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 12-24-2023



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the first reading from the Book of Second Samuel chapter 7. Then we move to the second reading from Paul's Letter to the Romans and conclude with the Gospel lesson from the Gospel of Saint Luke. Christmas is only one from this Sunday's lesson, so we pray that all of you have a very Merry Christmas.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Second Samuel. This is the second Book following First Samuel and was originally one Book until the separation made by the translators of the Greek Old Testament known as the Septuagint. First and Second Samuel was written by an unknown author and chronicled the events from the birth of the Prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 1:1-28) until the last words of King David (2 Samuel 23:1-7). First Samuel opens with a description of the corruption of the Levitical priesthood (1 Samuel 2:12-17) and the threats from Israel's main enemy the Philistines who captured the Ark of the Covenant (1 Samuel 4). One of the main things that happened in these two Books was the pronouncement by God of the Davidic Covenant. This is the Covenant which is God's promises to David made through Nathan and found in 2 Samuel 7, the text of today's reading.

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Note: The intervening verses that were skipped in the reading were included below in order to provide the full context and meaning.

First Reading:

> *1 Now it came about when the king lived in his house, and the LORD had given him rest on every side from all his enemies, 2 that the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within tent curtains." 3 Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your mind, for the LORD is with you." 4 But in the same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying, 5 "Go and say to My servant David, 'Thus says the LORD, "Are you the one who should build Me a house to dwell in? 6 For I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the sons of Israel from Egypt, even to this day; but I have been moving about in a tent, even in a tabernacle. 7 Wherever I have gone with all the sons of Israel, did I speak a word with one of the tribes of Israel, which I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?'"' 8 "Now therefore, thus you shall say to My servant David, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, "I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people Israel. 9 I have been with you wherever you have gone and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make you a great name, like the names of the great men who are on the earth. 10 I will also appoint a place for My people Israel and will plant them, that they may live in their own place and not be disturbed again, nor will the wicked afflict them any more as formerly, 11 even from the day that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. The LORD also declares to you that the LORD will make a house for you. 12 When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, 15 but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. 16 Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever."'" (2 Samuel 7:1-16).*

According to the rules given to Moses, the glory of the Lord's dwelling place was in the tabernacle, but King David desired to build a temple for God (v. 2). Nathan the Prophet told David instead that the Lord would make a house for him (v. 11) and that his descendent (whom we know was his son Solomon) would be the one to build the temple of God (vv. 12-13). The promises of God to David as relayed by the Prophet Nathan included first, that David would have rest from his enemies (v. 11), that his descendent would build a temple of God (vv. 12-13), and finally that the "throne of David" would be established forever (v. 13 b). We understand that after God later revealed the mystery (as we will see in the second reading), the One who would sit upon the throne wasn't King David's son

Solomon, but the Lord Jesus Himself. Verse 14 is a description of Jesus' Second Advent, the coming rulership of Jesus during his coming earthly reign as we see confirmed by Revelation 12:5, "And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne." Israel is the one who gave birth to Jesus, and at His First Advent He was taken up into heaven (Acts 1:9). Jesus is the One that will sit on the Throne of David. Although Mary was the earthly host of Jesus, He was born as a child of the Nation of Israel, "a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars" (Revelation 12:1). Jesus is the Messiah of the Jews, and through the mystery of the church the Messiah of the Gentiles as well.

As you were reading the verses from 2 Samuel, it can be confusing as to whether the author was speaking about King David or the coming Messiah, the Son of David. The people in King David's era hearing Samuel's prophecies may have desired to see David's greater son and believed that somehow Solomon would reign forever. However, Jesus is the One called the Son of David. In the opening of Matthew's Gospel Jesus is called the Son of David (Matthew 1:1). Later in Matthew Chapter 9 two blind men called out, "Have mercy on us Son of David" (Matthew 9:27). Even those that doubted knew Jesus' identity. At one point after Jesus had performed great miracles the crowd called out, "this man cannot be the Son of David, can he?" (Matthew 12:23b). When Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the crowd cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David; BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 21:9). Jesus had a messianic title, and was the One to whom was promised His reign would endure forever (2 Samuel 7:13).

As we celebrate Christmas tomorrow, this is the Royal Person that we commemorate being born in the manger, where all ceremonial lambs are born. After Jesus' resurrection, He "sat down at the right hand of the Father" (Hebrews 10:12), "having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time" (Ibid). He is "waiting from that time onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET" (Hebrews 10:13). "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:13). Paul said that salvation is a free gift that comes through faith. "8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). No matter how hard we try, Jesus' work is still finished for us. We walk in the strength of God's power for His purposes as we see in the very next verse of Ephesians. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). As believers, we have been sealed by the Holy Spirit, as Paul said in Chapter 1 of Ephesians. "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation–having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13). These are the spiritual truths that we are celebrating during Christmas.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

As we move on to the second reading from the closing version of the Paul's Letter to the Romans, we see that the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus was the fulfillment of a great mystery that wasn't understood until after He came. The Gospel of Jesus Christ was something that was hidden in the former times, but is now understood, a mystery revealed by God through Jesus Christ.

Second Reading:

> *25 Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, 26 but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith; 27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen. (Romans 16:25-27)*

The Good News (or Gospel) is appointed as a light to all the nations (v. 26d) which leads to the obedience of faith (v. 26e). Although this was a mystery in the ages past (v. 25b), it was manifested both by the many prophetic verses in the Scriptures and through the voice of the Prophets as we saw in the first reading. Paul said more about this mystery Ephesians:

> *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 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; (Ephesians 3:2-5)*

The salvation of the Gentiles through Jesus' sacrifice and the church age was a mystery that wasn't revealed until after Jesus came. Although the prophecies were there concerning the ingrafting of the Gentiles into God's kingdom (see for example Isaiah 56:6-8 "foreigners," the salvation of the Gentile Rahab in Joshua 2:9-11, the salvation of the Ninevites in the Book of Jonah). Isaiah was more explicit about this coming salvation for the Gentiles. He said about Jesus, the Root of Jesse, "And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him, And His resting place shall be glorious" (Isaiah 11:10). Again, these are the spiritual truths that we celebrate during Christmas

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson is from Saint Luke and records the miraculous event of the birth of Jesus to the Virgin Mary.

Gospel Reading:

> *26 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. 28 And coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." 29 But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. 30 The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; 33 and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end." 34 Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" 35 The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. 36 And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God." 38 And Mary said, "Behold, the bondslave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. (Luke 1:26-38)*

Many points arise from the reading. First, Mary is called the "favored one" in verse 28. She said about herself later in this chapter, "For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondslave; For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed" (Luke 1:48). One can hardly imagine the calling which God placed her to be the bearer of the Son of God. In the reading, God called Mary who found favor with God who was to be the bearer of God's Son Jesus who would through the "ark" (see below) of His bodily sacrifice save the world from their sin. Jesus was conceived not through normal human means but through the virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit (v. 34). Mary, was obviously very perplexed at all that was happening and called out to the Angel to explain these things (v. 34), who was more than glad to do so. Second, Mary's Son would be called "the Son of God" (v. 35) and the Lord would give to him the throne of David (v. 32), the fulfillment of the prophecy that we saw in the first reading. Finally, Mary (and Joseph) were obedient to God in naming their Son Jesus, and Mary promised her obedience to God by calling herself "bondslave of the Lord" (v. 37). By the way, Jesus is from the Hebrew name "Jeshua," which means "the Lord is Salvation." Jesus is the salvation of the entire world, which is why we are so pleased to

celebrate His birth on Christmas.

Noah, who came centuries before, was also called "blessed", and it was through the righteous and faithful acts of Noah that the world was saved from the flood. God said, "But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD" (Genesis 6:8). Noah built an ark to save the people of the world from the wrath of God that was to literally be poured out through the Flood. The Blessed Mary on the other hand, bore the Son of God to be the ark of salvation for all who would believe. These similarities between Noah and Mary are important because they show how these two people were obedient to the difficult challenges that God placed upon their lives. Although it's okay to ask questions when we discern the calling that God places upon **our** lives, it's also crucially important as believers to carry out His instructions.

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 Luke 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).

May you and your family have a very Merry Christmas.

Reflection Questions

1. In the first reading, what began as a promise that David's son (we know as Solomon) would build a temple for God (v. 13a) expanded into a throne that would endure forever (v. 13b). The temple is a place where people gather to worship God, and in the Old Testament was a place inside of which God's Spirit dwelled. We know the ruler of the temple is Jesus forever, but how can the throne of the temple endure forever, when we know that it was destroyed in 586 BC and again in AD70?

2. In light of your answer to the first question, read what Saint Paul had to say in the Letters to the Corinthians. "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?" (1Corinthians 6:19). "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16). "And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people'" (2 Corinthians 6:16).

How would you change your answer in light of the spiritual truth that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit on which Jesus is (and will) reign forever?