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

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 123: 08-24-2025



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, our first reading is from the final chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah. The passage is prophetic in nature; it touches on events in the last days of God's plan for redemption. The second reading from the Epistle to the Hebrews deals with the challenging subject of discipline and how God uses it in the lives of His children. Finally, we read more about Jesus' teaching ministry as He traveled through Israel. In this passage, He includes some tough lessons that are important for us to understand.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The book of Isaiah is like a small Bible. Chapters 1-39 speak of Israel amid the nations (like the Old Testament, consisting of 39 books in many versions). Chapters 40-66 speak of comfort in the revelation of Christ (like the New Testament's 26 books). This last section begins with John the Baptist, climaxes in chapter 53 about the sacrifice of Christ, and ends with the Millennial Kingdom. Today's portion was written to educate Israel about the distant future of the Messianic Kingdom of

God and the ultimate restoration of the nation.

First Reading:

> *Isaiah 66:18-21 NAS95 18 "For I know their works and their thoughts; the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and see My glory. 19 I will set a sign among them and will send survivors from them to the nations: Tarshish, Put, Lud, Meshech, Rosh, Tubal and Javan, to the distant coastlands that have neither heard My fame nor seen My glory. And they will declare My glory among the nations. 20 Then they shall bring all your brethren from all the nations as a grain offering to the LORD, on horses, in chariots, in litters, on mules and on camels, to My holy mountain Jerusalem," says the LORD, "just as the sons of Israel bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD. 21 I will also take some of them for priests and for Levites," says the LORD.*

In these verses, Isaiah moves from speaking of God's judgment upon those unfaithful to Him to announcing a future gathering of all nations. Representatives will come into God's presence and be introduced to His great glory. Then, they will be sent out to the countries of the world that have not known God. Someone has called this the Great Commission for Israel (similar to the Great Commission to the Church in Matthew 28). These "missionaries" will declare the glory of God to the nations.

The result will be a great migration, multitudes coming to Jerusalem, described as "My holy mountain." The text tells us they will come in various ways: "on horses, in chariots, in litters, on mules and camels." Notably, God will choose some of these new believers to be priests and to be used in serving capacities for God.

One might ask, "When will these things come to pass?" The answer would require a meticulous study of prophetic Scriptures—Old and New Testament texts—to be definitive. The Bible often speaks of a great tribulation in the end times. Many believe it is the saints (believers) who come out of that tribulation period who will be the messengers to bring to God those who had not yet heard of His love and grace and who, as a result of this witness, come into a relationship of faith in God.

No matter the timing of this prophecy, the recurring theme in this passage is God's glory. What is God's glory? "Glory" is difficult to define because it does not represent a concrete object. It means a quality or essence, much like "beauty." God's glory reflects His beauty and perfect nature,

manifesting His unique and sought-after presence. Glory is the positive reference to His attractive reputation, which is manifested in who He is and displayed in what He does. We get a sense of God's glory by the loving dynamic within the three persons of the Godhead, with His generous and gracious interaction with humankind (as recorded in Scripture), and in His display of exotic beauty and intricate design in nature (general revelation). God's glory has been on display for all to see in creation, so that Saint Paul says: "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse . . . Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man . . . " (Romans 1:20, 22-23).

Responding to God's glory and living in light of this reality is an integral part of a well-lived life with eternal qualities to it. In the passage of Isaiah, it is the distinct privilege of people to declare His fame and reflect His glory to those who do not know. In our lives, we have the privilege to live for God's fame, and not our daily. We can choose to order our lives around giving glory to God, or we can exchange this opportunity to glorify self, honor the finite things of this world, or value what was created over the Creator Himself. Though the results are not always immediate, this passage reminds us that God's glory is worth pursuing.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The central theme of Hebrews is Christ's preeminence. It involves some fundamental and profound theology and includes efficient ideas about Christian living. In fact, the last three chapters provide valuable teaching about walking in faith (ch. 11), walking with hope (ch. 12), and walking in love (ch. 13). Today's reading provides a helpful lesson about the value and necessity of discipline, which often may be painful but always serves God's good purpose.

Second Reading:

Note: Includes verses 8-10 omitted from the reading.

> *Hebrews 12:5-13 NAS95 5 and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; 6 FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE*

> *DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES." 7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. 11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. 12 Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.*

The section begins with a reminder that discipline comes from God, and it happens in the lives of all Christians ("every son," v. 6). In fact, the very reality that God disciplines someone proves that person's sonship; he indeed belongs to God, because parents don't discipline someone else's children. It should be noted here that the words in the text express discipline and chastisement, not judgment and punishment. There is a difference.

Most people do not like pain and suffering, and we pray fervently to be rid of them. But, whatever the reason for the pain—whether it's the discipline of God or the consequences of natural infirmities, God can use the suffering for His good purposes. One writer, who has suffered a debilitating disease for many years, wrote:

"If my parents could have stopped me from being afflicted by this disease, they would have. But God didn't, and He's the perfect Father, knowing what will make me a better person. Because of their love, my parents would most likely have insulated me from some of the greatest lessons of life that I could learn only through my suffering. Because of God's love for me, He dare not withhold the pain and suffering."

But why is it necessary for God to discipline His children? What are God's motives? Unfortunately, many of us have been disciplined by an earthly parent out of impatience, sometimes to show us who's boss, or to get us to cooperate with their plan, with no interest in our nurture. Some of the tactics that earthly parents wrongly use are guilt and shame, producing in us a fear of punishment and a surface compliance to the desires of the one with authority. If we view God like our earthly parents, then we have some soul work to do to trust God in the midst of His discipline.

God does not discipline His children to comply begrudgingly or even to get even with the wrongs we have done. God lovingly disciplines His children to help shape a worldview in our hearts that pries our fingers off self-reliance, independence, and autonomous pride; and in exchange, opens our arms to embrace a God-reliant walk with Him. Saint Paul wrote of a time when he was under so much affliction that he even despaired of life itself. As a result of this time of discipline, Paul internalized a deep reliance on God, saying: "We had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead" (2 Corinthians 1:9).

In our immaturity (just like a child), we do not know how much we need our Father. We often live as if we are in charge and give a quick nod to God when we want to do well on an exam, need a new job, or feel like we are in a bind. But God, in His kindness, knows this is low-level living in Him. Through having the proverbial rug pulled out from underneath us, He helps us to live in light of reality and recognize that we cannot do life on our own. In our disorientation and desolation, we desperately seek God's abiding presence and find our consolation in Him (not in our sense of control or carefully arranged circumstances). We begin to internalize His value system in our soul by living in dependence on Him, which is a "severe mercy" on God's part. God's motive is to bring life that is truly life (John 10:10) to us amid His strategic and loving discipline.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

We hear a lot today about intolerance. We are urged to tolerate almost everyone and everything that someone might believe or do. Moral standards of right and wrong seem to have evaporated in modern society, and common sense has been replaced with personal preference. But, there is a standard; there is a right way, and everything contrary to that must be wrong. Jesus and Christianity are often criticized because of their claim that there is only one way to God. Today's reading emphasizes that truth in the teaching of Jesus Himself, who claimed to be the way (John 14:6).

Gospel Reading:

> *Luke 13:22-30 NAS95 22 And He was passing through from one city and village to another, teaching, and proceeding on His way to Jerusalem. 23 And someone said to Him, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" And He said to them, 24 "Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. 25 Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, 'Lord, open up to us!' then He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know where you are from.' 26 Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in*

> *our streets'; 27 and He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you are from; DEPART FROM ME, ALL YOU EVILDOERS.' 28 In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being thrown out. 29 And they will come from east and west and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God. 30 And behold, some are last who will be first and some are first who will be last."*

Luke records essential lessons from Jesus' teaching as the Lord makes His way to Jerusalem, where He is to suffer and die. He had told His disciples about His destiny, although they did not fully understand His plan of salvation until after the promised resurrection. Some had understood His teaching about the necessity to come to God through Him, and one asked Him specifically about it. Are there, he wonders, only a few that will be saved? Jesus answers by describing the entrance to faith as "the narrow door." His further comments can leave no doubt about the exclusiveness of the way to God.

Not all who feel entitled to enter can do so. The "head of the house," no doubt a reference to God the Father, surely has the right to open and close the door to His own house, and knocking on the door will not achieve entrance if you are unknown to the householder. He clarifies that the past physical association with Him (eating and drinking, for example) is insufficient. People also claim they listened to His teaching in their streets, but this is still insufficient. Those entitled to enter are those who enter through the "narrow door." What is this narrow door that Jesus is referring to?

In the Gospel of John, Jesus answers the question by metaphorically referring to himself as the door to the sheepfold. Inside the sheepfold, the sheep are safe and find refuge. He said, "Truly, truly I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:7-10). It is clear from this and other parts of Scripture (John 14:6, Acts 4:12) that Jesus is the only entry point to eternal life.

It is clear, then, that there is no salvation apart from genuine trust in the grace of Jesus and His finished work on the cross, evidenced by His resurrection. He indeed is the only way to God. Those who reject the opportunity to trust Him will weep and gnash their teeth when they see Israel's fathers and prophets in the kingdom, and they are left out. These words should bring them to repentance so they can "recline at the table in the kingdom of God." The last—the down-and-outers, the ones who do not feel entitled—will be first in the kingdom because they have accepted the lordship of Jesus in their lives.

Reflection Questions

1. The pinnacle of God's glory is displayed in His work of salvation accomplished through Christ's perfect life, His death, and His resurrection. How has God's glory changed you from pursuing the corruptible things of this finite world to orienting your life around the incorruptible beauty of God's nature? Where do you see God's glory displayed in your life's choices, attitudes, and values? Where would you like to see God's continued work in your life and through your life to reflect His glory?

2. How did your parents discipline you as a child? What tactics/motives reflected the heart of God, and what tactics/motives did not reflect the heart of God? What parts of that experience do you need to exchange to embrace God's loving discipline in your life? What seasons of discipline do you need to revisit in your mind and mentally process with this new perspective of God's heart for internalizing His value system in you? How can this perspective on God's discipline being part of our sonship encourage you and those you love to stay faithful to God amid suffering?

3. Since Jesus spoke metaphorically of entering through the narrow door, what does it mean to do this spiritually? How does this metaphor get lived out in your life? It might require a first-time decision to follow Him if you have never articulated your allegiance to Christ or daily moments of trust to show your allegiance to Him as Lord. What would it be worth to you to recline at the table in the kingdom of God and be with the Old Testament saints for eternity? How might you grow in valuing this eternal reward over short-term gratification that gets in the way of reflecting God's glory?