Jesus and His people.

1. Jesus' birth and ministry were predicted by Old Testament Scriptures (v.2).

2. Jesus would be born in the line of King David as to his earthly genealogy (v.3).

3. He would be the Son of God and as God would have the power to be resurrected from the dead (v.4a), and be filled with the Holy Spirit (v.4a).

4. He would be perfectly holy (v.4b).

5. He would be the Lord of the Church.

6. All grace would flow through Jesus (v.5)

7. Jesus would establish the church's apostles, including Paul (v.5).

8. His Church would bring about obedience and faith (v.5).

9. Paul's ministry would extend to the Gentiles (v.5).

10. All believers would be called "saints" and, like the apostles, called out to ministry (v.7).

Saint Paul knew Jesus in a multifaceted way, which should be a model for us as followers of Him today. Most importantly, we need to recognize Jesus as the Son of God who was raised from the dead and lived a holy life through the power of the Holy Spirit so that we can receive His grace. Receiving His grace means that I am now in good favor with the Father and declared righteous.

Reflection Questions

1. Review the list above from the second reading in Romans 1 about Jesus. Choose one point and think about how this truth affects your life.

2. What difference does knowing that Jesus is Immanuel, "God with us," make to you?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 7: 12/14/2025

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

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading today is from Isaiah Chapter 35. Before we read the text, it's essential to take note of the context, the audience to whom Isaiah was speaking, and the information we can glean from other prophetic voices in the Bible. This prophet ministered to the people of the Southern Tribes of Israel, including Benjamin and Judah, during the time that Assyria took the Northern Kingdom into captivity. Micah and Hosea were prophets speaking on behalf of God at the same time as Isaiah. His message was one of repentance and subsequent hope for the future. Isaiah was a forerunner who

announced the coming Messiah and his future kingdom, much like John the Baptist in the New Testament. Like the other prophets, Isaiah often saw near and long-term events "telescoped" together, but even more so because of the greater range of his visions. This is called by the theological term "prophetic foreshortening." In hindsight, it's easy to differentiate between the near-term events and those in the distant future that have yet to be fulfilled. However, when we look at the events that haven't been fulfilled yet, such as the future era known by biblical scholars as the Millennial Kingdom, it's more challenging to determine the order and timing of the events. This portion of Chapter 35 concerns the coming Kingdom which the Messiah would bring in. Looking back, we understand this would be fulfilled at Jesus' Second Coming. But Isaiah did not have the advantage of knowing the difference between what would happen when Jesus came the first time and what is yet to take place at His second coming. This is why it's essential to understand the whole of Scripture when we read isolated portions of the prophetic Books.

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

First Reading:

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

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

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

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

Micah said that the kingdom of the Messiah would be a time of peace, when weapons of war would be turned into peaceful use (v.3). In this age the city of Jerusalem would be the capital city of the universe (v.1). The King would serve as the perfect judge over the entire world (v.3). The Jews misinterpreted this to mean that the Messiah would immediately usher in His Kingdom when he came, and who can blame them? Only after Jesus was crucified, raised from the dead, and explained the Scriptures (Luke 24:27) to them did some of them understand. Even then, some doubted (Matthew 28:17).

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

Introduction to the Second Reading:

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

Second Reading:

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

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

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

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

Gospel Reading:

> *2 Now when John in prison heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples, 3 and said to Him, "Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?" 4 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see: 5 the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM. 6 And blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me." 7 And as these were going away, Jesus began to speak to the multitudes about John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? 8 But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those*

> *who wear soft clothing are in kings' palaces. 9 But why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I say to you, and one who is more than a prophet. 10 This is the one about whom it is written, 'BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER BEFORE YOUR FACE, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.' 11 Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. (Matthew 11:2-11)*

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

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

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

Reflection Questions

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

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

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

How do these Scriptures give you hope, especially during Christmas?

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

Perhaps you would be willing to leave a comment on our web page or Facebook.

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 4: 12/07/2025



What are you looking forward to? This question may have many answers: Christmas, time with family, a new year, a raise? But after all of this comes and goes, what else are you looking forward to? What do you have to look forward to at the end of your life? When nothing seems to be going right, is there something outside this life's roller coaster to look forward to?

The Bible speaks much about expectation, hope, and things to come. Because it is divinely inspired, it has the unique voice to talk to us from an eternal perspective about real hope and what we can look forward to. This week, we will begin with Isaiah's prophecy to the Jews in the Old Testament concerning the Messiah, the Jewish hope of a Deliverer. Next, we will study what Saint Paul had to say about Jesus as the hope of the Gentiles, and conclude with a Gospel lesson from Matthew about John the Baptist's pronouncement of the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

Today, the first and second readings and the Gospel lesson were either directly from Isaiah or drawn

from this Old Testament prophet. As a review, Isaiah was a prophet to the Southern Kingdom of Judah from about 740 to 700 BC. He spoke words of both condemnation and hope to the tribes of Benjamin and Judah concerning their impending capture by the Babylonian empire. This was during the same time that the Northern Kingdom was taken into captivity by Assyria in 722 BC.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Isaiah Chapter 11. Isaiah writes in a form called "prophetic foreshortening" in which two events (one near and one far away) are written in such a way that they seem to happen simultaneously. Study the text and see if you can locate the transition point where the prophecy regarding Jesus shifts from the First Coming to His Second Coming.

First Reading:

> *1 Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a branch from his roots will bear fruit. 2 And the Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. 3 And He will delight in the fear of the LORD, And He will not judge by what His eyes see, Nor make a decision by what His ears hear; 4 But with righteousness He will judge the poor, And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked. 5 Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins, And faithfulness the belt about His waist. 6 And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, And the leopard will lie down with the kid, And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little boy will lead them. 7 Also the cow and the bear will graze; Their young will lie down together; And the lion will eat straw like the ox. 8 And the nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. 9 They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea. 10 Then it will come about in that day That the nations will resort to the root of Jesse, Who will stand as a signal for the peoples; And His resting place will be glorious. (Isaiah 11:1-10)*

Isaiah revealed some essential truths about the source of the Messiah, the nature of the Messiah, and the nature of his future "millennial" kingdom on earth. Isaiah said that Jesus would come from the line of Jesse (v. 1), who was King David's father. He said that He would possess the "Spirit of the

LORD", wisdom and understanding, and the "spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord" (v. 2). Next, in verses 3-4, a transition occurred which pointed to the future reign of Jesus initiated at His Second Coming. Isaiah said, "He will not judge by what His eyes see, Nor make a decision by what His ears hear; But with righteousness He will judge the poor, And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked." This means that justice will finally reign on the earth because Jesus will be physically ruling and reigning. Right now in this era of human history, evil is not always immediately punished, and the wicked often prosper by their cunning schemes. Not so during the millennial reign of King Jesus. The first time Jesus came to the earth as a Servant and like a Lamb (Isaiah 53:7). But when Jesus returns a second time He will rule the earth with a rod of iron (Revelation 2:27) and as a Lion (Revelation 5:5). Jesus' reign will occur during the future Millennial Kingdom when Jesus will reign over the earth for a thousand years beginning immediately after the end of the Great Tribulation period. If this sounds terrifying to you, it doesn't have to be. When you place your faith in Christ's righteousness, you do not have to fear His rule and reign, because you are united with Him forever. "There is therefore, now, no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). If you are not in Christ Jesus, then your fear should be a wake-up call to consider your eternal destiny.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

As we move on to the second reading from Romans 15:4-9 (plus the skipped verses 10-12), we find a writing from Isaiah, one of the most frequently quoted prophets. The text opens with a vital admonition about the value of the Old Testament Scriptures. As you read, note the importance of this admonition and the connection to the first reading from Isaiah 11.

Second Reading:

> *4 For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. 5 Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus; 6 that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 Wherefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. 8 For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers, 9 and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, "THEREFORE I WILL GIVE*

> *PRAISE TO THEE AMONG THE GENTILES, AND I WILL SING TO THY NAME." 10 And again he says, "REJOICE, O GENTILES, WITH HIS PEOPLE." 11 And again, "PRAISE THE LORD ALL YOU GENTILES, AND LET ALL THE PEOPLES PRAISE HIM." 12 And again Isaiah says, "THERE SHALL COME THE ROOT OF JESSE, AND HE WHO ARISES TO RULE OVER THE GENTILES, IN HIM SHALL THE GENTILES HOPE." (Romans 15:4-12)*

The opening admonition was that "whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (v. 4). Saint Paul quoted several Psalms and then Isaiah. In verse 12, Paul quoted directly from the same section of text we read in the first reading, Isaiah 11, verses 1 and 10. Paul did so to show that Jesus fulfilled this portion of Isaiah's prophecy at His First Coming, and to give hope to the Gentile Roman believers. He said, "Let all the peoples praise Him" (v. 11a), not just the Jewish believers but believers from every tribe and nation. We can encourage one another through these words, since we see that the Scriptures are true and that this prophecy is fulfilled through Jesus. We can trust that since the prophecies concerning Jesus' First Coming were proven to be true, we can trust that the predictions of the things that will happen in His Second Coming are also accurate.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Before we move on to the Gospel lesson, I want to share a section in the Gospel of Saint Luke Chapter 4 because it helps to illustrate the importance of Isaiah's prophetic writings. When Isaiah wrote his Book, all of the events concerning Jesus were yet future. Yet in this section in Saint Luke, Jesus quoted from Isaiah and said that a portion of it was being fulfilled instantly. But Jesus stopped his quote exactly when the prophetic timetable turned to the events concerning His Second Coming. In Luke Chapter 4, Jesus is just beginning His ministry and has returned to his hometown of Nazareth. The context of this section is just after Jesus' baptism, which is the same period as the Gospel lesson today in Matthew that we will look at later in this study. Read the text from Saint Luke and carefully note Jesus' quotation from Isaiah, which is marked in all CAPITAL LETTERS.

> *16 And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. 17 And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book, and found the place where it was written, 18 "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE*

> *DOWNTRODDEN, 19 TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD." 20 And He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed upon Him. 21 And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:16-21)*

In this section of Luke, Jesus quoted from Isaiah 61:1-2a but stopped short of the concluding portion of Isaiah 61:2. Verse two, with the section highlighted that Jesus omitted from Isaiah, said "To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD, **And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn**." Jesus said in verse 21b of Luke 4, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (v. 21b). It's very significant that Jesus stopped where he did when he was quoting from Isaiah because it is essential to understand the distinction between the purpose of His First Coming and of His Second Coming. We live in the "pause" between Christ's First and Second Coming. This era allows us time to choose to embrace the favor of the Lord (graciously) through faith. The next era, though, will usher in the day of "vengeance of our God." Who can stand in the midst of His setting the record straight? None of us has a chance outside of God's outstanding provision through the death of His Son, Jesus, at His first coming. Understanding this distinction will make it possible to understand the Old Testament's prophetic writings properly. It also helps to interpret the future events in the Book of Revelation, including the purpose of the Great Tribulation period we discussed last week.

The Gospel lesson today was from Matthew Chapter 3. Again, the text contained a quotation from the Prophet Isaiah as indicated by the capital letters.

Gospel Reading:

> *1 Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, 2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." 3 For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet, saying, "THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT!'" 4 Now John himself had a garment of camel's hair, and a leather belt about his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea, and all the district around the Jordan; 6 and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins. 7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance; 9 and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have*

> *Abraham for our father'; for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. 10 And the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 11 As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 And His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." (Matthew 3:1-12)*

In this Gospel reading, John the Baptist announced the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. He quoted from Isaiah 40:3 showing that he was the one about whom the Prophet Isaiah was speaking when he said, "THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT." Next, Matthew described the ministry and nature of John the Baptist, including his opposition from the two prominent groups that later also opposed Jesus, the Pharisees and Sadducees. John the Baptist warned that Jesus would eventually judge these oppressors (v. 12). In retrospect, we understand now that Jesus' judgment of them will not occur until His Second Coming, something which was unexpected – likely even to John the Baptist. The apostles expected Jesus to set up His Kingdom at any moment (John 6:15). The text today was just before Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:16). After Jesus was baptized another portion of Isaiah 11 was fulfilled when the Spirit of God descended like a dove and came to rest on Jesus (Matthew 3:16). Looking back to the first reading we see, "the Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him (Isaiah 11:2a).

What's the importance of this Gospel reading for your life as a believer in Jesus Christ? First, we can trust the Old Testament prophecies concerning Jesus' First Coming because we can read about the facts of their fulfillment in the New Testament. Second, since we can trust the prophecies about Jesus' First Advent, we can trust those about His Second Coming. Jesus' Second coming is when the believing world will realize God's wonderful promises, including restoring the world to its pre-fallen, sinless condition. Isaiah said in the first reading, "And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, And the leopard will lie down with the kid, And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little boy will lead them" (Isaiah 11:6). We have hope that Jesus' Millennial Kingdom will be a world of universal peace. This promise should motivate us to reach out to those in our community who don't know Jesus Christ personally. Thirdly, the Gospel reading warns us not to be deceived about our standing before God. The Pharisees and Sadducees were putting their trust in the wrong place (being children of Abraham). John the Baptist confronted them over this false belief and pointed them to put their trust in the only One who could truly save them, Jesus, the Promised Messiah.

Reflection Questions

1. Even though prophecy constitutes about one-third of the Bible, the importance of this genre is frequently downplayed, and the interpretation is often spiritualized. Yet we know that living with a proper anticipation of the Lord's return encourages holy living and dedication in loving Jesus wholeheartedly. Read the following Scripture. How does this cause you to live a more holy life and reach out to others who don't know Jesus?

> *7 The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. 8 Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. 9 Be hospitable to one another without complaint. 10 As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 11 Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:7-11)*

2. List a few characteristics of a forerunner who goes before someone. In what ways are you, as a believer in the risen Lord Jesus Christ, called to be a forerunner, like John the Baptist?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 1: 11/29/2025

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

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

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

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

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the book of Isaiah, a prophet who spoke to the people of Judah when a formidable enemy threatened them. They were the southern tribes of Israel, small compared to their brothers who had already fallen into captivity to the powerful Assyrians. Isaiah spoke several themes

to his countrymen in the time of their suffering: 1) Take heart, for God is sending the Messiah (one who will deliver them from their oppression); 2) Repent from trusting in self and trust in God's salvation; and 3) God's has an important future in store for those who align themselves with His purposes and value system. A prominent theme in the Bible is prophecy concerning the Jewish people's eventual restoration and spiritual awakening. In the first reading, we see the Prophet Isaiah predicting the future restoration of the Nation of Israel. The reading is from Isaiah Chapter 2. Read about God's plan for Israel and the prominent place Jerusalem will play in the future. As you read, underline the word "will" each time it appears in the text.

First Reading:

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

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

(Romans 11:17), this should provide us with comfort that God can and will work in our lives as well.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

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

Second Reading:

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

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

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

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

In the Gospel reading today, we turn to Matthew and the subject of eschatology, the study of the final events in the history of the world. This section of Scripture is known as the Olivet Discourse because Jesus gave it on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem across the Kidron Valley from the Temple. Jesus startled his disciples by saying that there would be a day when no huge temple stones would be left on top of each other. This was mind-boggling to his disciples, and they naturally asked when this would happen. Jesus answered their question by teaching His return to earth and the end times. He gave them information so that they would be forewarned and could prepare accordingly. Thanks to their faithful retelling of this information, we are forewarned and can live in light of what we know will take place in the future.

Gospel Reading:

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

> *the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. 43 But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. 44 For this reason you be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will. (Matthew 24:36-44)*

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

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

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Reflection Questions

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

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

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

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

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

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 162: 11/23/2025

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

Introduction to the First Reading:

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

First Reading:

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

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

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

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

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

Introduction to the Second Reading:

In the second reading today, let's look at what Saint Paul had to say to the Colossians.

Second Reading:

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

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

These truths about our new life in Christ are so profound that they remind me of the words of the Christian hymn "How Great Thou Art," of which verse three reads as follows.

> *And when I think that God, His Son not sparing,*

Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in;
That on the Cross, my burden gladly bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin.

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

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

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

Gospel Reading:

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

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

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

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

Reflection Questions

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

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

B. How long would Jesus promise elapse between the present earthly time when the criminal was

hanging on the cross and when he would be in paradise with Jesus?

2. Reread this verse from the second reading. "13 For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." Taking both these verses and what we learned about salvation in the Gospel lesson, is Jesus making us a promise that we too will inherit eternal life the very day that we die?

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

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

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

– When I am feeling afraid
– When I am feeling that evil people are encompassing me
– When I feel that I need to try harder to be a better person and not miss Mass

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 159: 11/16/2025

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. The Bible teaches throughout both the Old and New Testaments the importance of recognizing the imminency of the coming of the Lord Jesus and His eventual return. Later in this lesson, we will look at readings from the Old Testament Book of Malachi and the Gospel of Luke in the New Testament that address these topics. Despite these frequent teachings, it's easy to get caught up in our daily lives and overlook the possibility of meeting the Lord ourselves at any moment. I write about that in the Going Deeper section at the end of today's notes.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Malachi. Malachi was a prophet who wrote around the time of the closing of the Old Testament Canon. He is one of the Minor Prophets, meaning their book is shorter than the Major Prophets. This Minor Prophet who wrote one of what I call the "index books," because you shouldn't feel bad if you need to use the index at the front of your Bible to locate them. Malachi is a bit easier to find because it is the very last Book in the Old Testament, just before the New Testament Book of Matthew. Malachi's message to Israel was a call to repentance concerning the corrupt priesthood, rampant divorce among the people, their lack of tithing, and poor social justice. The reading for today is from the first two verses in Chapter 4 (some versions mark the

verses differently). Looking back to Chapter 3 we see that Malachi predicted both the coming of John the Baptist and Jesus. "'Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,' says the LORD of hosts" (Malachi 3:1). In verse 5, we see the promise of God's future judgment of His people, but in an interesting way. "Then I will draw near to you for judgment" (v.5a). God says He will be near the people of Israel, but it's for judgment. This verse is helpful because it should remind us that as God judges His people, He is still near to them, and His judgment is ultimately for their good. Let's read the text from the first reading in Chapter 4, but continue until the end of the chapter.

First Reading:

> *1 "For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze," says the LORD of hosts, "so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. 2 But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall.*

Omitted Verses:

> *3 You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing," says the LORD of hosts. 4 "Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel. 5 Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. 6 He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse." Malachi 4:1-6 NASB (Malachi 3:19-24 in the Lectionary).*

Some insights from this text are as follows. When Malachi said "the Day," he referred to the Day of the Lord (abbreviated DOL), which we have spoken about previously. The DOL is the future period of judgment which commences at the midpoint of the time known as the Tribulation Period and marks the beginning of the Great Tribulation (Rev 13:5). The purpose of the Great Tribulation is to bring the Jewish people back to communion with God. Malachi conditioned his prophecy of this terrible time period with a blessing to those who turned to the Lord and repented of their fallen condition.

"But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth . . . "(v2a, b). Malachi also said another remarkable prophecy when he quoted God: "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah, the prophet, before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD" (v5). One of the tribulation period's marks will be the Prophet Elijah's return. John said in the Book of Revelation, "And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth" (Rev 11:3). Although it's not explicitly stated in Revelation that one of these witnesses is Elijah, Malachi predicts his return and this does seem to align with the text in Revelation.

What is the relevance of Malachi's teaching for us in the Church today? As discussed in previous Mass Notes, we find in the teachings of Saint Paul that God has granted an escape to all believers alive at His second coming. "According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever" (1Th 4:15-17). Malachi called for the people to repent their sins and turn to the Lord. This is precisely the call for everyone alive today, from every tribe and nation. Malachi's message serves as both a warning for people to heed the call to turn to the One True God and to let the believers know that God hasn't forsaken His people, Israel. God will work actively to redeem His people and show them the need to turn their hearts to Him, even if it means subjecting them to terrible judgment. He will leave the 99 sheep and go after the one that is missing (Luke 15:4). If God loves his people Israel so much to go to this length to save them, how much more does He desire that everyone alive today turns to him through faith in Jesus? Saint Paul said, "But what does it say? 'THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, in your mouth and in your heart' –that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" Romans 10:8-10).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading from 2 Thessalonians is Paul's teaching on avoiding fellowship with anyone holding to false teachings. Believers, Paul said later in this same chapter, were to warn these people, not associate with them, but attempt to win them back to correct teaching (see 2 Thess 3:14 – 15).

Second Reading:

> *2 Thessalonians 3:7-12 NASB (plus skipped verse 6)*
> *6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, 8 nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you; 9 not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example. 10 For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. 11 For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. 12 Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread.*

Paul advises the Thessalonians who were struggling with persecution (2 Thess 1:4-6) to break fellowship with those who didn't follow God's teaching (v. 6) and emulate Paul's behavior in serving without an expectation of payment. Although Paul had the right to work as a paid minister, he chose not to so as to set an excellent example for others to follow (v. 9). The principle he gave was, "if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat" (v. 10b). Paul had heard that some among them were not working but were instead "acting like busybodies" (v. 11c). Paul admonished these people with a word from the Lord to emulate him and "work quietly" (v. 12).

Paul's connection between work and worship is an important point, which is also closely tied to godly stewardship. Paul's admonishment is relevant for us today in that God calls all of us to serve Him and be good stewards of the gifts that He has given us. God calls us to offer our bodies up to Him as "living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God" (Romans 12:1). Through this we offer ourselves through our work to God as our "spiritual service of worship" (Romans 12:1e). Thinking of our work as a form of worship helps us to understand better God's holistic picture and plan that He has for our lives. Perhaps this view is easier for those employed, such as musicians, who can clearly visualize how they serve God through the beautiful music they make flow through their instruments. But Paul's admonition to connect work with worship goes beyond the musician, even those who clean streets for a living or run parts in a machine shop.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

In today's Gospel lesson, God provided a message that continued the theme of the coming great and

terrible Day of the Lord. Let's read the Gospel text from Luke Chapter 21.

Gospel Reading:

> *5 And while some were talking about the temple, that it was adorned with beautiful stones and votive gifts, He said, 6 "As for these things which you are looking at, the days will come in which there will not be left one stone upon another which will not be torn down." 7 They questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, when therefore will these things happen? And what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?" 8 And He said, "See to it that you are not misled; for many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and, 'The time is near'. Do not go after them. 9 When you hear of wars and disturbances, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end does not follow immediately." 10 Then He continued by saying to them, "Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom, 11 and there will be great earthquakes, and in various places plagues and famines; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. 12 But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name's sake. 13 It will lead to an opportunity for your testimony. 14 So make up your minds not to prepare beforehand to defend yourselves; 15 for I will give you utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute. 16 But you will be betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death, 17 and you will be hated by all because of My name. 18 Yet not a hair of your head will perish. 19 By your endurance you will gain your lives." Luke 21:5-19*

In this text, as with many Old Testament prophets, when Jesus told the story, he used a theological construct known as "prophetic foreshortening." This means that when he spoke of events in the near term (as we look back in history), he combined them with events in the distant future such that the two events appear stacked together in the Gospel narrative. This was also the case in the first reading from Malachi today, when he said, "the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings" (4:2), just one chapter after he predicted the first coming of Jesus in 3:1. What Jesus was predicting was actually two events. However, they may appear at first glance to be just one period of time. First, the temple would be destroyed. We know that this was fulfilled with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Second, He was predicting the coming of the Great Tribulation period. In between these two events, Jesus said certain other events would happen, and it's this in-between period in which we find ourselves today. The events typifying this period, according to Jesus, will include:

1. The appearance of false Christs (v.8),
2. Wars, earthquakes, and famines all over the earth (vv. 9-11), and

3. Persecution of believers for Jesus' name (vv. 13-19.

What's the importance of Saint Luke's teaching for believers in the Lord Jesus Christ? First, we should expect to see the types of events that Jesus mentioned during this period. We should be surprised to be persecuted for our faith. Second, we must not be surprised to hear about false messiahs such as cult leaders who claim to be Jesus or start whole religious movements through new ways of interpreting the Bible. Many false religious movements have arisen, such as the interpretation of secret "Bible codes." Jesus said not to be surprised by these events. Third, we should expect to see terrible natural disasters on an unprecedented scale.
Note: As I was writing this, news was coming in about the awful destruction caused by Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines.

Another implication of this text for our lives is to provide comfort and trust in God that He knows what He is doing. When life is chaotic (inside and out) it is helpful to remember that nothing is out of His control. We must often turn to Him for help and hope.

Yet, there is hope. As we saw in the first reading from Malachi, "He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers (v6a). Jesus said in the reading today, "Yet not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives (vv. 18-19). If He was offering physical protection, then the Apostles wouldn't have had to give their lives to defend the Gospel. No, He wasn't saying that we might not be harmed physically, but that we will be protected spiritually.

Have you trusted the Lord Jesus for the promise of eternal life through faith in Him? Hearing about all the bad things going on in the world doesn't give us much hope in this life, but there is much hope for the life to come.

Reflection Questions

1. Has there ever been a time in your life in which you almost faced the Lord? Were you a believer in the Lord Jesus when this happened? If you were, did the event lead you to a closer walk with Jesus? In what ways was it possible that this event was a means of God's judgment in such a way as

to draw you closer to Him?

2. In our modern age, we have often compartmentalized our lives, thinking that worship belongs to Sunday while work is a Monday to Friday kind of thing. Have you ever considered your work as a form of worship? As we saw in the second reading, Saint Paul calls us to emulate his godly behavior in working without burdening others while continuing to serve without an expectation of reward. In what ways can you reconsider your work life as worship? How would taking on this new mindset help you to
A. Relate to others at your workplace, and
B. Have a more accurate view of your service to God, even if you are not engaged in full-time ministry?

Going Deeper

It was a breezy afternoon when, after church, I decided to travel from Metro Detroit to a place called Kettle Point in Canada to do some windsurfing. This spot at the southern end of Lake Huron was famous for having huge waves on windy days. This day was no exception, and the waves were forecasted to be ten feet tall! Even though it was not normal for him, my brother decided to ride along to watch. I had an excellent afternoon riding the large, smooth waves in the bay. Just before I was going to stop for the day, I came in for a brief rest and decided to go out for just one more run. I had an uneasy feeling as I was carrying the windsurf board back to the water and was compelled to pray very hard for God to keep me safe on this final run.

As I proceeded out into the bay where the largest waves were crashing into a bowl-shaped area to the east of the beach, I turned on the face of a very large wave. This was like heaven! Suddenly, my sail separated from the mast base on the board, which sent it flying in one direction while my sail remained in my hands. Meanwhile, that same large wave crashed on top of me with my sail! I let go of the sail and soon realized that I was drowning. I quickly noticed that I could not float in the bubbly water caused by the constant crashing of the waves, and soon got very tired in my attempts to grab small amounts of air between the waves. I knew that I was going to die right there, with my precious brother only a half a mile away on the shore. Once again, I began to pray. As I continued fighting, I had a strange realization and began to visualize my dead body washing up on the beach. This was very real and is challenging to put into words. I visualized my body from a viewpoint some distance away, above me. Yet I continued to fight and pray.

As I was fighting for my life in Lake Huron that day, two things came immediately into my mind. First, I made the vivid realization that I wasn't in control of the timing of when I would meet the Lord; it was up to God! It had been easy to think I was the master of every element of my life. However, when my close call with death happened, God used the opportunity to show me that He was the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He was in control of my life and had already set the exact day I would meet Him. Who was I to say that I would be alive when he returned, as the Bible taught? Second, life-threatening times like this were not a very good time to search out a new relationship with God. You either have one, with Jesus as the Lord of your life and your only hope of salvation, or you don't. The Bible says, "Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near" (Isaiah 55:6).

My story ended well. Somehow, I realized that if I pulled on my wetsuit, I could create a small air bubble in my chest area that slightly increased my buoyancy. Also, I saw a white flag on a small floating buoy a few yards away. And there were some jet skiers in the area. Against all odds, I managed to swim over to the buoy and break the fiberglass rod attaching the flag. This left me with a two-foot-long mast with a flag attached. Between the enormous waves, I was able to wave the flag. After about five minutes of waving, I had still not moved any distance towards the shore, although my board and sail had long ago washed away. I continued to pray, and eventually someone riding a jet ski spotted me and came over and yanked me out of the water. As I walked back up the beach, I praised God, and someone offered me a ride in their truck so I could hurry back to tell my brother the fantastic story. My equipment washed up on the beach a few minutes later in perfect condition. Later that evening at a restaurant in Sarnia, Ontario, I had my first meal as a truly "born from above" man.

Although I am much more careful while windsurfing, I recognize that I don't have the choice to know when I will meet the Lord Jesus. It's up to Him and could happen at any time. We must be prepared, for we never know the day or the hour.

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 671:

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11/09/2025



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 11-9-2014. This week, we open with the first reading from the Prophet Ezekiel, move to the second reading from Second Corinthians Chapter 3, and close with the Gospel lesson from the Second Chapter of John.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Prophet Ezekiel. The context of the reading is Ezekiel's prophecy concerning a restored temple in Jerusalem. The most likely interpretation of this text is that this is the "Millennial Temple" because its construction coincides with the beginning of the Lord Jesus' thousand-year (millennium) reign after the end of the tribulation period. This follows the conclusion of a period of judgment known as the "Day of the Lord," a prominent theme throughout the Old Testament. This period was first mentioned by the Prophet Isaiah who said, "For the LORD of hosts will have a day of reckoning against everyone who is proud and lofty and against everyone who is lifted up, That he may be abased" (Isaiah 2:12). The Day of the Lord, or DOL, is mentioned at least another 18 times in the Old Testament including Ezekiel 13:5, "You have not gone up into the

breaches, nor did you build the wall around the house of Israel to stand in the battle on the **day of the LORD**" (emphasis added). This time, also known as the time of Jacob's trouble (Jeremiah 30:7), is the conclusion of the period of time during which God will pour out His judgments upon the unbelieving world left after the church has been "caught up" from the earth as described by Saint Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. After Jesus returns with His church (Revelation 19:11,14) the world is restored to a time of worldwide peace under the rulership of the Lord Jesus Christ for a period of one thousand years (Revelation 20:4). The reading for today is in the section that describes how life-giving water will flow from the temple to renew the salt-laden Dead Sea. *Note that the omitted verses 3-7 and 10 were included in order to provide the proper context.*

First Reading:

> *1 Then he brought me back to the door of the house; and behold, water was flowing from under the threshold of the house toward the east, for the house faced east. And the water was flowing down from under, from the right side of the house, from south of the altar. 2 He brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around on the outside to the outer gate by way of the gate that faces east. And behold, water was trickling from the south side. 3 When the man went out toward the east with a line in his hand, he measured a thousand cubits, and he led me through the water, water reaching the ankles. 4 Again he measured a thousand and led me through the water, water reaching the knees. Again he measured a thousand and led me through the water, water reaching the loins. 5 Again he measured a thousand; and it was a river that I could not ford, for the water had risen, enough water to swim in, a river that could not be forded. 6 He said to me, "Son of man, have you seen this?" Then he brought me back to the bank of the river. 7 Now when I had returned, behold, on the bank of the river there were very many trees on the one side and on the other. 8 Then he said to me, "These waters go out toward the eastern region and go down into the Arabah; then they go toward the sea, being made to flow into the sea, and the waters of the sea become fresh. 9 It will come about that every living creature which swarms in every place where the river goes, will live. And there will be very many fish, for these waters go there and the others become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes. 10 And it will come about that fishermen will stand beside it; from Engedi to Eneglaim there will be a place for the spreading of nets. Their fish will be according to their kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea, very many. 11 But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they will be left for salt. 12 By the river on its bank, on one side and on the other, will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither and their fruit will not fail. They will bear every month because their water flows from the sanctuary, and their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing." (Ezekiel 47:1-12)*

The water flowing from the temple comes from an elevated position since the temple is where all nations will eventually come to worship. John said in Revelation, "Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy; For ALL THE NATIONS WILL COME AND WORSHIP BEFORE YOU, FOR YOUR RIGHTEOUS ACTS HAVE BEEN REVEALED" (Revelation 15:4). The Millennial Temple will be elevated, both physically as well as spiritually, the place where Jesus reign will be central. As the life-giving fresh water flows from God downhill towards the salt-laden Dead Sea, the water becomes deeper and deeper until it disappears down into the depths of the now freshwater lake. The Dead Sea will become fresh and a source of fish, with water providing nourishment for trees that will also flourish in this formerly dead region. The application of this is that all life is from God, water is life, and this comes from God out of the Millennial temple. God can heal the fallen creation and reverse the curse of Adam. This should encourage us because sin is not the last word written in the history of the world.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Corinthians. The overall context of Chapter 3 is the theological concept of "carnality". Paul addressed the problem of Christians who are immature in their faith, which resulted in the Corinthian believers indulging in the things from their old lives of sin. Paul warned that believers needed to be careful because they would all stand before the Lord, give an account, and receive a reward for what they did for God. What was at stake was not their salvation, but their eternal rewards. *Note: Verses 12-15 omitted from the reading were included to provide the proper context.*

Second Reading:

> *9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. 10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. 11 For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. 14 If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. 15 If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. 16 Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If any man destroys the temple of God, God*

will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are. (1 Corinthians 3:9-17).

Paul said that all of the believers were working together to build God's church (v. 9). This project of building for God was something that was empowered by God's variety of gifts given to each believer (v. 10a, "according to the grace given"). Paul said that it wasn't as important as **what** we did, but rather our heart and motivation in **why** we did it (vv. 12-15). Paul reminded us that as believers, we are a temple of God, and we are to use the gifts given to us through God's grace to accomplish the work He has for us. God will test our works against His gold standard, that of perfect knowledge of our motives. This is something that the Corinthian church needed very much to understand, as they were struggling with carnal living in their culture that was filled with idolatry in their crossroads city. Later in this Book Paul explained to the Corinthian believers more about the coming judgment. Believers will be judged at what is called the "Bema Seat Judgment" found in 2 Corinthians 5:10. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." Paul also described it in Romans. "But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God" (Romans 14:10). This judgment is not about salvation, that was something that was determined by Jesus Who died on our behalf (1 John 2:2) and when we trusted in Him (John 3:16). Instead, the point of the Bema Seat Judgment is to reward believers based on how faithful they were in serving the Lord. We see this clearly in the last Book of the Bible where Jesus said, "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done" (Revelation 22:12). The Bema Seat of Christ should provide extra encouragement for us to steward our gifts and talents according to God's value system and not the world's value system. As we go about our lives as Christians, we must remember to test our motives and use our spiritual gifts in the service of the Lord.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from John Chapter 2. The central theme of the Gospel of John is to show that Jesus is the Christ and that Jesus is the incarnation of God, the "logos" or "the Word that became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14a). Jesus declares throughout the Book that He is God, for example John 10:30, "I and the Father are One." Chapter 1 summarizes God's plan of redemption through the birth, life (and eventual death) of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the One Who "came to His own, and His own people (the Jews) did not receive Him" (John 1:11). John showed that God's plan of salvation was for people to find life through Jesus' giving of His own life, not as a victim (John 10:18) in a sacrificial offering but as One who willingly offered Himself as a final sacrifice for the sin of the world once and for all (Hebrews 10:12). 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). The first chapter of John also introduced the person of John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, who was God's appointed forerunner who came in the spirit of Elijah to fulfil the Old Testament prophecy in Malachi 4:5-6. John the Baptist came "to bear witness of the Light, that all through Him might believe" (John 1:7). Finally, the opening chapter of John's Gospel introduced Jesus' ministry by revealing His calling of the first disciples. Peter the Rock was first and was given this new name by Jesus (1:42), followed by Philip (v. 43) and finally Nathanael (v. 45). Jesus' first recorded miracle was shared in the closing section of the chapter when Jesus revealed to Nathanael how He had seen him standing under the fig tree. Since Jesus wasn't in close enough proximity for this to have occurred naturally, Nathaniel received this as a miracle (John 1:48). This impressed Nathanael so much that he declared the Rabbi Jesus to be the Son of God, which was the first affirmation of Jesus' divinity in this Gospel.

Chapter 2, from which today's reading is found, opens with the miracle of Jesus turning the water into wine at the wedding in Cana in the region of Galilee near the Sea of Galilee (John 2:1-11). After Jesus did this miracle, John recorded that "His disciples believed in Him" (John 2:11c). After the wedding celebration concluded, which according to Jewish tradition would have gone on just short of a week, Jesus traveled with His mother, brothers, and disciples to Capernaum. This brings us to the reading for today.

Gospel Reading:

> *13 The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. 15 And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; 16 and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a place of business." 17 His disciples remembered that it was written, "ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME." 18 The Jews then said to Him, "What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?" 19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20 The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" 21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body. 22 So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken. (John 2:13-22)*

The first point from the text is that Jesus's actions revealed his high reverence for God and correct worship in the temple. This is the first of three Passover celebrations that are mentioned in the Gospels (v. 13, John 6:4, John 11:55). The first of two times that Jesus drove the money changers from the temple (v. 14, Matthew 21:12). The money changers were in the outer courts of the temple, preying on the Jewish pilgrims coming from various countries to observe the Passover. This pilgrimage was required for every adult over 12 years old (Exodus 23:14-17). One reason that Jesus was angry, in addition to the fact that commerce was being conducted in the temple that included the sale of sacrificial animals, was that the money changers swindled their clients and took advantage of the fact that they had no other choice but to buy their sacrifices from these temple crooks. Jesus called this a "robbers' den" in Matthew's Gospel. On that occasion Jesus proclaimed to them, "It is written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER'; but you are making it a ROBBERS' DEN" (Matthew 21:13). In the reading Jesus told them, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a place of business" (v. 16b). (John 4:24). Jesus would not tolerate commerce in the temple, especially that of crooked money changers. Again, Jesus' actions of driving out the money changers from the temple indicated His reverence for His Father God.

The way Jesus drove the shady currency exchange merchants from the temple gives us an insight into the second point that arises from the text: Jesus' supernatural power and inherent authority. John said, "And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables" (v. 15). The Passover was a hectic season in Jerusalem with the arrival of thousands of pilgrims from around the Roman world. A large contingent of Roman soldiers would have stood guard outside the temple. Jesus must have driven out the money changers with such power that they could not raise any objection with the Roman authorities, who would have responded quickly to the situation. John said, ''His disciples remembered that it was written, 'ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME,'" a quote from the Messianic Psalm 69. Even Jesus' disciples didn't realize all of these things right away, but they were humble enough to insert this insight into the record once they did. The way Jesus drove the money changers away revealed the tremendous power He wielded from His Father God and His inherent authority as the author of true worship.

The third and final point from the text is the introduction of Jesus' "parabolic" teaching method. The parable in the reading today is more indirect than the "kingdom parables" in Matthew 13. Jesus told the Jews in the temple, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (v. 19). Even though the temple repair project had been ongoing for 46 years, the renovation had still not been completed. The Jewish historian Josephus writes that the renovation continued all the way up until the siege of Jerusalem that began in the year 67 and concluded with the destruction of the temple in 70. Instead of meaning the Temple building, Jesus was referring to His own body, which would be given over to death, and then would be resurrected in three days. The Jews misunderstood Jesus;

something that we find out later in Matthew's Gospel was His intention by teaching this way. In that text when His disciples came to Him and asked Him why he taught the people in parables He answered them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted" (Matthew 13:11). Jesus' reason for obscuring the truth to those who won't believe is that it shields them from further judgment when they will stand before the Lord.

The first two chapters of John mark a series of firsts: the first disciples, the first miracles, the first display of Jesus' power, and the first use of His marvelous teaching method in parables. We can rejoice that we can model Jesus' reverence for His Father God when we worship God. We can minister to others through the same power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus Himself possessed. Finally, we can meditate and learn from Jesus' teaching in the Gospels. Something about Jesus' teaching method makes us understand the concept even more clearly than if He had told us the truths directly.

Have a great week.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In all three readings, we see a display of God's power:

Ezekiel shows us that God's life-giving water will resurrect the Dead Sea

Paul shows us in 1 Corinthians that all Christians will face a time of giving an account for what we have done with the gifts and talents entrusted to us.

John records a display of power when Jesus cleansed the Temple and predicted His resurrection power.

As you think about these three passages and the incredible display of power, what areas of your life

need God's resurrection power? How do you respond to God's power?

2. Jesus had a zeal for worship to be pure, not tainted by selfish motives. This theme was also discussed in 1 Corinthians, since our motives will be laid bare at the Bema Seat of Christ. What do you want God to change in your life to purify your worship and your motives, so that you will not be ashamed at the Bema Seat of Christ? Talk to Him about this area that you would like Him to purify and cleanse—and ask Him what your role is in making life-giving changes.

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 668: 11/02/2025



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 11-2-2014. This week we open with the second reading from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans where we learn about the hope given to us through Jesus Christ. Then we conclude with the Gospel lesson from Saint John in which we learn how those that hold saving faith in the Lord Jesus can never be separated from His love.

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Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Apocryphal Book of Wisdom.

First Reading:

> Wisdom 3:1-9
> The souls of the just are in the hand of God,
> and no torment shall touch them.
> They seemed, in the view of the foolish, to be dead;
> and their passing away was thought an affliction
> and their going forth from us, utter destruction.
> But they are in peace.
> For if before men, indeed, they be punished,
> yet is their hope full of immortality;
> chastised a little, they shall be greatly blessed,
> because God tried them
> and found them worthy of himself.
> As gold in the furnace, he proved them,
> and as sacrificial offerings he took them to himself.
> In the time of their visitation they shall shine,
> and shall dart about as sparks through stubble;
> they shall judge nations and rule over peoples,
> and the Lord shall be their King forever.
> Those who trust in him shall understand truth,
> and the faithful shall abide with him in love:
> because grace and mercy are with his holy ones,
> and his care is with his elect.

In this reading, we see how, even though God allows trials in the lives of believers, He will deliver them in the end. Unlike "sparks through the stubble," which ultimately burn up and turn into nothing but dust, the "faithful shall abide with him in love." We will see something almost exactly like this in today's Gospel reading.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from the fifth chapter of Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans. The big idea of this chapter is that although death came through Adam's sin, life and hope came through Jesus Christ. Chapter 5 opens with the adverb "therefore," a word that means a logical consequence. When we see this word, we must ask, "What is it there for"? In this case, the word provides a link to the previous chapter. Paul explained in detail in chapter 4 how Abraham was justified by his faith and not by his works. Paul cautioned the Romans that anyone who thought they would be justified before God because of their works was incorrect. Works flow out of a believer who has been justified by faith. Paul said, "Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness" (Romans 4:4-5). Though Abraham's works were mighty, they were not the reason he was justified before God (Romans 4:2). Justification is a theological concept that God forgave his sin as if he had never sinned. Paul quoted from the Old Testament Book of Genesis. He said, "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Romans 4:3). God imputed His righteousness to Abraham because of his faith in God's promises (Romans 4:22). This promise extends to all who trust in the Lord Jesus. Paul continued, "Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead"(Romans 4:23-24). Paul reemphasized this in his letter to the Ephesians, saying, "8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Ephesians 2:8-10).

The verses before today's reading provide more important contextual information. Can you imagine going to Mass and hearing the readings without ever understanding the context again? This section, beginning with the "therefore" we just discussed, introduces the concept of hope that will be important during the reading we look at later. Merriam-Webster defines hope as "to cherish a desire with anticipation, as in 'hopes for a promotion.'" Read the introductory verses of chapter 5 and discover how hope comes about in the life of a believer.

> *1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. 3 And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; 4 and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; (Romans 5:1-4)*

We know that as Christians we are justified before God, meaning that we stand before Him with our sins forgiven "just as if we have never sinned" (v. 1). God has put our sins as far as east is from west and remembers them no more (Psalm 103:12). We stand in our belief through God's grace (v. 2a) and "exalt in hope of the glory of God" (v. 2b). We don't relish any other hope, but that of both seeing in the future and experiencing in the present the active work of the glory of God in our lives. This is how we can persevere through tribulation (v. 3), which then brings about "proven character" (v. 4a), which finally leads to hope (v. 4b). In summary, we first exalt in hope of the glory of God, God allows tribulation to give us perseverance that leads to proven character and finally hope for our own souls.

Therefore, with all of these things in mind, such as how a believer is counted worthy before the eyes of God on judgment day, let us proceed to the reading.

Second Reading:

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

Hope comes from God working through our trials to produce godly character. When we finally receive hope from God through our perseverance and subsequent godly character, this hope "does not disappoint" (v. 5a) "because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (v. 5b-ff). If this weren't enough, the mystery of all of this is that "while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly" (v. 6). However, "one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (vv. 7-8). Contemplate this moment: Christ, who knew that we would sin in the future, died for us on the cross 2,000 years ago, knowing us and willingly bearing the penalty of our sins for us. Paul

continues, saying that not only have we **been** forgiven by Jesus' past, once for all work on the cross, but we are also **being** saved from the future wrath of God through Christ's actions (v. 10). We were reconciled with God (v. 10), or made right with Him, through the blood of Jesus Christ. Finally, we can "also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation" (v. 11). God's active acts of sanctification in our lives in an already, not yet sense are the heart of the Christian life. Imagine the mystery of it all once again. "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; perhaps for the good man, someone would dare even die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (vv. 6-8). How can we not just praise God for what He has done!

Hope is something possessed by true believers in Jesus Christ. In contrast, have you ever known anyone who lived year after year in a hopeless state after losing his or her longtime spouse? If such a person doesn't have a living faith in the Lord Jesus, they can be the picture of hopelessness. I know such a person, and without knowing it, their spouse was the one who gave them hope for living. Once they passed away, the source of hope was gone, and the person who remained living lapsed into an extended state of hopelessness. Each time I read about and contemplate the hope that I have in the Lord Jesus, I think of this man whose wife left him behind without hope. Others can give us joy and temporal hope, but the Scripture is clear that the only source of eternal hope is in God. How many of us unknowingly place our hope in the hands of another person rather than in the Lord God Almighty? Would you please say a quick prayer for this man, that God would open his heart to receiving the truth of the Good News of the Gospel?

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

As we move on to the Gospel lesson from Saint John, we will see the promise and assurance from God to Jesus that anyone who believes in Him will not suffer the wrath of God, as we saw in the first reading. The context is after Jesus' feeding of the five thousand along the shores of the Sea of Galilee (John 6:1-14). Afterwards, the people were about to take Jesus by force and make Him their King (John 6:15). Jesus fled from them and separated Himself from His disciples. Later that night, the disciples found Jesus walking on the water (John 6:19). The crowd clamored after Jesus, wanting more of the material blessing (in this case, bread) but not necessarily wanting the commitment to follow Him for their spiritual needs.

Gospel Reading:

> *37 "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. 38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. 39 This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. 40 For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day." (John 6:37-40)*

Jesus explains here what true faith is: believing in Jesus. The bottom line is that those who hold saving faith in the Lord Jesus can never be separated from His love. In His foreknowledge, God knows who will come to Him in faith. Those that do come to Him will never be separated from God and they will be raised up with an eternal body on the "last day" (v. 40). The faith of a believer is given to them as a gift (Ephesians 2:8-9).On the other hand, those who do not believe will not be raised up on the last day and will instead suffer the eternal wrath of God. It is a mystery of God but a condition of the fallen world that some people come to believe in Jesus and be rescued from God's promised wrath, while others persist in their unbelief and suffer damnation in hell. It may not be politically correct to say this, but it is God's truth. God calls us to minister to those who don't believe, and to bring the knowledge of salvation through Jesus Christ, without which no one comes to the Father (John 14:6).

These verses can challenge us to consider whether we are like the crowd. First, do we only want Jesus for material benefit, or are we true believers trusting that Jesus will raise us up on the last day? If the answer is the latter, then these verses provide much comfort, knowing that we cannot lose our salvation. If the answer is the former, take some time to confess to God the Father your desire to be a true believer in Jesus Christ.

Saint Paul also discussed how believers could never be separated from the love of God.

> *35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35-39)*

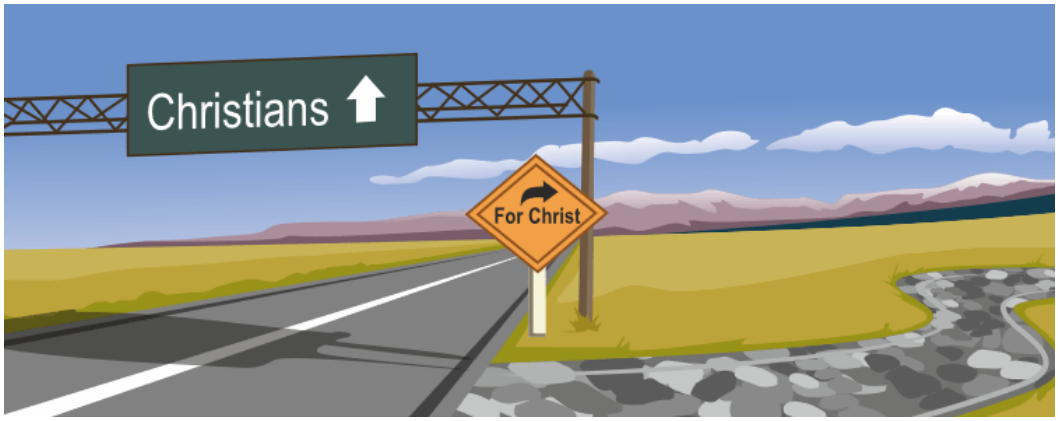
We can persevere through our tribulations and hope from God while never being separated from the love that is in Jesus Christ (v. 35). As you go through this week, remember to pray for and even to reach out to those who don't have the hope that you hold onto through your faith in Jesus Christ.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. How is God's hope (as discussed in Romans 5) different from the hope the world provides? How have you experienced God's hope in your own life?

2. Many who do not understand Christianity claim it is an "exclusive" religion. How do the words in the Gospel reading confirm and counteract this notion? How can you be an ambassador for Christ, dispelling the myth that Christians are judgmental, exclusive, and unloving?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 150: 10/26/2025



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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, I'll share a story about an airplane trip I (Jim) took a few years ago and how that relates to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

First Reading:

The first reading is from the Apocryphal book of Sirach.

> *The LORD is a God of justice,*
> *who knows no favorites.*
> *Though not unduly partial toward the weak,*
> *yet he hears the cry of the oppressed.*
> *The Lord is not deaf to the wail of the orphan,*
> *nor to the widow when she pours out her complaint.*
> *The one who serves God willingly is heard;*
> *his petition reaches the heavens.*
> *The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds;*
> *it does not rest till it reaches its goal,*
> *nor will it withdraw till the Most High responds,*
> *judges justly and affirms the right,*
> *and the Lord will not delay.*
> *SIR 35:12-14, 16-18*

The writer proclaims how God cares for those in the lower classes of society, like the weak, orphans, and widows. Widows were especially oppressed in biblical times, although God proclaimed throughout the Old Testament how the nation of Israel was to care for them. In Psalm 68:5, God said He is the "father of the fatherless and the protector of widows." In the New Testament, God calls His believers to care for these people. James 1:27 says, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction." God calls us to emulate His spirit of compassion for those in the underclass and oppressed in our society.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

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This passage comes from the Apostle Paul's last known letter, written to Timothy, his son in the faith.

Second Reading:

> *6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*

Skipped verses (9-15): Personal Remarks

> *9 Do your best to come to me quickly, 10 for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. 11 Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. 12 I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. 13 When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments. 14 Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. 15 You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message. 16 At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. 17 But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. 18 The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

A person's last words bring a sober realization of one's life and values. Here, we see that Paul's values are consistent with his message of salvation through faith in God's grace. The first section points to these essential truths about biblical Christianity:

- Faith is not easy—Paul said he was being poured out like a drink offering (read "sacrifice"). He also likens faith to a fight and a rigorous race. While he feels spent on behalf of his call, he

realizes that the sacrifices have been a special offering to the Lord.

- Faith is worth it! Paul looks back with satisfaction at the fact that he has kept the faith. He is not implying that one can lose one's salvation. He is marveling that God has kept him faithful amid significant opposition.

- Faith provides us with hope for the future. Death is not the end of the story. Paul states that there is great reward on the other side for him—specifically a crown of righteousness. Why is this so valuable to Paul? Righteousness, being right with God, is the entrance requirement for heaven. Paul knew that he was wrong with God based on his own performance. So to think that at the end of his earthly life, he would be rewarded by being in right standing with God was a treasure he cherished.

- The Lord is righteous in his judgments, which means that his perspective and rulings are the final word and are right. There will be no arguing with or manipulating the Lord, the righteous judge, at the end of our lives. His word is final. This should give us motivation to get on the same page with Him now so that we will not be surprised in the life to come.

- Faith is equated to longing for Jesus' appearing. We may wonder how these two concepts connect. Longing for Jesus' appearing implies faith since we long for things we love. Longing for Christ's appearing is an expression of our relational intimacy, affection, and value system bent toward Christ. The treasure of a crown of righteousness can be ours as well if we, like Paul, long for his appearing.

Although verses 9-15 are skipped in the Mass Reading, they are essential for establishing Paul as a real person with genuine relationships, in real messes, expressing real faith. The application for us is that we can be encouraged to know that real Christians have real struggles amongst circumstances and people that are out of our control (but are still under God's control).

The last section tells how Paul got through his struggles and the open opposition he felt against the message of Good News. He attributes his success to the Lord, who stood by his side and gave him

strength. This strong trust in the Lord allowed him to forgive others deserted him. He was not compelled to pay anybody back for the wrongs they had done to him. He could let them off the hook because he trusted the Lord to defend him. What a vision for us—to have such deep roots in the Lord that painful offenses and hurts can be released and brought into perspective.

I (Christy) remember when I was deeply hurt by someone who claimed to love me. His desertion in my time of need left a large wound that I could not, in my own strength, forgive. Until this point in my life, I had easily forgiven others of their offenses, but curled up in a fetal position on my bed, crying from the emotional pain that would not go away, I asked the Lord to help me forgive. While the feelings of forgiveness did not happen overnight, eventually, I could release this person from the debt that their offense had incurred. I imagine that Paul, too, had to work through bitterness, resentment, and anger to not hold these hurts against those who deserved severe consequences. Like the story of the tax collector, when one sees the outstanding debt forgiven on our behalf, it is difficult to feel justified in withholding forgiveness from others.

Paul ends with a sense that the Lord will rescue and bring him safely to his heavenly kingdom. So, no matter what obstacles or trials we face, we can trust that nothing can ultimately harm us because we are in Christ. No wonder Paul breaks out in praise: "To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen." We can have a deep, abiding rest and assurance that God will care for us as His children, no matter what!

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

It was the classical dark and stormy night as I (Jim) flew the instrument approach into snowy Saranac Lake, New York, with two friends nestled warmly in the seat behind me one night in March. As I made the necessary turns and altitude changes, I manipulated the aircraft's radar system downwards to reveal the two mountains on either side. These showed up in bright red on the screen, although my passengers were oblivious to the danger. Later, they told me that what they perceived was a methodical series of a dozen button presses and knobs being turned, followed by the plane emerging from the clouds and being greeted with flashing runway lights welcoming us to New York. As we taxied off the runway, they congratulated me on a great landing, and we headed for the terminal to pick up our rental car. As we made our way towards the resort at which we were staying in Lake Placid, I settled down for a relaxing drink in the lounge. What a great trip!

Then the terror hit me. I had forgotten to cancel my flight plan with air traffic control! As I frantically called air control on my cell phone, I knew I was in trouble. I knew that since this was a flight performed under instrument flight regulations, search and rescue procedures would have been initiated immediately if I had not reported on the ground after a few minutes of signing off from the in-flight air traffic control. The flight service station answered on the first ring, and I explained that I had made a huge mistake and had forgotten to cancel my flight plan. In my state of utter shock, I begged for forgiveness and prayed at the same time. The controller explained that the sheriff had indeed been called and had launched a search for the plane. They first looked in the aircraft parking area, where they had already located my plane safely tied down. I knew that I deserved punishment since the typical response to such an infraction would be at least the suspension of my license for a period and a hefty fine. But the controller said, "Never mind, it's OK. We are just glad that you are safe. Have a good evening." [If you want to read the whole story, I wrote about it **here**.]

Have you ever been in a situation where you deserved punishment and even knew it was coming, but got off the hook? What if I had proudly told the air traffic controller that it wasn't my fault? Do you think he would have easily let me off the hook by confronting him this way?

That is what we will talk about in our Gospel lesson today. In the Gospel lesson, Jesus told a parable about two people who approached God with completely different hearts. The New International Version entitled this section, "The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector," since it was evident from the context of the previous chapters that the first man in this parable today was a member of the group known as the Pharisees. We have frequently discussed this group in past lessons; here's a review of their primary traits. The Pharisees held to a strict interpretation of the Jewish Law, but also added requirements known in the New Testament as traditions. Their doctrine evolved over several hundred years until the observance of their traditions became more important to them than obeying a basic interpretation of the Jewish Law. Jesus said in Mark's Gospel regarding the Pharisee's traditions, "You nicely set aside the commandment of God to keep your tradition" (Mark 7:9). Jesus summed up his feelings about them by saying several chapters earlier in Luke, "Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness." The Pharisees approached God with a proud heart compared to the tax collector, who we will read about in the following parable today.

The Gospel lesson today was a parable in which Jesus illustrated prayer by contrasting two different types of people: a religious Pharisee and a humble tax collector.

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Gospel Reading:

> *9 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' 13 But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' 14 I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." Luke 18:9-14 NIV*

It was helpful in this study to step back and survey the context of this text. This parable was sandwiched between the parable of the persistent widow (we studied last week) and an incident in which the disciples scolded a group of children who approached Jesus (Luke 18:15-17). The point of the first parable was that believers should always pray and not lose heart (Luke 18:1). The persistent widow expressed grown-up, godly faith and never gave up seeking justice. The point of the story of the children visiting Jesus was to illustrate the value of possessing childlike faith. Jesus closed the section by saying, "whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." It was useful to understand this context because the parable we are studying today deals with the same subjects addressed in the two surrounding stories, prayer and the condition of a person's heart while praying. With these truths in mind, we approached the central text being studied today.

This parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector was a study of contrasts between the proud heart of the Pharisee and the meek heart of the tax collector. Luke began with a summary statement about the condition of the Pharisee's heart. They were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else (v. 9). Conversely, the tax collector referred to himself as a sinner (v. 13b). The Pharisee's prayer was nothing more than a boast about his perceived goodness. His prayer was similar to a eulogy that he gave himself! The Pharisees' works were substantial since the Law only required fasting once a year and tithing only upon crops and animals. But his boastful prayer never made it up to heaven to the one who could answer it, though this man never asked for anything. It was evident that the Pharisee believed that he obtained righteous standing with God through his religious works or perceived goodness.On the other hand, the tax collector perceived that righteousness came only through God's power. His prayer reflected a humble and contrite heart. The deep contrast between the two men in the story illustrated the central truth of the parable. God calls believers to be reconciled to Himself through humble acceptance of their sinful

position before Him. They cannot earn their way to God, but must accept Jesus' finished work on the cross to be found righteous before Him.

One of the defining doctrines of the New Testament is justification by faith and not by works. The topic of justification is found in verse 14, "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. All those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." The keyword is "justified." This word in the New Testament is a legal term that means "a declaration of one to be innocent or just." A way to remember the biblical application of "justified" is, "Just as if I'd never sinned." When a person is declared just in the eyes of God, they are considered righteous, such that they don't receive their rightful penalty for their sin. The source of a believer's righteousness is foreign, meaning it doesn't come from their own works or self-perceived goodness. God's righteousness can only come through the gateway of faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. God has declared the universality of sin. Paul said, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). He explained further in Romans that the proper payment for a life of sin was death, meaning eternal separation from God. However, with this bad news, he also brought good news, literally the word in the New Testament translated as "Gospel." "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Paul explains that faith in Jesus is the mechanism through which the gift of eternal life is imparted to the believer. "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, that no one should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Good works are essential

in serving the Lord and provide evidence of salvation, but they are not the *source* of our justification. Righteous standing before God can only be granted by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Some questions may arise after this very brief study of justification. Some may ask, "Can we just keep on sinning since we believe and are going to heaven?" Paul answered quite succinctly in the Book of Romans. *"1 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? 2 By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"* (6:1-2). What about the role of works in our salvation? The Scriptures obviously state that we cannot earn salvation through our works, but works are significant because they are the method through which we serve the Lord Jesus. Finally, others may inquire, Can we know that we have received salvation through faith in Jesus? Isn't that presumptuous? The Disciple John said, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13, emphasis added). Yes, you can know that you have received salvation. The Holy Spirit testifies to this fact. Paul said in Romans, "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' 16 The Spirit himself testifies with

our spirit that we are God's children" (8:15-16). Having questions is normal and reveals that a person is seeking the truth of Scripture. Paul said, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you–unless, of course, you fail the test?" (1 Corinthians 13:5).

Reflection Questions

1. Justification through faith in God's grace is an important concept. Summarize your understanding of what justification means, why it is necessary for salvation, and how one can be assured of just standing before the LORD.

2. If you recognize that you, like the Pharisee, have been trusting in your good works to get you into right standing before God, take a moment and confess this wrong attitude in your heart to the LORD. First John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

3. Review the bullet points about biblical Christianity from the discussion on the second reading. Which points address a specific question, concern, or fear of your life? How does this truth provide you with comfort, hope, or direction?

4. In what genuine relationships and real messes are you finding it hard to exercise genuine faith? How can Paul's example of fighting the good fight, longing for the appearing of the Lord, and forgiving those who hurt him inspire you? Take a moment and talk to the Lord about your situation. Ask him to stand by your side and give you strength, so that you too might say—"To him be glory for ever and ever"!

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 147: 10/19/2025



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we learn about what is called a "type of Christ" in the first reading and much about prayer in the Gospel reading. We begin this week's study with a story from another Gospel passage that provides some important insights into faith and prayer relevant to the Gospel lesson.

Imagine that once upon a time, there was a woman who enjoyed an abundant life with many friends and material blessings. Even the weather smiled at her as she lived in a region where it was mostly lovely. This lady went to worship services every week and enjoyed fellowshipping with her friends from the community. One of the things that she enjoyed most was shopping at the market near the largest and most beautiful lake in the country. This person felt loved and accepted and was very thankful for all God had granted her.

One day, things began to change. This blessed woman started getting very weak and was troubled

by a wound that, no matter what she did, wouldn't stop bleeding. She went to the local doctor, and when she couldn't find a cure, she spent more money and went to all of the doctors in the region. However, no doctor was able to solve her chronic medical condition. This was very troublesome for her because, as time went by, it became common knowledge around town that she was sick from this particular disease. Because her faith community considered blood to be unclean, those with whom she worshipped began to consider her unclean. In fact, the leaders prohibited her from entering the worship center until she could find a cure. The people in her faith community wouldn't help because, remember, she was considered unclean. She longed to go down to the market and buy the things that she used to.

To make matters worse, she had spent so much on the doctors that she didn't have much money left to buy food there anyway. She had no one to turn to except God. Every day, she poured out her heart in prayer and begged Him to heal her. Years passed, yet she continued to slide deeper into despair.

The situation for the women in the story was dire. If we consider our own lives, how bad do things have to get before we pray? What circumstances would have to arise for us to pray for others? We shared the story because it helps set the stage for the Gospel lesson later in this week's study.

The story of the woman with the incurable disease is found in the Bible in the Gospel of Saint Luke, Chapter 8.

> *43 And a woman who had a hemorrhage for twelve years, and could not be healed by anyone, 44 came up behind Him and touched the fringe of His cloak, and immediately her hemorrhage stopped. 45 And Jesus said, "Who is the one who touched Me?" And while they were all denying it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing in on You." 46 But Jesus said, "Someone did touch Me, for I was aware that power had gone out of Me." 47 When the woman saw that she had not escaped notice, she came trembling and fell down before Him, and declared in the presence of all the people the reason why she had touched Him, and how she had been immediately healed. 48 And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace." (Luke 8:43-48 NASB)*

The Bible says to pray without ceasing (1 Thess 5:17) regardless of the circumstances. How hard do

you think the woman in this story prayed for help? Since she had nowhere else to turn, it's easy to imagine that she consistently called God for help. Indeed, God allowed these dire circumstances in the woman's life to bring her to faith in the Lord Jesus for the forgiveness of her sins. Perhaps the woman was always faithful in praying, even before she became afflicted with the disease.

How bad do things have to get before we pray? How do we sense that others' needs are serious enough for us to pray for them? Regardless of the seriousness of the circumstances, God has called us not to wait until troubles come our way *but to be faithful and pray in order to obey*.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The woman in Luke 8 was a person who turned to Jesus in faith. Another great person of faith in the Bible was Moses. The Scripture says that he "chose to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Hebrews 11:25). Let's move to the first reading to see an instance of how this godly man prevailed through a close walk with God in prayer. The context was a battle with the Amalekites just after God provided manna for food and water from a rock in the Wilderness of Sin, an appropriate title for how the people behaved! "Why now have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst" (v. 3)? Did the Hebrew exiles really believe that God didn't know that they needed water to drink and for their animals?

First Reading:

> *Exodus 17:8-13 NIV 8 The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. 9 Moses said to Joshua, "Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands." 10 So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. 11 As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. 12 When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up– one on one side, one on the other– so that his hands remained steady till sunset. 13 So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.*

In the story, Moses acted as what is known as a "type" of Christ. A "type" is a theological term for people, statements, or events prefiguring or superseded by antitypes. In this case, Moses' actions through praying with his staff and outstretched arms prefigured the *antitype* Jesus Christ, the one people would eventually look to for their ultimate victory over sin and the devil. During the battle, the people were compelled to look to Moses for victory or face certain annihilation. Moses was a type of Christ who acted as an intercessor between the people and God. In Deuteronomy 18, Moses said, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him (v. 15, emphasis added). Moses knew to whom this verse pointed, the future Savior we know as Jesus. Moses acted as God's appointed leader for His chosen people during this tremendous time of trouble. As long as the people of God looked to Moses with his outstretched arms, calling out to God, they were victorious in battle. However, when they shifted their focus away from Moses (and God), the advantage moved to the enemy. In the same way, we must focus our attention upon God, both in prayer and through the dedication of our thoughts and actions. Prayer and reading of the Bible are the two main ways in which we communicate with God.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Moving on to the second reading for today, we find some remarkable truths about the source and value of Scripture. Understanding Scripture is essential because the more we know the Bible, the better we understand God! Prayer is about deepening our relationship with God. Memorizing is also critical because we don't always have a Bible available when we may need it. Let's read from Saint Paul's Second Letter to Timothy.

Second Reading:

> *2 Timothy 3:14 – 4:2 NIV 14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 15 and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 1 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: 2 Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage– with great patience and careful instruction.*

In today's reading, Paul provided some foundational Christian living principles. He said that the source of Scripture was from God the Holy Spirit, the breath of God (v. 16a). He affirmed that salvation was through faith in Jesus (v. 15). The result of learning the Scriptures was that they "are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (v. 15), and "so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (17a). Paul called believers to minister to people through the Word of God, whether it was convenient or inconvenient, and said to do so with "great patience and careful instruction" (4:2b). Paul's foundational teaching was critical to the church at this time because it revealed the great value of Scripture, something for which believers in the early church had to be willing to die.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Let's move on to the Gospel lesson from Luke 18:1-8. This is another in a series of parables that occurred after Jesus' return to Jerusalem from Samaria, where he had healed a group of lepers that we discussed last week. As you read, see if you can catch the rhetorical method Jesus used, known as "arguing from lesser to greater."

Gospel Reading:

> *Luke 18:1-8 NIV 1 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. 2 He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. 3 And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' 4 For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!'" 6 And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. 7 And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? 8 I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"*

Let us back up a bit and briefly look at how Jesus taught using parables. His method of teaching through this genre was to provide a simple story to illustrate a significant spiritual truth. We must be careful not to make a parable "walk on all fours." Instead, our objective must be to search for the single intended meaning. Our lives may have multiple applications with the single meaning gleaned

from the parable. In this story, Jesus made it very easy for us by stating the spiritual meaning before he told the story. "*Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up*" (v. 1). Jesus' call was to be persistent in prayer while waiting on God's timing. The theological application of this spiritual truth was that God is faithful by teaching us the necessity of prayer.

Examine the parable more closely. The story was about a widow who, through her constant pleading, finally convinced the "unjust judge" to agree to her request. Widows were one of the lowest of people of all the social classes in the Bible. God has commanded throughout the Scripture to care for people in this lowest of social classes, along with orphans and aliens (not people from Mars). Jewish Law included many provisions for widows, including the right to glean crops from the corners of the field left unharvested for this purpose. That someone with no social standing could convince a judge to rule in their favor proves how persistent this particular woman must have been! Jesus didn't mean that God was an unjust judge. Instead, he used it as a rhetorical method of arguing from lesser to greater. Jesus used a very similar technique in another parable in Matthew. "If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (Matthew 7:11 NIV). What Jesus meant in Luke's parable was that if the unjust judge could be swayed by the persistent pleading of someone from the lowest level of society, how much more would God delight to grant answers to our prayers as believers in Jesus and part of the family of God?

A second, but critical point arose indirectly from the parable, which was often repeated in the Bible. God called us to be persistent in prayer and to wait for His timing. Psalm 37:7 says, "Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him." Psalm 27:14 said, "Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord." Paul said in Philippians 4:6, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." Hebrews 4:16 said, "Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." Patience is essential in prayer, as only God knows the best timing to answer our requests!

What are some practical ways we may improve our persistence in prayer? Some methods have worked for me, although they may not be suitable for everyone.

1. Write your prayer requests down on a 3×5 card. Carry this with you, and as you find time, pray throughout the day. It's helpful to categorize your requests, such as "Healing" or "Come

to Faith in Jesus."

2. Consider if you construct a kind of "prayer maze" in your head by assigning the people for whom you are praying to a geographical map of where they are located. For example, you could begin by praying for people in your hometown, then move on to prayers for those in the western part of your state, then to the north, east, and so on. This has proven very helpful to me since I often pray for people during my daily exercise, where I would not have access to cards on which I had listed prayer requests.

3. Finally, pray! Ask God to show you ways to improve your prayer life. Remember what we discussed several weeks ago in the section on Luke 16:1-13. The application of this text was that God has called us to use our talents and ingenuity to lead people to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Pray and ask God to energize your prayer life by using your time, skills, and material possessions. This includes using our technological devices like smartphones and computers.

I bet that some of you are mighty prayer warriors and that your prayer lives came about because of certain circumstances that God allowed. Others may just need a bit of encouragement from time to time about keeping up with the discipline of prayer. Remember, God has called us not to wait until troubles come our way, but to be faithful and pray to obey. We shouldn't do this out of guilt or obligation, but to deepen our relationship with the Father.

Reflection Questions

1. Ask God to reveal the spiritually lost people in your life. Who are the lost causes in your life whom only God could change? Write down their names and, as God leads, pray for them like the persistent widow.

2. We said that prayer and reading the Bible are the two main ways we communicate with God. What are some other ways that God communicates with us?

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Going Deeper:

Do you have a story to share about the power of persistent prayer? You can email me at jim@christiansforchrist.com.

Recommended Readings on Prayer:

"The Way of the Heart" by Henri Nouwen (Ballantine, 1981).

"A Journey to Victorious Praying" by Bill Thrasher (Moody, 2003)

"Prayer" by Ole Hallesby (Augsburg, 1994)