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

Eye Witness Encounter – by Aida Karabu



Eye Witness Encounter

Intro Quotes

"But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.' Acts 26:16-18 (ESV)

"Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him." Luke 8:39 ESV

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

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

Early on the first day of the week, after Jesus had risen, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had driven out seven demons. She went and told those who had been with Him, who were mourning and weeping. And when they heard that Jesus was alive and she had seen Him, they did not believe it. Mark 16:9-11

Jesus Appears to Two Disciples

After this, Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them as they walked along in the country. And they went back and reported it to the rest, but they did not believe them either. Mark 16:12-13

Later, as they were eating, Jesus appeared to the Eleven and rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen. And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved." Mark 16:14-16

My life: Autobiographical Background

Hello!

I've been through a lot in life. I want to share it all, so that even when I die people can still learn from my life, and can see for themselves who brought me out of the pit and how, and what they can do to get out themselves with His help, and to illustrate that it really never is too late for anyone.

And to parents with children who are going through a lot of things like I did, I want you to keep praying and never give up on them.

Brace yourself, because, like many people, my story before I met Christ is not a pretty one.

Loosely, I grew up in church, but I turned away from the Lord, and when I was 14, I moved to the UK to a prestigious boarding school to complete my GCSEs (sounds nice huh?). I was one of the few black girls, and I didn't have many friends in the slightest. I did complete them, and got A's and A*'s across the board in 10 subjects – with only one B (which just about shattered me at the time). I felt really sad and alone – but I kept it all in without an outlet. The girls there were sometimes, often, mean beyond description.

One day, I remember asking to be excused from class, and instead of going back to class I just broke down crying in an empty classroom. I just broke down. I had kept it all in for so long when I finally let it out I became indifferent, numb. I just wanted to disappear. I knew that no one would care or really notice if I did. Maybe just cruel gossip about where they think I might've left and my issues once I'm not there.

I finally broke the façade of the perfect girl slamming it at school, and as soon as my parents found out how I really felt, they shipped me back home to Ethiopia, where we lived at the time, and reassured me I didn't have to go back if I really didn't want to.

I felt like my life was over and I was ruined, that I was a total failure and that I would never make it, and so I did the natural thing, I dove into a downward spiral.

When the one thing I used to define my self-worth, my grades started to fall, because of anxiety at the new school after everything, and now that faith in God was a thing of mockery and a sign of stupidity in my mind based on what I believed about science and my secular standing at this point, I started doing all kinds of crazy negative things to try and cope.

I started smoking what the world touts as "harmless weed" to ease my heavy heart and mind, making friends with others who did this and who felt like they were also going in a downward spiral, going to crazy wild parties (fyi if you would like to know, the bible uses the terms carousing and debauchery to describe these exact pastimes), that I did to try and drown all the pain out. It didn't work.

Then "just for fun and relaxation" started to become drinking super heavily till blackout or throwing up at parties and sleeping around with people I had never met. At this point I didn't feel like there

was anything worth saving, I had already even completely left behind my childhood commitment to remain a virgin for my husband.

Then it turned into hard drugs. Miscellaneous pills from strangers and joints filled with unknown substances, other than weed. I was totally dead inside, and I hated everything I had become and everything I was. I needed someone to save me. I needed someone to love me enough to walk with me and guide me and fix me and make me a better person. I kept looking for this.

In my mind I was a total waste. For me all hope was lost. This is the part where I write this in the hopes that someone going through this or thinking of doing this will not go through with it.

Long story short, I had 5-10, brace yourself – suicide attempts – over the course of a few years. I still bear the scars on my arms. It was a total nightmare for my whole family. I tried to die by swallowing an entire bottle of pain killers, I drank bleach, I cut the mains electricity wire with a metal knife, I tried to hang myself, I took a whole pack of sleeping pills, I was taken away in an ambulance more times than I would care to count – and for some reason I just wouldn't die.

I remember thinking of God one day and just thinking "Why won't you just let me die? Are you so cruel to leave me suffering like this? Just leave me alone and let me die!" I was looking for peace, and in my misery I thought that death would bring it to me. I realize that it was peace that I was looking for, and not death. I only wanted to die because I thought that was the only way I could find true peace in life.

Now looking back, I now know it was God who kept me alive, although then it felt like cruelty, He didn't want me to die like that without me knowing true peace, which was Him. He was the one who saved me from my own hands each time, and He was the one who had all the good in store for me to see after He rescues me.

At that time I didn't know God at all, I had forgotten all about Him, but somehow deep down I knew that if someone loved me enough, deeply beyond all my worst failures and worst mistakes, that I would be fine. So, I changed my approach of sleeping with different kinds of men for sexual pleasure alone to sleeping around so that I could find this type of love. Newsflash, I didn't find it in men that way.

I didn't really tell anyone, but I resolved to get into a long-term relationship for this purpose. So in all my wisdom at the time I used dating applications like Tinder to find this. Most of those meetups ended up in one-night stands with strangers or simply didn't not go anywhere – until I met .. let's call him J.

We met at his house, and I loved it so much I just never left and I lived with him for about a year or so. But all of this in my past and all the scarring on the inside of me was still there, and I couldn't fix it, and neither could J.

I thought sexual love with a romantic partner would fix it, and it was the kind of long-term relationship I had dreamed of getting on Tinder, but he, although there was so much I loved about him, had his own issues and didn't know God either, and he just couldn't help me the way I was looking for.

He could buy me a whole new wardrobe, deck me out with the best makeup, buy me cool gadgets I could never afford or get from my family at the time, he bought me new shoes, he could paid for plain tickets and expensive vacations and weekend getaways for me, he bought me my favorite foods and loved me in all the ways he knew how. We picked out a house to live in and raise kids together, I thought I was as happy as I could ever be, but I still needed so much fixing, and I still had that longing for that other kind of love. This may sound like a perfect love, but J also caused me a significant amount of harm. Physically, emotionally and psychologically.

I realized my life would end up with me and him living in a small town with kids, wondering how my life ended up that way, with kids who alienated me because I was an imperfect mother, a husband who was estranged from me, hating my life, hating myself, and trapped. I didn't want that. So when it got to the point where I wanted to leave J and everything too, I realized my last resort to get this love and get my life and my soul fixed inside wasn't working. I realized I that I wanted to leave but I didn't have a reason. We already had so much history that I didn't want to end it, but it wasn't bringing me any satisfaction or fulfilment, many times it was taking away from me more than it was giving.

Philosophy Class

Interestingly enough, the thing that got me thinking about God again was a secular philosophy class. Philosophy 1306, Reality, Thinking, and the Self. I hadn't thought about God in a positive or serious light for as long as I could remember, even as far back as Sunday school although many times as a teenager I would tag along with my mom and my immediate family to church. Hearing, and I guess deep down sensing that Jesus was true and real, but believing God was unfair and Heaven was only for the select few who gave up everything and hard to work hard for it. I wasn't that. I couldn't raise the dead like Elijah. I didn't understand all the strange prophecies in the Bible. There's a lot of junk in there that didn't seem to make a lot of sense in a logical, modern scientific technologically advanced world I was living in. I have school to go to. I thought, I can't follow God and go to school at the same time. I would have to be a desert nomad and go into the desert and give up everything I knew and loved – it seemed like too high a price. So I swore a kind of hatred or vow against god in my heart, not consciously or verbally, but to continue living my life walking away from Him and disregarding His advice and commands with the aim to meet Him in Heaven on Judgement Day or whatever and blame it on His unfairness. I didn't care if I went to Hell, because I believed I could claim it was because of God's injustice. I thought I would somehow be more right than God, more holy, more honorable or more loving in some way by choosing to dive in. I think many, many people have made this deep unconscious decision in their heart, never really articulating it. Many of them may cover this secret decision with what they believe is scientific evidence which disproves the existence of God, or evidence that God is not just or is somehow a liar, or trying to keep something good from us from scripture. "Why would God kill innocent babies?", they ask. It never occurs to them that if they think God is equally guilty of it than equally so is anyone who kills a baby in the womb or a newborn. There are so many logical inconsistencies in these arguments that looking back I wonder at how I didn't see them before.

Anyhow, I was attending this Philosophy class at school online as I was living with J, and God came up in the course material. Just a general discussion, the Philosophy professor wasn't preaching per se, but he was presenting how some believe in the possibility of the existence of a creator because of the intricacy of the human mind out of the philosophical duty of presenting both sides of an argument.

However simple this philosophical conversation was, I can't remember exactly the topic, but God came up as evidenced by our minds as thinking things. Where did the mind come from? Can chemical and meat soup make a mind if left in a jar for thousands of years? I started to be intrigued. I remember talking to J about it. I was really excited. What if this higher omniscient (all seeing, all pervasive, everywhere at once), omnipotent (all powerful in terms of power and technological and mechanical wisdom) being exists? I said. Like an omniscient being that's always everywhere that sees everything that has just always existed. A different kind of being different from us, Ancient. Always been there. Has seen everyone and everything from the beginning of time. The philosophical notion of such a being make me excited and happy. The wisdom this being must possess. Like, there

was a possibility of a freedom and new wisdom and life and knowledge by somehow coming into contact with this being. Logically speaking, if such a being existed, I reckoned that it would have the wisdom to do things like teleportation, to different universes and realities that we are not even aware of. This all coming from my secular, atheistic and scientific world view. We think about such beings in science fiction all the time, it shows up in kids shows constantly. I just started to consider and realize the existence of a true, benevolent, omniscient and omnipotent God in reality.

For some reason, when I was bringing it up as a question to J I actually believed it. I wasn't asking him for his opinion yes or no or to validate or deny my thoughts, they were already firmly planted, I was just sharing my excitement and thoughts to see how J would react. I can't remember at what point, but I was convinced. I never even once associated this being with the God of the Bible that I grew up with at church, I didn't see him as a 'God' in the religious sense at all, I was opposed to religion at this point in my life, in my mind such a beings existence was just a kind of scientific or philosophical possibility of the universe. If you are an atheist and you believe in aliens, you can't rule out that there might be some beings out there that exist outside our dimensions. Beings that have been around much longer, that know a lot more than we do, that can see through time and space.

I reached out to the Philosophy professor and I told him that whether or not he intended it, his course led me to conclude that there is a God and that i brought me back to my faith in Christ in a dramatic way afterwards. I don't know if he saw that coming, I wonder if he was atheist himself. He never said if he explicitly believed in God after the fact, I asked him and he told me that he would like to keep his personal views on God incognito, and He didn't reveal to me whether he did or he did not believe in a God explicitly either way, but I have my suspicions.

Come save me

So, I began to desperately cry out to this omniscient, omnipresent, omnibenevolent being just to see what he would do. I wanted him to take me to another planet. Another existence. Another reality. I was just tired of life on Earth. If you know the reference, I wanted the being to take me to another reality and show me a new Kingdom like Thor took Jane to Asgard.

For some reason, because I know the fact of his existence was not brought into question, that it was a reality, that he would answer as long as I welcomed him as who he is and had an understanding of His power and his separation from us in terms of his power etc. He's just a being on a different scale of life, so I called out to Him jokingly for 3 days is straight, for some reason I knew that if I jokingly

called out to Him believing and knowing that He would show up if I just kept asking, he would. Now here is where you guys might not want to listen to me anymore. I didn't realize what the Bible said at the time, I only realized what it said after I saw what I saw and I started to read it:

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. Mark 11:24 ESV

"anyone who approaches Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him." Hebrews 11:6 (BSB)

"'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.'" Jeremiah 33:3 (NIV)

And one night, someone from that side of reality I was calling to did show up. And surprise surprise to my or maybe your atheist/agnostic self at that moment, it was none other than Jesus Christ.

The encounter

"the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." Matthew 4:16 NIV

"On the day I called, you answered me; my strength of soul you increased." Psalm 138:3 (ESV)

One day I was in the other room sulking and feeling lonely. I am not going to omit that I was high, I was feeling very ashamed of myself, and very disgustingly gross in terms of hygiene (I hadn't showered, or brushed my teeth, and I was wearing pajamas all day).

When J finally walked in to check on me, to see if I was okay, I knew that he would end up doing or saying something to hurt me, to make me feel ashamed of myself, not worthy, not good enough. I

didn't want him to see me like that. Like the mess that I really was on the inside. But he came into the room anyways and I mustered up the resolve to love him anyways, because I didn't want to lose him. But I felt like I had nowhere to go to hide my shame and filth and disgrace from J, and I wish he didn't walk in and see me like that and change how he thought or felt about me by seeing me intoxicated like that. Looking back, seeing me intoxicated would have never made J change his mind about me. We got drunk together all the time, and J didn't mind when I was smoking or drinking marijuana drinks. The thing that made J change his mind and feelings about me was when I saw Jesus, and I was freed from alcoholism and drug use. That's what made him too ashamed to associate with me or love me anymore. When I started sharing that I saw Jesus and believing what He said, reading the Bible and dragging him to church with me. But anyways, that's jumping ahead.

When I looked up at J when he walked in, it wasn't his face there, I saw someone else's face superimposed over his body there that was glowing brightly like the sun – but not harsh – it was a soft light, I didn't have to shield my eyes.

He looked something like the following if you're interested. Note how handsome and majestic He looks, but he shines a lot brighter – with the light coming from within, like the second picture:

"Then the two from Emmaus told their story of how Jesus had appeared to them as they were walking along the road, and how they had recognized him as he was breaking the bread. And just as they were telling about it, Jesus himself was suddenly standing there among them. "Peace be with you," he said." Luke 24:35-36 NLT

I had never seen that persons face before but I instantly knew who it was. He didn't tell me who he was. He didn't need to. He walked in and I saw Him shining bright like the sun with a crown on His head and a Jewish nose and long hair and I just knew who it was. He was smiling at me. A soft, "Surprise!", his smile said. There as so much compassion and love for me in His eyes. I felt like I had always known Him and He had always known me when I saw Him. His presence validated my entire existence. It justified me. If He is who He is and He was there with me and He loves me, then that's what makes me who I am. Not my mistakes or my failures, the fact that He is who He is and He was there with me for even just that one evening. It gave me the freedom to start again. To live a life free of the burden of my past mistakes. To live a life identified by the fact that He is real, He is literally on the throne of the universe, and He was there in that dingy single bedroom apartment room with me and J. Except only I could see Him.

I felt such awe and reverence, like I was in the presence of a King – He was wearing a golden crown shining like white light, and I remember I just chuckled and laughed to myself and said "But it's You!", "But You're Jesus!" I knew who He was, and He was there, in the room with me. Only I could seem Him in His minds eye. J had no idea what I was seeing.

If you've never read the Bible before, I don't care, in the Bible, someone else saw Jesus in a similar way, where the others around them couldn't see Him. Saul saw Jesus in his minds eye on the Damascus road. Only Saul could see Jesus:

The Damascus Road: Saul Converted (Acts 9:1-9 NKJV)

Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ****and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he journeyed he came near Damascus, **and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.** Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It *is* hard for you to kick against the goads." So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord *said* to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." **And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one.** Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought *him* into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

So, I felt the weight of His presence and His power and authority ***in the universe,*** He's well known throughout time and space and to other creatures, what the Bible would describe 'heavenly hosts' that I was not aware existed up until this point. Think of the creatures like the cherubim and the seraphim mentioned to be in the Heavens or the presence of God in scripture. There are other creations God has made in the universe.

But anyways, He was who He was and He was right there in front of me in person. I was honored to be in His Kingly presence, so I bowed low to the bed where I was sitting, because I felt like that's the most natural thing I could do in His presence, and the least I could do to show that I recognized who He was and that I was honored to be in His presence. He didn't force me to bow or ask me to bow. I think, deep down He wouldn't have been offended if I didn't. When Jesus was on Earth plenty of

people stood before Him and didn't bow, in fact, many people were compelled to mistreat him. He didn't mistreat them or command anyone to bow before Him, even though He knew who exactly who He was and who He would be the entire time.

He didn't say anything, but His eyes spoke volumes, volumes of love and forgiveness and compassion and understanding. He had so much love and compassion for me in His eyes. I understood that He actually knew me and was always with me, and was always there my whole life even when I didn't see Him and didn't know it. I saw that He loved me, and that He felt so much pain to see me in my pain knowing that no one would help, that He went out of His way to do whatever it took to just stop it and save me from my suffering, and He didn't even blame me for anything I had done, He just wanted to save me and put me out of my misery.

"The Lord is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion. The Lord protects the unwary; when I was brought low, he saved me." Psalm 116:5-6 (NIV)

I felt true peace when He was there with me. True security. True love and understanding. Negative emotions were so far removed. I had no feelings of regret, or guilt or shame or condemnation. All of these emotions we're lifted in His presence. That's what He came to take away from me.

I'm happy from the inside out, and from the outside in, I'm firmly formed. You canceled my ticket to hell— that's not my destination!

Now you've got my feet on the life path, all radiant from the shining of your face. Ever since you took my hand, I'm on the right way.

Psalm 16:9-11 MSG

He didn't say "I died for you", to make me feel guilty, the crucifixion is not even something that He mentioned to me in that moment, that is just what it took to end my suffering, and now He was glad that my suffering was now over, "Its okay, stop crying I'm here" is basically what His love in front of me said, "Shh shh, stop crying, it's okay now, everything is going to be okay, I'm here now, It's okay." The calming comfort of a loving Father grasping His scared child in His arms, I lept with joy

into them with intense relief and shed a watery tear or two realizing who He was, feeling His peace, and knowing that He saved me and forgave me, and no one could make me feel guilt or shame or judge or condemn me because He was God's Son and He was in the room with me, He loved me, and if He didn't judge me and He's literally King of the Universe, who then on Earth had the right to? I realized that no one could use the guilt and shame of my past mistakes (or sins as the Bible would say) as a weapon to keep me bound and trapped in chains of fear, and to keep me from erasing past mistakes from memory and doing things the right way now. He gave me freedom. I had received a kind of presidential pardon and justification, I was in the same room as the resurrected Jesus I think. That alone just completely changed everything. Talk about a game changer. This one was free and undeserved, and an eternal one at that.

"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." 2 Corinthians 3:17 ESV

He was smiling at me, and His compassionate, understanding, fatherly smile said, "You tried it your way right? Now are you ready to do things my way?", with a twinkle of light and compassion in His eyes.

I felt a love and a grace so deep that I thought no one could've ever got that from the Bible, and that all the religious people really didn't get it, until I read the Bible for myself after seeing seeing who I saw, and I realized that's exactly what the Bible had been saying the whole time about Jesus, and love and how all the religious people that didn't know His love didn't get it at all, which is kind of mind blowing to me at least. I just didn't know what it said.

"So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him." 1 John 4:16

"Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love." 1 John 4:8

"How priceless is your unfailing love, O God!" Psalm 36:7

"For your faithful love is as high as the heavens; your faithfulness reaches the clouds." Psalm 57:10

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

(CSB)

"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people" Titus 2:11 (ESV)

Following

Over time following this, I started to become a completely different person. I started listening and watching sermons out of interest, and reading my new Bible, and going to church and trying to convince J to come with me.

I also started feeling really uncomfortable whenever I slept in the same bed or room as J, he'd reach for me and I would pull away, not because of anything He would've done to me, he would never ever hurt me in a million years, but because I started to feel like it wasn't right with God. I just had this overarching conviction or deep desire to not continue living in sin in that way, but it was a tough decision, because every desire of mine to live in sin and fornication was waning but I was still living there. And my body wanted to sleep with J every moment of every night as we had been doing for about a year, so I had to make a tough decision and just decide to ignore and not satisfy the passionate desires of my flesh.

So I started to sleep on the couch or in the other room. I thought God wanted me to stay with J and fix him and love him as my husband because I knew God was all about love now, but the pastors I talked to straightened me out letting me know that sleeping with someone unfortunately does not make them your husband. And J had made it clear that he didn't want to marry me, especially now that in his eyes I was just a religious crackpot who was mentally ill because I say that I saw Jesus. Anyways, this was just a temporary cohabitative situationship. As someone who didn't believe in God before, this didn't bother me. Just live with J and sleep with him, even have kids with J, I thought a marriage certificate and a ceremony wasn't that necessary to live like we were married. So it really did break my heart, because before I had hope that if I stayed with him we would eventually get married, and I still wanted him and our relationship, but I just didn't want the sin anymore. I wanted God more.

Sleeping with him just made it pre-marital sex, which is called fornication which is classified as sexual immorality in the Bible, and it is a sin. In other words, it is something that ultimately brings

unnecessary pain and heartbreak to our souls when we do it.

"Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous." Hebrews 13:4 (ESV)

"Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you. Such sins have no place among God's people." Ephesians 5:3 (NLT)

"But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death." Revelation 21:8 (ESV)

This can sound harsh, but notice it doesn't say no sex, it says, if it's sex, it's for life, which is what I had wanted at the start. J didn't want to marry me now that I was a believer and now that I was so pushy about him going to church and now that I was always trying to change him and I viewed him as flawed in his own words. I wasn't the same woman who had moved in with him. I had changed in a very drastic way, and this wasn't in the contract. If J believed me when I told him what I saw and that it was real, believed in Jesus and the Bible and got baptized with me, I would have not had a problem marrying J. He would still be my first choice. I just knew if we had completely different worldviews and purposes and meanings in life the marriage would have been difficult. One night, when we were sleeping in the same bed, I had a nightmare that J proposed. You may expect that any woman who dreams of their boyfriend proposing would be happy, gloriously happy! In the dream, it was dark out, nighttime and there was a hurricane blowing all around us. J had his signature beige jacket and beat up shoes and dry dandruff peppered blond brownish hair, he took a knee and he presented a ring. Except I started to panic, like I couldn't breathe and I felt like I was having a heart attack. I felt like I was making the greatest mistake of my life and I got backed into a corner and I had no way out. At this point we did things like listen to the book of Ecclesiastes together and watched Christian movies on PureFlix together and watched sermons together. But J would ask to change the channel then later that same night he would reach over to me at night and I was say no. I remember at one point I was crying deliriously, and I asked him to pray with me, because I sensed a coming judgement and I felt like we needed to beg for mercy from God because we we're living in sin before Him. I sensed the weight of the sin. J prayed with me for a bit. He prayed silently, but I felt unsettled, like he was just going through the motions to do whatever to keep me happy, not because he believed. Eventually, regrettably after I fight, I moved back in with my parents. Whenever we did talk or meet up I ended up sleeping with him again, so in the end we just stopped talking.

With the help of the Holy Spirit, I did gain enough self-control to learn how to resist the temptation to sleep with people who were not my husband. In any case, to enter a marriage with a non believer, would be what the Bible calls being unequally yoked. All in all, the Bible says don't do it because the unbelieving spouse will convince you overtime to abandon your faith or join theirs, or because the tension in the relationship and world views and priorities will ultimately lead you in different directions and approaches in life, tearing the relationship apart.

Don't team up with those who are unbelievers. How can righteousness be a partner with wickedness? How can light live with darkness? What harmony can there be between Christ and the devil? How can a believer be a partner with an unbeliever? 2 Corinthians 6:14-15 (NLT)

Can two people walk together without agreeing on the direction? Amos 3:3 (NLT)

Next, I made a declaration of my faith and symbolized the change that happened within me in public by becoming baptized in my mum's home congregation in Canada, and this was quite literally the happiest day of my life till this point, and it was a testimony to the whole church because they had really seen a big change in me. It also renewed hope for their friends and family members who also didn't believe and maybe were lost because of this new flame of renewed hope and affirmation that God really does still save in miraculous ways. More than anything, it was an answered prayer for my mum. All those years of diligent praying and desperately crying out to God to save my life, and man, did He answer! I was the prodigal daughter living in sin far away from home, and Jesus sent me back home answering my moms prayers.

I invited J to my baptism at my mums church but he didn't come, and I felt God's presence again so strongly and freshly, I had a completely fresh blank new slate on life, I was free! I could start again! I got what I was looking for all along, the redeeming love. I had found it given freely and without restraint in one of the most unlikeliest places to a young girl living in the 21st century, I found it Jesus.

It sounds incredulous, but I know that it's true. I know that this sounds like religious crackpot nonsense. Except I saw it and it's true. It seems so impossible yet it just simply is without explanation. I now know there's nothing impossible for God, and it sounds like I'm a totally changed person, because I totally am. It's one of those things that many people just sometimes don't believe unless they see it themselves.

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

"Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God." John 3:3 (NLT)

Jesus appears to (sometimes called 'Doubting') Thomas Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord!' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.' A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.' Thomas said to him, 'My Lord and my God!' Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.' (John 20:24-29 NIV)

That was me, I was a doubting Thomas, and now I saw what I saw and I'm telling you. So please believe me, but I understand why you might find it hard to believe. If not me, read the Bible and believe Jesus, what He said, that He lives today, and that He's coming back to take true believers to where He is forever, at some point in the future, that I eagerly hope and pray for.

As a result, a lot of the negative addictions and cycles in my life and the desires to continue in them we're broken overtime. Overtime I realized they we're bad for me, and I didn't have a reason to do them anymore. I realized it was more self harm than anything. And the redeeming love of God have me a license of forgiveness so that I felt free to stop. I don't drink anymore, I don't smoke weed anymore, I have not watched porn and I don't sleep with men I've never met anymore. In terms of faith, I used to identify as an atheist existentialistic nihilist since I was 13-ish, and now I found a whole lot more than anything I thought I could ever find, better than anything I could have ever wanted in one singular moment. Better than a million dollars, better than a boyfriend, better than life itself. I found Jesus and the literal way to immortality. Talk about a plot twist. I did not see that coming in the plot of my life. Someone did. God did. God always knew in advance. Jesus has been alive all those 2000 years or so since His death, I think He will be alive a lot longer after that as well.

So I renewed my commitment of celibacy 'till marriage, 'till death or 'till Jesus return. I'm more forgiving, I'm more loving, I'm more understanding, I have way more self-control, I have a hope to pick me up and a comfort to rely on when I'm down and divine direction and wisdom to go back to when I feel aimless and I need guidance. All because I came to a point so low in my life, after I had exhausted every other option, I called on Him. All because when I called to Him He came to the rescue. I want you to know that you can have this too, it's free gift to all who ask for it.

"Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28 NLT

"Let anyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who desires drink freely from the water of life." Revelation 22:17 NLT

You can call on Him too. I have deep assurance and hope and security in immortal life and His return one day because I saw Him, it's a kind of assurance that always stays deep within me in the midst of distress.

"God rescued me from the grave, and now my life is filled with light." Job 33:28 (NLT)

I wrote this to tell you that just asking God for help can do what all the psychologists, well-meaning family members, motivational self-help journals, medications, drugs, alcohol, sex, women, and men combined could ever do in a lifetime for the fixing of your soul in one moment, and for free. Why not call on Him? What do you have to lose? You might lose an opportunity to have something far above anything you we're ever looking for or expected in your life.

I don't believe in Jesus or the Bible because a Pastor preached it to me, because I was raised a Christian, because someone told me to, or because I was convinced or taught it by a person. I was minding my own business and I saw Jesus, alive and well, standing before me shining like the sun exactly like the Bible says while I was probably still a professing atheist against the God of the Bible at that moment. I believe in the Bible because I saw Jesus, and it corroborates with everything I saw. It all checks out. It explains everything crystal clear. If you're like me in the past or J, and you have a problem with blind faith, this is not a blind faith. It's not really even faith, because faith is defined as "The assent of the mind to the truth of a proposition or statement for which there is not complete evidence" by the The Century Dictionary. I don't know who would argue that I did not have conclusive evidence, therefore this by definition is not faith. It's just reality or fact.

Just like He showed Paul, Moses, Hagar, the disciples, Mary Magdalene and the women at the tomb, Sarah and Abraham. He hasn't changed how He does things. He's still the same God. After that, the Bible was perfectly authenticated to me as a historically accurate and relevant text. A never ending story penned by God, including me.

Never as a show of religion, but out of a realized need, you can communicate with God and ask Him to come into your life and become real to you, or you can just read these following Bible verses.

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. Mark 11:24 ESV

Keep asking and calling on Him genuinely like you actually need Him until you get the answer you're looking for or you get a response or some kind of guidance.

Here are some helpful scriptures:

If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved. As the Scriptures tell us, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced." Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They have the same Lord, who gives generously to all who call on him. For "Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved. (Romans 10:9-13 NLT)

They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with everyone in your household." (Acts 16:31 NLT)

""For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. "There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son." (John 3:16-18)

"For I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners." Mathew 10:13 (NLT)

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

"Then Jesus told him, "You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me."" (John 20:29 NLT)

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 01-08-2023



Although the gift-giving season of Christmas has just passed from our radar screens, the tradition of gift giving is found in each of the readings of the mass this week. In the Old Testament reading, we see that people will give gifts to Jesus, the King, who will reign on earth during His second advent. The New Testament reading shows us how St. Paul was God's gift to the Gentiles. And the Gospel reading recounts the story of the Wise Men who came from the East to give gifts to Jesus during His first advent.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

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

This week we are first going to examine the second reading from Saint Paul because the first reading from Isaiah and Gospel lesson from Saint Matthew must be studied together in light of the insights from Paul. The second reading is Ephesians Chapter Three where Paul unveiled a mystery that had been hidden throughout the ages until after Jesus' First Advent, what we just celebrated at Christmas. As you read this section of Ephesians try to select the single verse that Saint Paul provided which summarized this mystery.

Note: Verse 1 which was omitted from the reading is included below.

Second Reading:

1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles– 2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; 3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. 4 And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; 6 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel, (Ephesians 3:1-6)

Even though Saint Paul did minister to the Jews (see for example, Acts 13:14) his *primary* ministry was to the Gentiles. In contrast, Peter's main ministry was to the Jews. Paul, through the providence of the Holy Spirit, said that God placed him into the position of stewardship over the Gentile believers in the Church (verses 1 – 2). He said elsewhere in Galatians, "But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the Gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised" (Galatians 2:7). God determined that the *primary* focus of his ministry was to give the Gospel to the Gentiles, the same way that He sent Saint Peter to bring the message to the Jews. Though God set Paul apart to concentrate his ministry on the Gentile people, his background was that of a devout Jew (Philippians 3:5) and his heart was set upon winning the Jews to the Kingdom of God.

In this week's reading, the mystery was that the Gentiles would be gloriously grafted (Romans 11:17) into the people of God through the Church. It is important to understand, at least from a high level, Paul's background while we discuss this mystery which was revealed to him. He was formerly a member of the Jewish group known as the Pharisees, a cult which we have discussed extensively in the context of Jesus' interactions with them. The Pharisees were a group of devout Jews who from all

accounts would have abhorred the concept of unconverted Gentiles joining their strict Jewish sect. A modern analogy would be to think of the children's game where the goal is to hammer round and square wooden pegs into their respectively shaped holes. One could never hammer a square peg into a round hole regardless of how forcefully a person went about it or how talented they were, and regardless of their background. In the same way, the Pharisees could never have in their wildest imaginations envisioned a time when large populations of Gentiles would be invited and subsequently accepted into the family of God. They should have envisioned this as the Old Testament Scriptures predicted that this would happen. Isaiah said, "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 11:10, emphasis added). The concept of the Gentiles coming to God appeared throughout the Old Testament. We see this again in Isaiah in the section being covered today in the first reading, which with the benefit of history, we find that this was in the context of Jesus' Second Advent. "And **nations** will come to your light, And **kings** to the brightness of your rising" (Isaiah 60:3, emphasis added). The square pegs of the Gentiles will then fit nicely into round holes through God's mysterious unveiling of His divine plan of the Church. If you are not of Jewish heritage, but consider yourself a part of God's family through faith in Jesus Christ, then you can thank God for using the life of St. Paul to bring about this paradigm shift. Yes, even the Gentiles are fellow heirs, fellow members and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The quotation above from Isaiah brings us to the first reading, found in Chapter 60. As we said before, with the benefit of history and hindsight, we understand that this section of Isaiah refers to the Second Advent of Jesus Christ, namely when He returns in glory. With this context in mind, study the reading and take special note of the gifts that the Gentile believers will bring to the LORD.

First Reading:

1 "Arise, shine; for your light has come, And the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. 2 For behold, darkness will cover the earth, And deep darkness the peoples; But the LORD will rise upon you, And His glory will appear upon you. 3 And nations will come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising. 4 Lift up your eyes round about, and see; They all gather together, they come to you. Your sons will come from afar, And your daughters will be carried in the arms. 5 Then you will see and be radiant, And your heart will thrill and rejoice; Because the abundance of the sea will be turned to you, The wealth of the nations will come to you. 6 A multitude of camels will cover you,

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

The young camels of Midian and Ephah; All those from Sheba will come; They will bring gold and frankincense, And will bear good news of the praises of the LORD. (Isaiah 60:1-6)

Isaiah said that God would use "deep darkness" (v. 2a) to bring Gentiles (the nations, v. 3a) to Him. The Old Testament Prophets referred to this time of deep darkness as the "Day of the Lord," something which we discussed at length in the study for 10/30/2022. The timing of the Day of the Lord was hidden from the Prophets, but what we know is that it occurs just before Jesus' Second Coming and in the context of the Great Tribulation spoken of in the Book of Revelation Chapters 6 – 18. During this period God will accomplish two objectives. First, He will complete His disciplining of the Nation of Israel, bringing them to return to Him, and second He will judge the godless, unbelieving Gentiles remaining on the earth. After this time, Jerusalem will become the capital city of the universe. The Prophet Ezekiel said, "Thus says the Lord GOD, 'This is Jerusalem; I have set her at the center of the nations, with lands around her'" (Ezekiel 5:5) and about the Jews "who live at the center of the world" (Ezekiel 38:12e). God will use the tribulation of the end-time period to bring believers from all nations to Him, while the unbelievers will be permanently excluded from God's eternal Kingdom (Revelation 22:15).

Note the types of gifts that the future Gentile leaders will bring to King Jesus. "They will bring gold and frankincense, And will bear good news of the praises of the LORD" (Isaiah 60:6d). Throughout history, gold has been the most valuable of all metals. It's a rare and valuable treasure, and the perfect commodity that never degrades – making it an excellent gift to bring to Jesus, who is reigning as LORD. Frankincense is something very familiar to any Catholic, as this material produces a most pleasant aroma when burned and has the smell of perfume in its native form. I was an altar boy for most of my younger years and was frequently near the priest burning this sweet swelling material. The burning of incense is symbolic of the prayers of the faithful rising to heaven (Revelation 5:8). The future world leaders will present their gifts of gold and incense directly to the Source of their salvation, the Lord Himself! What a joyous occasion this will be!

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

This brings us to the Gospel lesson from Matthew Chapter Two, in which we find the Magi presenting their gifts to the King of the Universe. Read the text and take particular note of their **three** gifts.

Gospel Reading:

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

1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, 2 "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him." 3 And when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he began to inquire of them where the Christ was to be born. 5 And they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet, 6 'AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER, WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.'" 7 Then Herod secretly called the magi, and ascertained from them the time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, "Go and make careful search for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, that I too may come and worship Him." 9 And having heard the king, they went their way; and lo, the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them, until it came and stood over where the Child was. 10 And when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 11 And they came into the house and saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell down and worshiped Him; and opening their treasures they presented to Him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. 12 And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their own country by another way. (Matthew 2:1-12)

The context of this section is that Jesus had already been born in Bethlehem and his parents had moved him out of the stable into a house. He was an infant, probably less than two years old as we see from Herod, who later in Matthew made a plan to kill all infants two years old or younger. The Magi were likely people from the Babylonian region along the Euphrates River in present day Iraq south of Baghdad. These mysterious scholars were highly educated people that were part pagan priest, part magician, and part scribe. They were also interested in astrology and this was woven into their mystical religious beliefs. Nowhere in the text does it say that there were three of them, as in the famous song about the three wise men. This designation comes from the three gifts they brought with them to present to the King. There was likely a small group of them, but they would have been accompanied by a large number of guards and servants. Thus, this would have made their arrival that much more disturbing to King Herod.

The Jewish priests and scribes told the Magi the prophecy from the Prophet Micah, which they evidently weren't aware of, that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). This must be the case, or they would have gone directly to Bethlehem in the first place and avoided King Herod. Verse 9 said, "And having heard the king, they went their way; and lo, the star, which they **had seen** in the east, went on before them, until it came and stood over where the Child was" (emphasis added). Then, the star reappeared! So, what did they do? Did they stop and ask for further directions? No, followed it and went to Bethlehem! Now they had both the prophetic word from the Jews, and the star to guide them. Therefore, they kept going on the journey, but had to BELIEVE God's revelation and follow it.

Finally, when they arrived in Bethlehem and located Jesus, they presented their *three* gifts to him. The Magi's gift of gold would have been very useful to the holy family during their subsequent flight to Egypt necessary to flee King Herod. Notice the similarity of their gifts mentioned in the first reading from Isaiah 60 but with one glaring addition: myrrh. Myrrh was something used throughout the eastern world as an embalming agent. These kings of the east presented Mary and Joseph with a precious gift that could be used for the future burial of their Son. Look at it this way. One day you attended the baptism of an infant in the church, and afterwards one of the guests presented the happy couple with a beautiful new coffin for the child. Yes, the coffin could be sold, and the money used to raise the child, but what kind of a message would the presentation of such a gift make to the parents? The magi, unbeknownst to themselves, predicted the death of the Messiah. Little did they know that His death was a necessary part of the redemptive story so that you and I might have eternal life. In a future age Gentile believers will present gifts of gold and incense to Jesus, the need for myrrh has been done away with because Jesus rose from the dead and conquered death for you and me.

The chain of ideas that emerged from the text is as follows. First, God gives revelation in order to find Jesus. Second, God calls us to believe his revelation and follow it. Finally, when we truly meet with God our response is joy, worship and giving! The bottom line is this. God calls us to believe and follow His revelation about Jesus and when we do our response is joy, worship and giving.

Reflection Questions

1. Think about the message that you send implicitly when you send someone a gift. A child gives his father a pair of gloves for Christmas. Another child gives his mother a box of candy. In light of the New Year and the idea of making resolutions for the next twelve months, what single gift could you present to Jesus this year?

2. It is easy to criticize the Pharisees for judging the Gentiles, and for considering them "unworthy" of being saved. The definition of grace is that no one is worthy of it. It is God's unmerited favor. Think about your own attitude towards those who seem unlikely to become Christians. Is there someone who you can identify as unlikely to be a fellow heir, a fellow member of the body and a fellow partaker in the promise of Christ Jesus through the Gospel? Commit to pray for this person and look for ways to be like St. Paul by loving them and speaking the truth of the Gospel to them.

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 01-01-2023



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week begins with an Old Testament reading that expresses a wonderful benediction on God's people. The second reading is most appropriate for this season of the year. Paul writes to the church in Galatia and encourages them with the marvelous truth that God sent His Son, Jesus, to be the promised Messiah, and He did so at just the right time. The Gospel reading reveals one of the prominent features of the Christmas story, the shepherds, who were the first to hear of the newborn child.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The Book of Numbers takes up the story where Exodus left it; Leviticus was parenthetical with lots of teaching about the law that had first been noted in Exodus. Numbers is a book of order, preparing the people for the wilderness wanderings. Its theme is service, how God's people should worship and walk in a life of purity.

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

First Reading:

Numbers 6:22-27 NAS95 22 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 23 "Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, 'Thus you shall bless the sons of Israel. You shall say to them: 24 The LORD bless you, and keep you; 25 The LORD make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; 26 The LORD lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace.' 27 "So they shall invoke My name on the sons of Israel, and I then will bless them."

There are three triplets in vv. 24-26. Could that be a hint of the Trinity? In any case, there are five blessings that the priest is to share with the people. "The LORD bless you" is the first. The term means merely that God will show favor to His people. That would have been a great encouragement to this multitude of people wandering in the wilderness. "… and keep you." God promises to guard, protect, and preserve His people. "The LORD make His face shine on you." This was the request of the psalmist many years later, "Let the light of your face shine on us" (Psalm 4:6). You will recall that after Moses met with the Lord on Mt. Sinai, his face shone with the reflected glory of God (Exodus 34:30). And Paul tells us that "the knowledge of God's glory [is] displayed in the face of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6).

"And be gracious to you." God is the God of grace; He continually gives to His people what they don't deserve (that's grace). "The LORD lift up His countenance on you" is another way of saying "make His face shine on you." It's a comfort to know that God is always looking at His people and seeking to provide for them. "And give you peace." The Old Testament word for peace is still heard today in many parts of the Middle East. It's "shalom," and it means far more than the absence of hatred and war. It suggests health and wholeness, harmony. And, of course, it is only God who can give that kind of peace ultimately.

To make this text relevant to believers today, remember that if you are in Christ, God extends these same blessings to you: favor or grace, protection and provision, shining His face on you, and giving you spiritual health and wholeness.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Paul's letter to the Galatians is an argument against falling away from the faith. It's a challenge to

recognize our position in Christ and conduct our lives as people of faith. The portion we're reading today has some really deep theological content that is important for the believer to understand.

Second Reading:

Galatians 4:4-7 NAS95 4 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, 5 so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. 6 Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

The first verse of our study takes us to the Christmas theme, "God sent forth His Son, born of a woman." It's the fulfillment of centuries of the promises of the Old Testament prophets. And it occurred at exactly the right time; Paul describes it as "the fullness of the time." The known world at the time of Christ's coming was largely centralized with the Roman Empire in control. There was a trade language that was known worldwide, so the message of the Gospel could be circulated and understood within a few years of Christ's life. Many of the religions of the day were expecting some kind of "savior." During the 400 silent years between the Old and New Testament God was preparing men, nations, and civilizations—unwittingly to them—for the Messiah's arrival.

In fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, Jesus was born. And Paul gives the reason for His coming: "that He might redeem those who were under the law." He came to be the sufficient sacrifice that God demanded as the penalty for our sin. But, there's more than that. Paul speaks of "the adoption as sons." In the culture of that day, a lad had no legal rights or standing until he reached a certain age. He was a real son of his father, but he was not entitled to an inheritance or standing as an adult son until he reached that age, and then he was "adopted" legally as the heir of his father. God, in His grace, has given to the believer today the Holy Spirit ("Spirit of His Son"), and we can call God "Father" or "Papa." As the young men in Galatia, once they were adopted, they were no longer like slaves, they were legitimate sons, heirs. So are believers today; no longer slaves to sin and the law, but free, adopted sons of the Father. And it's all of God's doing out of His amazing love and grace.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

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

Among the many "Christmas" passages in the Bible, Luke 2 is probably the most often read. As told there, the story is filled with the miracles associated with the coming of Messiah, with a report of the first to be told, the shepherd. On the other hand, Matthew 2 tells of the wise men from the East who were led by a star to find the promised Jesus. We would do well, however, to read Philippians 2, also, which in a way tells the Christmas story from Jesus' point of view (vv. 5-8) and what it cost Him. Today's reading begins after the birth of Jesus and the shepherds hearing the announcement from the angels.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 2:16-21 NAS95 16 So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. 17 When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. 20 The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them. 21 And when eight days had passed, before His circumcision,

His name was then called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

In our passage today we read that the shepherds, after hearing the announcement from the angels, "came in a hurry" to check out the story. Isn't it interesting that the announcement was made to men who were considered to be pretty low on society's register? But, it was to them that the announcement was made. We don't know all that they had been told, but they obviously believed the angels' message. They came and saw, and then they left to spread the good news, all the while "glorifying and praising God." As a result, many heard the story and wondered about it.

We're told that Mary also pondered about what had happened. The birth had been foretold, so she knew that this little baby was to be the "Son of the Most High" (Luke 1:32). There is a popular Christmas song that asks, "Mary, did you know?" Well, she knew a lot. The angel had told her that this baby would be "great" and would have "the throne of David" and "reign over the house of Jacob forever in a "kingdom [that] will never end." (Luke 1:32-33). Even his name was given Mary and later to Joseph: Jesus "because he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). So, Mary knew a lot about God's purposes for this baby, but she couldn't understand it all. Thus, she wondered about what it all meant and how it would work out.

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

According to the custom and the practice laid down by God for His people, Mary and Joseph presented the child to God; He was circumcised on the 8th day, and He was given the name Jesus, which means, "God saves." Thus began Jesus' human life on earth, one that He would eventually offer as the only sacrifice that can take away the sins of the world forever.

Happy New Years from Christians for Christ. May this New Year bring you closer to God in many ways.

Reflection Questions

1. Jesus, as the Son of God was truly God in the flesh, whereas we as children of God are adopted into His family. In what ways have you yourself understood what it means to be an "adopted" son or daughter of God?

2. As adopted children of God, not under the Law but under grace, in what ways to you rejoice in being free from the law and enjoying this father-son type of relationship with God?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 12-25-202

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



These readings are for "The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas): Mass at Dawn."

Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes and Merry Christmas to you. Today, as we celebrate Christmas, we look at some readings from Isaiah and Luke which reveal the blessings granted to us both today and in the future as believers in the Lord Jesus. Then we see Luke's telling of the story of the shepherds seeing Jesus for the first time.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The reading from Isaiah deals with what Bible commentators and theologians call the "Millennial Reign of Christ." This is the period of time during which Jesus returns to the earth to restore His rightful rulership taken from him as a result of Satan's usurpation (refer to Genesis 3) and the subsequent crucifixion. Jesus willingly handed over His life as a Victor of sin, He is nowhere portrayed as a victim. Isaiah's prophecy deals with Jesus' future literal reign after the Great Tribulation period. During this time God reveals His special plan for the Nation of Israel with the capital city of Jerusalem along with the Gentiles ("nations") who believed in the name of the Lord Jesus. *"The nations will see your righteousness, And all kings your glory; And you will be called by a new name Which the mouth of the LORD will designate"* (Isa 62:2).

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

First Reading:

Isaiah 62:11-12 NAS95 11 Behold, the LORD has proclaimed to the end of the earth, Say to the daughter of Zion, "Lo, your salvation comes; Behold His reward is with Him, and His recompense before Him." 12 And they will call them, "The holy people, The redeemed of the LORD"; And you will be called, "Sought out, a city not forsaken."

God's message to Israel through Isaiah revealed that the salvation of the LORD comes from Him (v. 11) and not through human's good works or obedience to the Mosaic Law. At a future time, God's Holy people, Israel or the Jews, will be called "The redeemed of the LORD" (v. 12c). The capital city of God's chose people Israel will be called, "Sought out, a city not forsaken" (v. 12e).

When Isaiah wrote God's message the City of Jerusalem was under siege from the ungodly forces of the northern Jewish tribes and the Syrian Empire (Rezin the king of Aram, Isaiah 7:1). Although Jerusalem, the capital city of the southern tribes, was threatened, Isaiah saw both near term and far term prophecies for the beneficial treatment of God's ordained city. Isaiah saw in Chapter 7 (starting at verse 7) how God would deliver Jerusalem from her enemies. Isaiah's visions often had both near term and long-term fulfillments such as seen in Isaiah 7:14 with the birth of Isaiah's own son but also in the prophecy of Jesus' birth. "Isa 7:14 "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." Today's reading reveals God's long-term plans for the Nation of Israel and the capital city of Jerusalem. The forsaken city of Jerusalem, which was sacked by the Babylonians in 586 BC (but saved from the Assyrian's in the early 700BC timeframe) would once again be exulted (v. 12). Jerusalem will be a city "Sought out, a city not forsaken" (v. 12e), a name which bears the reminder of the previous perils faced by the people (the Jews) in that city.

We too share in the exaltation of God's city as ingrafted believers into God's plan of salvation through the Jewish Messiah. Although we have gained an early share of this inheritance, God's people the Jews will ultimately be granted full acceptance by Him through their reception of their Messiah Jesus.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

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

This reading from Paul's Letter to Titus was penned including instructions on godly living for leaders of the church, bondservants, and believers in general. Paul wrote to Titus who was located in Crete at the time (Titus 1:5) where he had departed from him with instructions to appoint elders in the cities (Titus 1:5). Chapter 3 continues the instructions regarding godly living, including being obedient to civil authorities (verse 1) and to show kind consideration to everyone (v. 2) as all of us were capable of as nonbelievers (v. 3).

Second Reading:

Titus 3:4-7 NAS95 4 But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, 5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

The opening word "But" connects the subsequent verses to the ideas presented in verse 3 which were to be kind to everyone because, "For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our lives in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another" (v. 3). This "Oh But God" introduction shows God renewed the hearts of believers by making them born from above (John 3:3) not upon the basis of their good works but according to God's mercy (v. 5) which is his free gift (see Ephesians 2:8-9). This salvation came only through faith in Jesus Christ which resulted in our regeneration (again, being "born from above as per John 3:3) and the renewal of our formerly evil hearts through the renewal by the Holy Spirit of God (v. 5). It is only through this unmerited favor (grace, v. 7) by which we as believers will be granted heirs of eternal life.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Today's Gospel reading from Saint Luke was after The Angel of the Lord had revealed that the Messiah had already been born in the City of David (Luke 2:11) and the appearance of a multitude of angels (v. 13).

Gospel Reading:

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

Luke 2:15-20 NAS95 15 When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us." 16 So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. 17 When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. 20 The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

Observant Jews would either have known about the prophecy of the Messiah's birth to be in the City of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2) or perhaps the Angel of the Lord told them this during his visit. When the shepherds went to Bethlehem Judah they found the baby Jesus just as Luke had told them. "This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger" (Luke 2:2). The shepherds then relayed all that the Angel had said to them. This provided validation to Mary and Joseph that Jesus was indeed to Messiah.

The birth of Jesus proceeded exactly as outlined by the Prophets right down to the details of timing and the exact location in which He would be born. Jesus' birth was an announcement of the outpouring of God's love upon the world, first through the Jews and later through the Gentile believers including you and me. This outpouring of God's love foreshadows a host of future blessings promised by God for His believers as we saw in the first reading from Isaiah. We saw in the second reading how God granted us a new heart, one made not of stone, but a renewed one through the power of God's Holy Spirit. As we celebrate Christmas this day, we can look back at how God has so richly blessed us through the sending of His one and only Son who died to take away our sins (Hebrews 9:26 – 28). May God richly bless you this Christmas Day.

Reflection Questions

1. The Gospel reading detailed how the shepherds left their flocks in order to visit the obscure village of Bethlehem in order to locate the long-awaited Messiah. Open your Bible to the Old Testament Book of Micah, chapter 5, verses 1 – 2.

Considering both the first two verses of Micah 5 and the reading from Isaiah, what were some of the curses pronounced upon the Jews?

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

2. Considering these same verses but also including the second reading from Titus, what were some the blessings that God either promised or brought to fulfillment through His believers?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 12-18-2022



This week as we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ, like last week, 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 it's important for us to explain the personality of King Ahaz, the King of the Southern Tribe of Judah, about whom Isaiah will be speaking. Ahaz was son of King Jotham, the latter whom was a godly ruler of Judah. 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 important 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 in order 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 and 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 gave King Ahaz the opportunity to trust in Him by asking for a sign. Instead of asking for a sign, King Ahaz spoke out of the pride and self-reliance of 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 of 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 important truths for our lives. First, Saint Matthew brought out the fact 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 means by which the sinless God-Man could come into the world. Second, since the virgin birth was a fulfillment of biblical prophecy, we can trust other prophecies that speak to areas of our life and ministry. This includes things like how the second coming of the Lord will play out, 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 in order 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 important prophetic fulfillment regarding the title of Jesus as Immanuel. This title means "God with us" which is an important 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 that we might come to the Father through Him. Second Jesus moved into the neighborhood to stay in order 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, there are many meaningful truths 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 was 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 apostles of the church, 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 believerswould be called "saints" and, like the apostles, called out to ministry (v. 7).

Saint Paul knew Jesus in a multi-faceted 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 I am 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 it make to you to know that Jesus is Immanuel, "God with us"?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 12-11-2022



Did you know that even as firm believers in Jesus Christ that 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 down 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 unfolding good news that God has not abandoned His people.

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

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading today is from Isaiah Chapter 35. Before we read the text, it's important to take note of the context, the audience to whom Isaiah was speaking, and information that 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 the Northern Kingdom was taken into captivity by Assyria. 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, one that 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 far 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." When we look back in hindsight, it's easy for us 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 which haven't been fulfilled yet, such as the future era known by biblical scholars as the Millennial Kingdom, it's more difficult to determine the order and timing of the events. This portion of Chapter 35 concerns the coming Kingdom which would be brought in by the Messiah. Looking back we understand that 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 in His second coming. This is why it's important 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 of Israel and the whole world of believers, in the context of the future 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, it seems that every part of it is broken at some level. Families are torn apart, lives are exhausted, 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 those who are called the "redeemed" and the "ransomed" of the LORD. To be redeemed is to be bought back 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 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 important to be patient and wait upon God, even when we see great injustices going on around us. Impatience was one of the issues that got into the way of the Jews properly 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 one near Jerusalem in which 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 usable (v. 3). In this age the city of Jerusalem would be the capital city of the universe (v. 1) and 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? It was only after Jesus was crucified, raised from the dead, and explained the Scriptures (Luke 24:27) to them that **some of them** understood. Even then, some doubted (Matthew 28:17).

Malachi was another prophet who called the people of God to be patient. He provided clear 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 important 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 in which he did this is to claim 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 went on to quote from the prophets. James, inspired by the Holy Spirit, 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 onto 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 that ever lived. I responded with a question. "Do you mean the greatest man that 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 that ever *lived*? Study the text of the Gospel lesson and as you read, try to ascertain why the greatest man that 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, he was commended by Jesus 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 that ever *lives*.

John the Baptist's shortcomings stand to give Christians hope, especially during the upcoming Christmas season, which is such a difficult time for so many people. Since even the second greatest man that ever lived experienced periods of doubt in his life, 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).

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

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 provide you with hope, especially during the Christmas season?

2. When you think of the terms "redeemed" and "ransomed" in regards 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)?

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 11-27-2022



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 a dimension of what will take place in the future. Knowing the future gives clarity to the present and helps us to 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 that we can be informed about ultimate reality, thus making wise decisions with the one life that each one of us gets.

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 actually 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 ultimately wasn't equipped with the resources necessary to win the battle. Even though he was forewarned, he did not take the warning seriously, and thus, suffered irrevocable damages.

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 own abilities, and underestimate the power of the enemy. 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 we were originally designed by God to rule and reign with Him (Genesis 1:26-27), but we are hounded by an enemy. 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. In spite of the fact that they were cautioned for 120 years (Genesis 6:3) the entire world perished except for Noah and his family (7:21-22). Though only Noah's family believed, it's certain that anyone who would have sought refuge in the ark would 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 in order to receive proper instruction about how to become 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 of 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:

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

The first reading is from the book of Isaiah, a prophet who spoke to the people of Judah, in a time when they were threatened by a formidable enemy. 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 at 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 eventual restoration and spiritual awakening of the Jewish people. In the first reading, we see the Prophet Isaiah making a prediction about 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 that 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 in order to avoid future judgment. In this part of Isaiah's message, the point is not necessarily a warning, but rather a disclosure to all the people in the world 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 now 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 our hearts are awakened by God's love, we no longer walk like the people living in darkness, without the love of God in their lives. We don't love in order to attain salvation; we love as a result of God's salvific work in our hearts. 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 went on to tell 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 be able to take things off through the putting on of the mind of Jesus Christ. There isn't a magical formula about how we can put on the mind of Jesus Christ, but some ways are through the study of 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 none of the 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 with the teaching of 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, too, 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 and 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 fall on deaf ears, as in the days of Noah. As a result, Jesus' coming will be a surprise to many, just as a thief in the night comes as a surprise to those who live in false security. Jesus' return will shock people who are with others who 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. Humanitarian 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 in order 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 also 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 and 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 into situations that require us to trust more in God. 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).

Reflection Questions

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

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

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 this 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 the 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 preparing 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?

Which parts of these messages would help give you resolve and encouragement to live with an eternal perspective for the hard decisions in your life?

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

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 11-20-2022

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. This week we learn about the appointment of godly King David. In the second reading, we learn about our position in Christ as believers. In the Gospel lesson, we see how faith in Christ leads us to eternal life the moment 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 was still holding 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 in order to give their full support to David as King. 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 many trials for David to finally 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 on to 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:

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

Let's take a look at what Saint Paul had to say to the Colossians in the second reading today.

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 deep truths about the nature of our relationship to God as believers in Jesus Christ. These truths are so profound that it's hard to comprehend all that Paul said 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) and 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 deep that it reminds me of the words of the Christian hymn "How Great Though 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 there 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 the crucifixion of Jesus. This is a sudden turn of events since last week in Chapter 21 Jesus gave a prediction of the destruction of the temple and looked forward to the time of His **second** coming. Read the lesson for today and pay particular attention to the insights that 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 that 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 in spite of the fact that he wasn't baptized and had never gone to church or synagogue?

What are 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 too have repented of our sin and trusted in Jesus' finished work on the cross that 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 that 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 time and also in the 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 sort of religious activity was granted eternal life with Jesus?

B. How long of a time period did Jesus promise would elapse between the present earthly time when the criminal was hanging on the cross and when he would be in paradise with Jesus?

2. Read this verse again 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.*" Considering both of 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 in which was some very important truths concerning our position in Christ. This continues the theme Paul began in the opening chapter. In that previous chapter were more truths that are important concerning our position in Christ. Read and reflect upon Paul's Letter 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 the some practical implications of what these verses mean 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

---

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 11-06-2022

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. This week we learn about how believers can be comforted through hard times as well as some insights into God's eternal kingdom he has prepared for us. We see that in the first reading from the Apocryphal book of Second Maccabees, then again in 2 Thessalonians.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Apocryphal book of Maccabees. This book provides much very important information about the happenings during the 400-year silent period before the birth of Christ, during which time no prophets of God spoke (1 Macc 9:27). The purpose of this book was to provide comfort to the Jews who were enduring intense persecution.

First Reading:

It happened that seven brothers with their mother were arrested
and tortured with whips and scourges by the king,

to force them to eat pork in violation of God's law.
One of the brothers, speaking for the others, said:
"What do you expect to achieve by questioning us?
We are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our ancestors."

At the point of death he said:
"You accursed fiend, you are depriving us of this present life,
but the King of the world will raise us up to live again forever.
It is for his laws that we are dying."

After him the third suffered their cruel sport.
He put out his tongue at once when told to do so,
and bravely held out his hands, as he spoke these noble words:
"It was from Heaven that I received these;
for the sake of his laws I disdain them;
from him I hope to receive them again."
Even the king and his attendants marveled at the young man's courage,
because he regarded his sufferings as nothing.

After he had died,
they tortured and maltreated the fourth brother in the same way.
When he was near death, he said,
"It is my choice to die at the hands of men
with the hope God gives of being raised up by him;
but for you, there will be no resurrection to life."
2 MC 7:1-2, 9-14

Today's reading from Second Maccabees was written during a period of intense persecution of God's people the Jews. The Nation of Israel was under terrible oppression leading up to the time when the tumult against the evil pagan king Antiochus IV Epiphanes climaxed resulting in the downfall of the beastly, antichrist figure by the Jewish hero Judas Maccabeus. The reading provides one tiny glimpse into the horrors the Nation experienced under Antiochus Epiphanes. The closing verses reveal the hope that the dying brother had in the One True God, and his hope that justice would prevail against his tormentors. One can only imagine the horrors that the Jews experienced during this time, times

which were eerily repeated under another antichrist type ruler, Adolph Hitler. The Bible describes how in the end times before the return of the Lord Jesus, how another ruler will emerge whom the Lord Jesus will crush. "*Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming*" (2Th 2:8).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Thessalonians. In this second Letter Paul addresses the people at Thessalonica with some important information regarding comfort during times of suffering.

Second Reading:

16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, 17 comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word. 1 Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you; 2 and that we may be delivered from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith. 3 But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. 4 And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will continue to do what we command. 5 And may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ. (2 Thessalonians 2:16 – 3:5)

In today's reading, we see that Paul experienced suffering and prayed for the Thessalonian believers to be comforted in their affliction. It is important to note that a biblical perspective never assumes that Christians will not suffer. The difference is that we have hope beyond this world, as Paul says, "eternal comfort" (v. 16). It is God's love that provides comfort, hope and strength to keep walking in the good works that He has prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). Instead of being sidetracked by suffering and opposition, Paul asked his fellow believers to pray for them that God would cause His Word to spread and be honored among the people who have not yet heard. Paul recognized the reality of suffering but did not see the situation as hopeless. He turned to God for help and hope.

The question for us to consider is, "What do *we* turn to for help and hope? Some turn to alcohol to

deaden the pain, or prescription drugs. Others turn to people like their spouse, children, or parents. While not all of these sources are bad, they are all finite. God is the only One big enough to take care of us. May we learn to turn to God for help and hope. Moreover, may we learn to share or need for prayer with others like Paul did so that we are not alone.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from Luke chapter 20 and provides some very important insights into to the nature of God's eternal kingdom. Let me provide some historical background to help you to understand Luke's message. First, although the concept may seem strange to us today, the Sadducees argument related to the Jewish legal concept known as Levirate Marriage found in Deuteronomy 25:5. "When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a strange man. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her to himself as wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her." The usefulness of Levirate Marriage in that society was something that we saw wonderfully displayed in the life of Ruth found in the Old Testament Book of the same name. Boaz, said, "Moreover, I have acquired Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, to be my wife in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance, so that the name of the deceased will not be cut off from his brothers or from the court of his birth place; you are witnesses today" (Ru 4:10). Levirate Marriage provided an important means of insuring the continuance of a family line. Ruth's marriage to Boaz was ***extremely*** important to God because it was through Ruth that Jesus was born! "Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab, Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse" (Mt 1:5).

Second, The Sadducees were an interesting bunch of legalistic Jewish believers who held the majority power in the religious court authority called the Sanhedrin in First Century Israel. They held different beliefs than the other group called the Pharisees. The Sadducees didn't believe in the afterlife, and only held the first five Books of the Bible to be authoritative. This last thing led them to hold some unusual beliefs since they didn't have the benefit of the vast array of historical or prophetic Books in the Old Testament Bible through which to properly interpret the Jewish Law. With this background in mind, let's take a deeper look at the Gospel text.

The Sadducees approached Jesus with false motives. They were not truly seeking truth from Jesus, but instead were trying to stump him. They wanted to trip Him up in this theological chess game. Looking back to the previous section Luke said about the scribes and Pharisees, "So they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, in order that they might catch Him in some

statement, so that they could deliver Him to the rule and the authority of the governor" (Luke 20:20). This previous verse was directed at the other group known as the Pharisees, the ones who *did* believe in the resurrection. In the Gospel text today Jesus addressed the particular beliefs of the other group, the Sadducees. Jesus, seeing the Sadducees motives and the faultiness of their presuppositions, treated them with dignity and grace. Yet they set up an impossible scenario for Jesus to answer based upon their belief system. Jesus explained where they were off base in their reasoning, and His points were as follows.

- Marriage is a valid paradigm for this age but not in the one to come.
- In order to receive eternal life, one must be considered worthy. How does one become worthy of life after death? He states they must be "sons of God" (v. 36). How does one become a son of God? Jesus said in the Gospel of John, Chapter 20:31-32, "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this Book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:30-31). Also, "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). Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live even if he dies" (John 11:25).
- We will not experience death in the life to come. There we will be like angels in that we no longer will have the capacity to die. We will be eternal, and in that regard, will be like God. "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is" (1John 3:2).
- Sons of God are the sons of the resurrection. God's resurrection life lives in us, making us like Him. The Apostle Peter said, "For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust" (2 Peter 1:4).
- Jesus pointed to the Old Testament Pentateuch, which was the only piece of the Bible in which the Sadducees believed, to prove His point about the resurrection. Jesus said that since Moses used the present tense in describing the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, this proved from the Sadducees own Holy Scriptures that there is life after death on earth. Checkmate, game over!

Gospel Reading:

27 Now there came to Him some of the Sadducees (who say that there is no resurrection), 28 and they questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that IF A MAN'S BROTHER DIES, having

a wife, AND HE IS CHILDLESS, HIS BROTHER SHOULD TAKE THE WIFE AND RAISE UP OFFSPRING TO HIS BROTHER. 29 "Now there were seven brothers; and the first took a wife, and died childless; 30 and the second 31 and the third took her; and in the same way all seven died, leaving no children. 32 "Finally the woman died also. 33 "In the resurrection therefore, which one's wife will she be? For all seven had her as wife." 34 And Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, 35 but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage; 36 for neither can they die anymore, for they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. 37 "But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the burning bush, where he calls the Lord THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB. 38 "Now He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to Him." (Luke 20:27-38 NASB)

The main point of this passage was Jesus' teaching of the truth of the resurrection, which is the central hope for Christian believers. Jesus taught His disciples that he would be resurrected, and later all of His believers have the hope that they too will one day rise from the dead with an eternal, perfect body. The Apostle Paul taught a great deal about the importance of the resurrection of Jesus. Let's take time to read what he said.

But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. (1 Corinthians 15:13-19)

Even though the Sadducees only believed that they would go around once in life, they believed in the biblical truths from the Old Testament Pentateuch. Jesus showed them that they were responsible for their actions in this life. Jesus graciously taught them through their own Scriptures that their eternal destiny was a direct result of their choices made during their lives. They were responsible for paying careful attention to the walk with God. Jesus said, "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). Believers are transformed through the resurrection into a "world" that is also transformed, a place where sin no longer exists, and God will walk among us. As believers, we can look forward to eternal life with God through the promises made by Jesus that "we are saved by grace through faith and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

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

Reflection Questions

1. What is the importance of the resurrection for you? What difference does knowing the truth of the resurrection make in your day-to-day life as a Christian?

2. Describe the importance of sharing your faith with nonbelievers. How does the promise of God to give you a new eternally perfect body free from pain and one in which you will be free from sin and able to stand with God in your renewed, eternal flesh, motivate you to share with others this good news?

Copyright Statement and Source for Apocryphal Readings:

Excerpts from the Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America, second typical edition © 2001, 1998, 1997, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC. Used with permission. All rights reserved. No portion of this text may be reproduced by any means without permission in writing from the copyright owner. Source: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings

---

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 10-30-2022

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. Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we look at a reading from Saint Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians and then the Gospel reading from Saint Luke.

First Reading:

The first reading is from the Apocryphal book of Wisdom.

Before the LORD the whole universe is as a grain from a balance
or a drop of morning dew come down upon the earth.
But you have mercy on all, because you can do all things;
and you overlook people's sins that they may repent.
For you love all things that are
and loathe nothing that you have made;
for what you hated, you would not have fashioned.
And how could a thing remain, unless you willed it;
or be preserved, had it not been called forth by you?
But you spare all things, because they are yours,

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

O LORD and lover of souls,
for your imperishable spirit is in all things!
Therefore you rebuke offenders little by little,
warn them and remind them of the sins they are committing,
that they may abandon their wickedness and believe in you, O LORD!
Wisdom WIS 11:22-12:2

The reading from the Book of Wisdom affirms the biblical value that God places upon repentance. God is patient with us as sinners so that He gives us the time and wisdom we need to repent. Saint Peter affirmed this. "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). God calls us, as the reading says, to "abandon (our) wickedness and believe in (Him)", the only source of total and true forgiveness. "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Even though "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a), "the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23b).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

It was a very windy midsummer day in northern Michigan as I raced my windsurf board across the Straits of Mackinaw on my way back from Mackinaw Island, Michigan. Earlier, I sailed between the towers of the mighty Mackinaw Bridge and then returned to the shore of Lake Huron to make a few adjustments on my sail. Next, I sailed seven miles across the Straits to Mackinaw Island and was on my way back towards the campground where we were staying. At this point the wind began calming and shifting in a direction that was going to make it very difficult to return to the spot from where I had launched. Eventually I made it back to the sandy shore of Lake Huron but was a few miles down from where I launched. I walked up the hill, borrowed a cell phone from someone, and called my wife to pick me up. I heard a strange silence on the other end, and she said, "You're alive!" As it turned out someone had given some bad information to the police who then called the Coast Guard thinking that I had gone down somewhere in the Straits. This led to a series of cascading events including a large manhunt with a helicopter, rescue divers, and local police operating from a command center in a marina in Mackinaw City. Evidently, a fellow camper had been watching me from the shore and at some point, she couldn't locate me. She then proceeded to tell one of the authorities at the campground who then called the police. The police then alerted the Coast Guard and the manhunt was on! The whole affair began from one piece of bad information. [*If you are interested you can read the story online here:*

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

http://www.cheboygannews.com/article/20130720/NEWS/130719421]

In the same way that a false report led to a series of cascading events that day while I was windsurfing, false information in the church can lead to a plethora of serious effects on the Christian church. This was the case in the second reading today from Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians. This was Paul's second written communication to this group of believers who had believed some false information concerning the timing of and events surrounding the return of the Lord Jesus. The overall purpose of the letter also included the encouragement of the believers in Thessalonica during their ongoing persecution for their faith.

Read the text including verses 3 – 12 which were skipped in the lectionary and are necessary to understand the context and the points which Paul was addressing.

Second Reading:

11 With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. 12 We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. 2:1 Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, 2 not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. 3 Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. 4 He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. 5 Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? 6 And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. 7 For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie 12 and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness. (2 THES 1:11-2: 12 NIV)

The key verses that revealed the context of Paul's address in this section were chapter 2 verses 1-2. "Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come." Evidently, the people had believed a false report from a forged letter reportedly written by Paul that Jesus had already returned. This news was very disturbing to the Thessalonians because they were enduring persecution for Jesus and if He had already returned then they had possibly been suffering for nothing. Paul had explained in his first letter to them how believers would meet the Lord Jesus upon his return. "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). The phrase "caught up" in the original language is the word "harpazo" which means to snatch or take away. The same word translated in the Latin is "rapturo." Although the timing of this biblical event is unknown, Paul's teaching provided hope for the Thessalonian believers who were undergoing persecution. Paul was clear that Jesus' return wasn't something that they possibly could have missed since every single believer would be affected.

The Day of the Lord (DOL) is a very significant topic in both the Old and New Testaments. The DOL is the time when Jesus will return for His Church and the Father will pour out His wrath on unbelievers. The interpretation of the meaning of DOL depends upon the theological grid from which you view the events of the end times. Most scholars believe that the DOL occurs in the middle of what is called the tribulation period, what the Book of Daniel calls this period the 70'th week. "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city" (Daniel 9:24). The DOL marks the beginning of the second half of the period known as the Great Tribulation. Joel said about this period, "Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand–a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as never was of old nor ever will be in ages to come" (Joel 2:1-2). He also said that this was a time of redemption, for many people (especially Jews) will come to faith. "And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the survivors whom the LORD calls" (v.32). Like the "catching up" from 1 Thess 4:17, the DOL wasn't something that the believers wouldn't notice. The purpose of Paul's writing to the church in Thessalonica was to correct this erroneous belief.

Paul continued with a very detailed explanation of the series of events that would lead up to the return of the Lord Jesus to carry away His Church. Paul said that a "man of lawlessness" would be revealed, a future world leader known throughout the Scripture as the "Antichrist." This satanic

person would "oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God" (v.4). The lawlessness of this end time will be held back by the power of God until the time that the man of sin is revealed (vv. 7-8). The man of sin will be accompanied by "the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders" (v. 9). The people that remain on the earth during this time will "refuse to love the truth and so be saved" (v. 10b). This leads to a terrible conclusion. "For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness" (vv. 11-12). The powerful delusion is partly the counterfeit miracles, signs, and wonders brought about through satanic powers that are allowed to rule the earth during this terrible period of time. The satanic deception of the Antichrist, the person known as the False Prophet, and Satan constitute an unholy trinity that will wage war upon the people left on earth during the end times. To read about these three evil personalities read Revelation Chapters 12 and 13.

After the believers in Thessalonica read Paul's prophecy about what would happen around the time of the Lord's return, they would have been comforted to know that they hadn't missed Jesus as they had heard among the rumors that had been circulating. Paul's teaching about the end times helped them to view their suffering in light of the epic battle that would rage in the era when the Lord Jesus really did return. The "battle" though, is no battle at all, for "the Lord Jesus will overthrow [him] with the breath of his mouth" (v. 8). That shows us the undisputed ruling power of our Lord, which should bring us hope and comfort, just as it did for the Thessalonian Church.

Our take away from this passage is to heed Paul's warning. Don't be deceived – the Day of the Lord is still to come. Therefore, love the truth and let it lead you to safety. Many books have been written on the subject of the end times and we hope that everyone investigates these matters for themselves by carefully reading and studying the Bible. The brief introduction that we gave today perhaps raises more questions than it answered! We will close this brief introduction to *eschatology*, or the study of the things of the end, and move onto the Gospel lesson.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson for today is from Luke Chapter 19. It is essential to survey the context of the verses we are studying today in order to understand the full context and therefore the meaning of the text. If we back up to Luke 18:18 – 27 we found an occasion where Jesus was confronted by a certain person that was both a ruler and chief tax collector. This ruler asked Jesus, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (v. 18). Jesus explained to him the requirements of the Jewish

Law, and then addressed wealth, the particular obstacle to finding God that existed in the ruler's heart. "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (18b). Read the subsequent verses in this section.

23 When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. 24 Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! 25 Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." 26 Those who heard this asked, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus replied, "What is impossible with men is possible with God." (Luke 18:23-27).

Jesus mentioned the impossibility of a camel being able to pass through the eye of a needle. Throughout the ages, a story circulated that goes something like this. Somewhere along the wall in Jerusalem there was a gate called the "eye of the needle" which required a man to dismount his animal in order to pass through at night when all of the other gates were closed. As the saying goes, the existence of this certain gate meant that when Jesus spoke of a camel going through the eye of a needle he was referring to this particular feature in Jerusalem. The legend went on to say that in this Gospel story Jesus wasn't actually saying that it was impossible for a rich man to enter heaven because he was referring to this certain pint-sized entrance along the wall of Jerusalem. What he meant was that for a man to be saved he would have to prostrate himself before God and crawl on his knees in the same way that he could fit through the tiny gate. God does require a humble and prostrate heart in order to come to faith and to a certain extent, this legend is helpful if interpreted that way. Many people have researched this matter and have found that no such gate has ever existed in Jerusalem. Jesus gave an even better explanation of the whole matter in the text itself. Jesus knew that this young man was relying heavily upon his wealth and that it would be very difficult for him to lay it down in order to rely only upon Jesus for salvation. Jesus clarified that it wasn't impossible for rich people to be saved, but this could *only happen through the power of God*.

With this context in mind, let's move onto the Gospel lesson in Luke Chapter 19 in which Jesus encounters an unusual rich man that *does* receive salvation through the power of God. He didn't even have to locate the fictitious "eye of the needle" in Jerusalem!

Gospel Reading:

1 Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. 3 He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man

he could not, because of the crowd. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. 5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." 6 So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. 7 All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'" 8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." 9 Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." Luke 19:1-10

Zacchaeus' statement about giving away his wealth and repaying those he had cheated provided a glimpse into the true condition of his repentant heart. Jesus, who through the power of the Holy Spirit was able to read people's minds, understood that Zacchaeus truly did turn from pursuing wealth as his god and instead to rely upon God for his salvation. With the exhibition of his faith, Zacchaeus revealed that he was saved through belief in God. Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this house" (v. 9b). Once again, we saw that Jesus chose someone to pursue, whom everyone in the community knew was a lost sinner, to "save what was lost" (v. 10b). As we have pointed out in last week's study notes, good works and intentions do not make us a Christian, they merely reveal the condition of our heart. In this case, Zacchaeus' good works indicated that his heart had truly been changed by God's power.

What does it take for a person with power, privileges and wealth to become a Christian? The story about the Philippian jailor in the Book of Acts helps to shed light on what it takes for a person of authority like Zacchaeus in Luke's Gospel to be saved. In this particular story, the gates of the prison flew open after an earthquake, and the jailor feared for his life because he was responsible for the security of the men inside. If one person escaped, it might mean the death penalty for him. After the jailor awoke from the earthquake, he was sure that the prisoners were gone. Instead, he found Paul and Silas inside. "He then brought them out and asked, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' They replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved– you and your household'" (Acts 16:30-31). Rich people and people in positions of authority, such as this jailor can have a very difficult time coming to faith in Jesus Christ. However, through the power of God, even the hardest hearts can be broken. The conclusion of the story is as follows. "Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had *come to believe in God*— he and his whole family" (Acts 16:32, 34 emphasis added). The Philippian jailor was saved in the same way as Zacchaeus, through faith in Jesus Christ by the hearing of the Word of God.

Reflection Questions

1. Paul told the Thessalonians not to be deceived, but instead to love the truth that will save them. Read the following list of false beliefs. With which of these false beliefs can you identify? Pick one and then study the corresponding verses such that you understand the corresponding truth.

A. False Belief: All religions lead to God. Anyone that acts according to their conscience, even if they don't trust in Jesus, will go to heaven.

John 3:16-21 NIV 16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. 19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

Acts 4:8-12 NIV 8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! 9 If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, 10 then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. 11 He is "'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.' 12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

John 14:6 NIV 6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Matthew 13:40-43 NIV 40 "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. 42 They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where

there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

Mt 25:41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

B. False Belief: God doesn't provide salvation to people who "just" repent and believe, salvation can only come through the authority of the Church.

Luke 23:32-43 NIV 32 Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. 33 When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals– one on his right, the other on his left. 34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. 35 The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One." 36 The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar 37 and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." 38 There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. 39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" 40 But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." 42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

C. False Belief: I'm basically a good person. If I go to church every Sunday and Holy Day as well as adhere to most of the teachings of the Church, I will go to heaven.

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1Corinthians 6:9-11 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor

homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

John 14:6 NIV 6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Acts 4:12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

John 3:3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

2. Now that you see these false beliefs contradict the truth, meditate on the following scripture. Then, take some time to talk to God, confess any false beliefs that you may hold, and ask God the Father to help you love the truth.

Romans 10:9-13 NIV 9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. 11 As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." 12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile– the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, 13 for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Copyright Statement and Source for Apocryphal Readings:

Excerpts from the Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America, second typical edition © 2001, 1998, 1997, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC. Used with permission. All rights reserved. No portion of this text may be reproduced by any means without permission in writing from the copyright owner. Source: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings