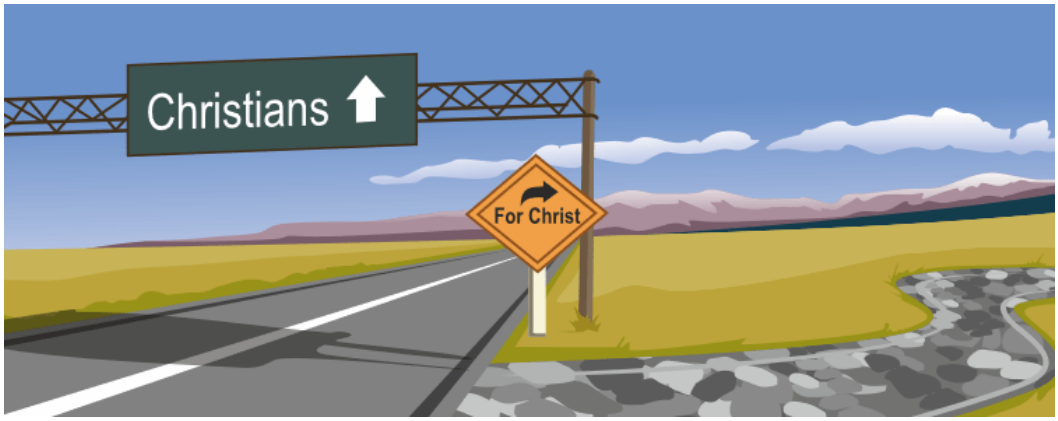
Study Notes for the Sunday Mass Published by Christians for Christ Ministries. We are a non-denominational Christian ministry that seeks to encourage and facilitate Christians in studying the Holy Scriptures. **"For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus."** 1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

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



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:

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.

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"!