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

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 126: 08-31-2025



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we examine the Book of Hebrews, where we see the difference between the Old and New Covenants. We close with Jesus' teaching of the Pharisees about humility, a message we all need to hear.

First Reading:

The first reading is from the Apocryphal book of Sirach.

> *SIR 3:17-18, 20, 28-29*
> *My child, conduct your affairs with humility,*
> *and you will be loved more than a giver of gifts.*
> *Humble yourself the more, the greater you are,*

> *and you will find favor with God.*
> *What is too sublime for you, seek not,*
> *into things beyond your strength search not.*
> *The mind of a sage appreciates proverbs,*
> *and an attentive ear is the joy of the wise.*
> *Water quenches a flaming fire,*
> *and alms atone for sins.*

The opening verses are a call to show humility, a frequent theme throughout the Bible. It is reminiscent of Proverbs 16:18, "Pride goes before destruction, and a proud spirit before the fall." The writer calls the lowly people of society to be humble, as well as those in the highest social and political strata, something which was surely countercultural back then and as much so today. The closing verses of the reading echo this same theme; however, they add the insight that wise people listen to the sayings of others, but humble people listen to the sayings of others.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading continues the study from last week in the Book of Hebrews. The context of the reading is following the author's teaching on the necessity of a believer to pursue peace and sanctification, "without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14b). The writer provided the counter example of ungodly Esau, "who sold his own birthright for a single meal" (v. 16b). Today's reading moves to the subject of how God deals with believers in the Old versus New Covenants.

Second Reading:

Note: The text below includes verses 20-21 and 24b-ff omitted from the reading.

> *Hebrews 12:18-24 NAS95 18 For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, 19 and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them. 20 For they could not bear the command, "IF EVEN A BEAST TOUCHES THE MOUNTAIN, IT WILL BE STONED." 21 And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I AM FULL OF FEAR and trembling." 22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, 23 to the general assembly and*

> *church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.*

The author greatly contrasts God's covenantal relationship with believers in the Old and New Covenants. The idea expressed is the difference between the terrors of God revealed on Mount Sinai versus the peace found on Mount Zion. Believers in the Lord Jesus as a part of the New Covenant can approach the throne of God with boldness in contrast to the fearful manner in which the Jews experienced God at Mount Sinai in the Old (see also Hebrews 4:16). The writer expressed how as New Testament believers we come not to a mountain burning with fire, but rather Mount Zion, the holy city of God (v. 22a). This spiritual city consists of "myriads of angels" (v. 22c), "the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven" (v. 23a), God the Judge of all (v. 23b), "the spirits of the righteous made perfect" (v. 23d), and "Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant" (v. 24a). The New Covenant provides a qualitatively different relationship between God and man through the "mediatorship" of Jesus Christ. This covenant is much better than the old one because through the blood of Jesus Christ, believers are made perfect without the consciousness of sin that perpetually existed in the Old Covenant. We find this stated earlier in the Book. "For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins?" (Hebrews 10:1-2).

The reading shows us how our changeless God revealed Himself through two covenants. The Mosaic Covenant was delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai through "blazing fire, "darkness," "gloom," a "whirlwind," "trumpet and the sounds of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them" (v. 18). This contrast is nowhere more evident in that of the blood of Abel versus the blood of Jesus in verse 24. Although God accepted Abel's sacrifice because it was offered by faith, the blood of Jesus Christ is infinitely greater than that of Abel because Christ's blood atoned for the sins of the whole world. As New Testament believers, we look forward to seeing Mount Zion, the holy city.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

This week, we return to Hebrews and the Gospel of Luke, which we saw last week. And again, we see some more about the group called the Pharisees in the Gospel teaching, just like last week. Perhaps what may be helpful here is a bit of background about this group of Jewish people. The

Pharisees were middle-class ordinary men who were not necessarily educated like the other group known as the Sadducees. The Pharisees differed from the Sadducees in believing in life after death, miracles, and angelic beings. They thought the word of God was inspired and sought to hold very strictly to the tradition of the Law as Moses gave in the first five books of the Bible, known as the Pentateuch. However, they falsely taught that their oral traditions held equal authority to Scripture. Jesus warned the Pharisees about these and other false teachings in His message of the seven woes found in Matthew 23:1-36. In our day, we must endeavor to continuously measure and test our religious traditions and beliefs against the unchanging Scriptures.

Now we will examine the context of today's reading from Saint Luke. Here we find Jesus dining at the home of a certain famous Pharisee, likely a member of the ruling council called the Sanhedrin. Could it have been someone like Saint Paul, a Pharisee himself? The Scripture says that the "people" were observing him carefully. It would seem that they were trying to find some fault in Jesus, to trip him up, to find a reason for which they could bring him to trial. It would also seem that other Pharisees were present. So as Jesus often did, he told a parable. When you hear the word "parable," I suggest you think of it this way. The word means quite literally "to throw alongside." So think of a parable as a story thrown alongside to show you a particular spiritual truth. Be careful not to make a parable walk on all fours, but try to get the single spiritual truth out of it. Also, be careful not to take it literally if it isn't meant to be taken that way, and we can determine if that is the case by looking at the context.

Consider this parable that Jesus gave directly to the Pharisees and the context as you read it. Imagine yourself sitting with Jesus among the Pharisees, a group who strived to please God by observing the Law and holding to their oral traditions. We also need to carefully consider that the reading for this week omitted verses 2-6 in Luke chapter 14. This is unfortunate because these verses very clearly describe the context of Jesus' teaching. The audience also included a man suffering from abnormal body swelling in the missing five verses. The Pharisees proceeded to ask Jesus whether it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath, which was the day all of this took place, Saturday (the Jews' Sabbath was always the last day of the week, not on Sunday as is celebrated by Christians). Jesus responded to their question with a question (as Jesus often did!). He asked the Pharisees what they would do if their child or ox fell into a hole on the Sabbath, would they pull them out immediately? The implied answer is, of course, yes. Anyone knows through pure common sense that you would pull your child or ox out of the hole on the Sabbath Day. Jesus then took hold of the man and healed him, which caused great anger among the Pharisees. They were likely thinking something like, "You just broke the Sabbath Law, and for this lowly scum of a man with a bloated face and who is ceremonially unclean." The question is, what was this man with dropsy even doing there at the prominent Pharisee's house? According to the Law, he would be ruled unclean and unable to enter the temple, but here he was at the home of the prominent Pharisee. Were the

Pharisees not already bending their rules to allow this unclean man to be at the meal? Or were they being hypocritical, or was the man able to wander in because of the typical open configuration of the ancient Near Eastern home? The text does not say. Now with this context in mind, let's look at the parable.

Gospel Reading:

> *Luke 14:1 NAS95 1 It happened that when He went into the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees on the Sabbath to eat bread, they were watching Him closely.*
> *Omitted Verses:*
> *Luke 14:2-6 NAS95 2 And there in front of Him was a man suffering from dropsy. 3 And Jesus answered and spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" 4 But they kept silent. And He took hold of him and healed him, and sent him away. 5 And He said to them, "Which one of you will have a son or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?" 6 And they could make no reply to this.*
> *Continuing:*
> *Luke 14:7-14 NAS95 7 And He began speaking a parable to the invited guests when He noticed how they had been picking out the places of honor at the table, saying to them, 8 "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, 9 and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this man,' and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place. 10 But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you. 11 For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. 12 And He also went on to say to the one who had invited Him, 'When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and that will be your repayment. 13 But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.'"*

Jesus' parable was a frontal attack upon the Pharisees who "love[d] the chief seats in the synagogues and the respectful greetings in the marketplaces" (Luke 11:43). Because the Pharisees were exalting themselves over everyone else, their problem was one of pride. The central teaching by Jesus in this passage was God's calling to be humble. By humbling yourself to help those who cannot help themselves, you will be repaid in heaven, but the reward may not be evident in this life. Jesus was upsetting the apple cart of the Pharisees' world by suggesting that the lowly people in this world, like the man with the terrible dropsy, would be exalted in the coming kingdom of heaven. Jesus demonstrated His humility by healing the man with dropsy (Luke 14:3), although He knew it would

anger the Pharisees with whom He would soon be dining. He then went on to teach them why being humble was so important.

Reread the section in the reading regarding this upside-down world that Jesus is teaching regarding His kingdom. "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted" (v. 11). God is the only one we may exalt any of us. However, the Pharisees exalted themselves above everyone else, even above their sick brother.

To apply today's reading in our lives, we can pray to God to help us see ourselves as servants to those who don't believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. We can ask God to show us how to see ourselves "washing their dirty feet," helping to heal their sickness, and serving them by praying for them. We can ask God to give us the courage to speak to them about the forgiveness of sins offered only through believing that Jesus Christ died once and for all on the cross for their sins, through a sacrifice that can never be repeated.

Reflection Questions

1. Can you think of a time this past week when I considered myself as better than someone else? What were the circumstances? In what ways does Jesus speak to you about what you learned in the Gospel message?

2. What is one thing that you can change regarding this teaching of Jesus on the necessity of being humble?

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