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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 7-24-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **7-24-2016**. This week we cover three excellent readings in which we learn more about God's righteous nature, the forgiveness that we have through Jesus Christ, and how Jesus teaches us to pray.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading from Genesis picks up where we left off in last week's reading where we saw Abraham meet with two angels and the Lord Jesus Himself. This week's reading deals with Abraham's pleading with God concerning the people of the region of Sodom and Gomorrah. These cities were located just north of the Dead Sea in an area known for its great fertility. Today's reading chronicles the events leading up to the destruction of the cities turning them into the wasteland that they are today.

First Reading:

Genesis 18:20-32 NAS95 20 And the LORD said, "The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. 21 I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know." 22 Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham was still standing before the LORD. 23 Abraham came near and said, "Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 24 Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will You indeed sweep it away and not spare the

place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? 25 Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" 26 So the LORD said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account." 27 And Abraham replied, "Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am but dust and ashes. 28 Suppose the fifty righteous are lacking five, will You destroy the whole city because of five?" And He said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there." 29 He spoke to Him yet again and said, "Suppose forty are found there?" And He said, "I will not do it on account of the forty." 30 Then he said, "Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak; suppose thirty are found there?" And He said, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." 31 And he said, "Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord; suppose twenty are found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy it on account of the twenty." 32 Then he said, "Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak only this once; suppose ten are found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy it on account of the ten."

The LORD told Abraham about the terrible sin of the people of the region of Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 20). The text says that the LORD would go "down" to Sodom (v. 20), a word which brings with it two meanings, geographically south and downwards spiritually. Looking back to chapter 13, we see how Abraham's nephew Lot chose to live in this fertile region when the land would not support both of their herds and there was a conflict among their herdsmen (Genesis 13:7). Abraham, a man who was well acquainted with God and knew of His grace and forgiveness, pleaded with the Lord Jesus before He went down to the region to judge them. We are not told how Abraham knew that the LORD's visit meant judgment. Regardless, Abraham began pleading on the basis of whether there were fifty righteous people in the cities would the LORD not destroy the people? Jesus' answer was implied as negative, there were not fifty righteous people in the region. After Abraham received this negative implication, he proceeded to boldly decrease the number, first to 40, then 30, 20, 10, and finally just 5. By implication by not responding to Abraham's final question the region of Sodom and Gomorrah did not contain even five righteous people. What a terrible condition the region had come to without having even five righteous people in the region!

We may ask, how many righteous people were there in these cities? We know that there was at least one righteous person in the land, the person of Lot, or at least he came to be righteous in his later life after the destruction of the region of Sodom and Gomorrah in which he lived. Even if Lot was righteous in the eyes of the Lord, this would not have brought the total number to the value of five predicated by Abraham's question. We know that the LORD did not destroy Lot. Rather He sent the two angels with whom Abraham had met and they eventually led him away from the city before the fire rained down (Genesis 19:24-25). Looking a bit deeper at Lot, although he may or may not have a righteous man at the time of the story in Genesis 18, we do know that sometime later he repented and was added to the hall of faith in the New Testament. We also know that God spared the city of Zoar from destruction because of Lot's request (Genesis 19:20-21).

The rest of Lot's family didn't fare so well. We know that Lot's wife didn't make the grade (Genesis 19:26). The relationship between Lot's daughters and God is murky since we know that they later

engaged in immoral sexual relations with their father since they felt that after the destruction of Sodom every man was dead and that they had to save the race from extinction (Genesis 19:19:31). This severe faithlessness may be abrogated a bit in light of the fact that they had just witnessed the terrible extermination of everyone in the region in which they lived by fire and brimstone raining from the sky (Genesis 19:24). This brings to mine the story of Elijah when he thought that he was the last believer alive in the entire world (1 Kings 19:14). Then the LORD reminded this great prophet during his brief season of faithlessness that there remained 7,000 who had or would be true to Him (1 Kings 19:18). So although Lot's daughters may have doubted God's promises made through Abraham we are not told the ultimate condition of their heart.

Abraham brought out the central point of the reading in his question at end of verse 25, "Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" The answer, one that is woven throughout the narrative of the decreasing numbers, is a resounding yes. Yes, the Judge of all the earth shall do justly, including the destruction of the wicked. Although in our day God mostly withholds judgment of the "wicked" until after they die, the Bible is clear that judgement is a certainty for those that deny the Lord Jesus and don't yield to His Holy Spirit in giving up their sinful lives.

It is useful to read what Saint Peter wrote about today's story and Lot:

2 Peter 2:6-9 NAS95 6 (emphasis added) and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter; 7 and if He rescued ***righteous Lot****, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men 8 (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds), 9 then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment,*

Peter's explanation helps us to understand the implications of living a **lifelong** pattern of sin without repenting through God's empowerment found through faith in Jesus Christ. Peter was clear that we are to learn from other's mistakes, and Sodom and Gomorrah stands as a "doozie" of an example useful to all of us today. Paul said, "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1Corinthians 10:11). This leads us to the main point of the reading. If Lot can find forgiveness and faith in God in spite of the series of poor choices he made, we took can do the same. God stands ready to forgive us of our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9b-ff). Through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, we are motivated to confess our sins (1 John 1:9a) and receive God's blessing upon our lives demonstrated by our service to Him.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The context of the second reading from Colossians continues from last week (Colossians 1:24-28) but

skips forward to verse 12 of the second chapter. The context of the omitted verses 1 -11 in the second chapter leading up to today's reading is Paul's affirmation of Jesus' humanity and divinity, something which the Gnostics opposed. This was because the false teachers that had infiltrated the church taught that since only spirit was good in contrast to flesh that was evil, the person of the Lord Jesus could not have truly manifested Himself as divinity in the flesh. Paul said, "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9). He also taught the Colossian church how they were complete in Christ Jesus and spiritually circumcised in their heart without the necessity of the physical operation itself (vv. 10-11). The reading continues with important teaching on a Christian's identity in Christ.

Second Reading:

Colossians 2:12-14 NAS95 12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. 13 When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

Paul taught that as believers our spiritually dead carnal life is buried in baptism as a picture of being born from the Spirit of God. When a person is immersed in baptism they make a statement that their sins are buried with Jesus Christ's burial, but when they emerge from the water they are raised in the newness of life in a similar was as when Jesus rose from the dead. Although Jesus was dead, God raised Him from the dead (v. 12d). Through faith God in a sense raised believers from the dead (v. 12c). In addition, as believers God forgave all of our sins – past, present and future (v. 13) and nailed the record of our transgressions to the cross of Christ (v. 14). This hostile "certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us" (v. 14a) has been forever taken away from us!

What does it mean to have all of our sins taken away, forever, with even the record of them being destroyed? One aspect is that if Satan (or we do in our ourselves) brings our past sins back into our mind, we can call upon God in prayer to fight this spiritual battle raging against us with a one hundred percent certain outcome. This is because as believers our God has forgiven us through the precious blood of Jesus Christ. It is only when we doubt our standing as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ that these attacks can harm our minds. Another aspect is that we can trust that although people may bring up our past sins God will never do it. God through Jesus Christ has placed our sins as far as east is from west (Psalm 103:12).

Next, as we turn to the Gospel reading, we will learn something from the Lord Jesus about how He instructed His disciples to pray specifically concerning their needs. This study will be useful because we know that prayer is the antidote to worry that comes when our enemies (spiritual and physical) bring up our past sins.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

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The Gospel reading from Luke is the Lord Jesus' teaching on prayer that He gave in response to one of His disciple's questions, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples." As you read, begin to develop a list of bullet points from Jesus' teaching. Ask, what is Jesus teaching **me** about prayer?

Gospel Reading:

Luke 11:1-13 NAS95 1 It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples." 2 And He said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. 3 Give us each day our daily bread. 4 And forgive us our sins, For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation." 5 Then He said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; 6 for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; 7 and from inside he answers and says, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' 8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. 9 So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened. 11 Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? 12 Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? 13 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"

What can we learn about prayer from the Lord Jesus? The big idea of Jesus' teaching on prayer was to pray to the Person of the Father, pray specifically and pray persistently. Prayer is an antidote to worry, as when Satan brings to mind our past sins as we just mentioned in the second reading. In order for this to be an antidote to worry, we must enter into the reality of this prayer, not just recite it. Here are some other points that we can learn about prayer from today's reading.

- We have a Father (that implies a relationship with someone bigger, wiser and more able to cope with this world than ourselves; we are not orphans).
- Our Father is in heaven (He is above the fray of this world and has power and resources at his command that we cannot even fathom).
- His name is holy (His name refers to his character and essence. If he is holy, then he relates in a way that is set apart from the world's way. His holiness is what creates a foundation of trust for us to surrender our will to His will, to turn to Him in our time of need.
- He has a kingdom that is on the move. We can choose to be part of His kingdom and allow His way of heaven to infiltrate this world through my life. Instead of worrying about how I'm going to make it in this world, I am now focused on being used by God to bring His ways to bear on this world.
- He forgives us, and through His strength we can extend forgiveness to others. This is a quality

of the Kingdom of God that is countercultural to the world's ways.

- He leads us out of temptation and delivers us from evil. Do I really want to be delivered from temptation and evil, or do I want only to be delivered from the negative consequences of sin?
- He has a kingdom, power and glory that will be manifested forever. Do I want to be a part of this, or do I think that doing life on my own is a better option?
- God calls us to be specific in our prayer. If we (or others) are sick Jesus is teaching us to pray that we may be well. This may be intuitive to you, but how often have you been sick and not prayed for your own healing? Perhaps Jesus will allow sickness in your own life such as to give you compassion for others who are sick.
- God calls us to be persistent in prayer. This is clear not only in today's teaching but also in Jesus' teaching on the parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8). In that case Jesus applauded the efforts of a woman who continually nagged a judge to resolve her case. Jesus calls us to be persistent.

These are some amazing realities that Jesus understood and allowed Him to live in a countercultural way, free of worry and anxiety, because He knew who His Father was. He offers that same type of perspective to us, if we will ask Him to teach us to pray in this way.

As believers, we can be confident that God not only hears our prayers, but answers them. John said, "This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him" (1 John 5:14-15). The key is praying according to God's will. We do that by learning His will, and the way to do that is to study His revealed will in the Bible, the Word of God. God's answers to our prayers may **not** be as we expect. He may answer yes, not, wait, or lead us in another direction to pray. God calls us to pray boldly as we see in Hebrews: "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

We hope that what you have learned today will help you to pray more effectively and fervently by having the confidence that God will hear and answer you. Over the years I have prayed for a very long list (about 150) people each day concerning their salvation. Over the course of the last almost two decades I have seen God answer my prayers in miraculous ways. In one case a man who had experienced God's miraculous intervention in an accident came to know the Lord Jesus much later in his life as a result of a second drunk driving arrest. This was a man that I had been praying for over the course of about 15 years. He later told me that he had felt called to God during that entire time and this was the natural outcome of what had to happen. He was thankful for God bringing him to this point of decision by using the bad events in his life to turn him around onto the track of following Him. Perhaps one of my faithful readers will recognize the person about whom I am speaking. May God be glorified in all that we do and may we praise Him for His intervention.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Today we learned something from Jesus about how to pray. In what ways does Jesus' teaching

challenge your current prayer life?

2. Look back at your some urgent prayers you made to God in the past year. Were any of these written in a journal? How were these prayers answered? How helpful would it be for you to write down certain prayer requests in a journal in order to be able to remember and to look back and update them with notes about how God responded? Consider starting a prayer journal and using note cards to write down your urgent prayer requests that you carry with you each day.

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass, visit this web site:

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/072416.cfm

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 111

Source(s):

Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 7-17-2016

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **7-17-2016**. This week we study a reading from Genesis where Abraham meets the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Who provides him with an important confirmation of a promised blessing. We also look at a reading in Colossians and close with the story about Mary and Martha in the Gospel of Luke.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The context of the first reading from Genesis is the appearance of the Lord to Abraham when he was ninety-nine years old just after he had obeyed God's order to be circumcised (Genesis 17:24) along with his son Ishmael (v. 13) born through his handmaid. Just prior to this, God had reconfirmed His promise of a son through Sarah by saying, "But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year" (Genesis 17:21).

First Reading:

Genesis 18:1-10 NAS95 1 Now the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, while he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day. 2 When he lifted up his eyes and looked, behold, three men were standing opposite him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth, 3 and said, "My lord, if now I have found favor in your sight, please do not pass your servant by. 4 Please let a little water be brought and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree; 5 and I will bring a piece of bread, that you may refresh yourselves; after that you may go on, since you have visited your servant." And they said, "So do, as you have said." 6 So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Quickly, prepare three measures of fine flour, knead it and make bread cakes." 7 Abraham also ran to the herd, and took a tender and choice calf and gave it to the servant, and he hurried to prepare it. 8 He took curds and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and placed it before them; and he was standing by them under the tree as they ate.

9 Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "There, in the tent." 10 He said, "I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife will have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him.

Note how the reading opens with "Now the LORD appeared" (v. 1) and then says in the next verse, "three men were standing opposite him" (v. 2b). In order to understand what is happening in these verses we must look beyond the verses covered in the reading. Later in this chapter we see that "the men" (plural) departed and Abraham was left standing with the LORD (Genesis 18:22) at which point Abraham did his famous reasoning with God about whether there were any righteous men in Sodom (Genesis 18:23-32). Next the text says, "As soon as He had finished speaking to Abraham the LORD departed, and Abraham returned to his place" (Genesis 18:33). If the men departed but Abraham was left standing with the LORD what was happening was that Abraham was standing face to face with the preincarnate Jesus Christ. God appeared in the form of a man to Abraham through, what theologians call, a "Christophany." As Abraham rushed around to prepare a meal for the group of two men (who were angels as stated in Genesis 19:1) and the Lord Jesus, the Lord provided yet another confirmation of His promise to him as they ate together. Sarah also heard the promise as she listened from the tent door while the "men" ate outside (v. 10). The Lord told him, "I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife will have a son" (v. 10).

For Abraham and all of those who walk by faith, this is an important passage that tells of God's story for redemption. Abraham is called the father of faith, because it was through him that the Messiah would come. He looked forward to redemption, while we look back in history at the cross, where the transaction took place. Jesus paid the price for our redemption and provides the way for us to be reconciled to the Father, resulting in eternal life. This re-confirmation of God's sending of a promised son delivered by none other than The Promised Son Himself provided an important foreshadowing of how God's promises may be trusted in the sending of the ultimate, final, only Son Jesus to the earth some two thousand years later.

God understands what we need in terms of confirmation of His promises during the times that we may be in doubt. In the same way that God understood Abraham's need for confirmation of His promise, we too may turn to God for the confirmation of the promises He has made to us. We do this first through understanding His promises, and then turning to the Scriptures to renew our understanding of the promises that we find there. In prayer, we affirm those promises and learn to stake our lives on what God has said. In our daily lives, we learn to walk by faith in God, trusting in His character and knowing that He will make good on His promises.

As we transition to the second reading, we will see the importance of understanding Jesus' true humanity in light of the false teachings happening in the early church. Although Jesus appeared to Abraham in the form of man as we saw in the first reading, the Bible states that Jesus was born in the flesh through Mary in order to live a perfect, sinless life and then gave Himself as the final offering of sins forever.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Colossians. It is vital to understand the context in which Paul is writing to the church at Colosse. Today's reading is from the opening chapter of the Book that is concerned with correcting the heretical beliefs of some in the Colossian church including elements of Gnosticism. This belief system taught that matter is evil, God is good and in the case of the Colossians, that Jesus was just another emanation of God and not fully God Himself in the flesh. They also taught that a special secret high knowledge (gnosis) was required for true salvation and spiritual enlightenment.

Second Reading:

Colossians 1:24-28 NAS95 24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. 25 Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, 26 that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, 27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.

Paul affirmed how Christ's body is the church for which he rejoices in his suffering (v. 24). The core of his message to the Colossians was how God had revealed through the church the mystery "which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints" (v. 26) which is "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (v. 26b-ff). It is through the reception and understanding of this mystery that believers are made complete in Christ.

A question that we must ask ourselves based on this text is whether Christ's sacrifice was sufficient or do we need to do something to add to it to make up what is lacking? What was Paul referring to when he said that his suffering filled up "what is lacking in Christ's afflictions."

The Scriptures are clear that God's work of redemption was finished on the cross when Jesus declared, "It is finished" (John 19:30). Hebrews 10:12 says, "But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God" (ESV), which further verifies that redemption was finished at the cross by Jesus' sacrifice. Paul himself affirms in various places and in various ways that Christ's work is sufficient to cover our sins. Cite numerous verses here.

God calls us to serve Him through our good works that flow out of a heart changed by God. This is clear from these verses in Ephesians:

Ephesians 2:8-10 NAS95 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. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

James in the Book by his name described the nature of saving faith as that which produces good works for God (James 2:17). Rather than thinking that by doing God's work we are earning our salvation, God calls us instead to seek His will for our lives and accept the blessing of Jesus' finished work for us. In this way we may be presented to God as "complete in Christ" (Colossians 1:28) as we read in today's reading.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading from Luke picks up from last week's message regarding the Good Samaritan. This time instead of relating a *story* about a traveler on a road, Jesus and His disciples were themselves traveling on a road. We know from the context that the village that we will read about them entering is Bethany. This small city was located very close to Jerusalem.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 10:38-42 NAS95 38 Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word. 40 But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me." 41 But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; 42 but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

The reading is a story about priority and motive. It's about the energy with which we do something. Martha busied herself with the dinner preparation while Mary sat at Jesus' feet listening to Him. This contrasts with how we saw Abraham and Sarah work together to prepare the meal for the Lord and then listened to Him during the meal (except Sarah listened from a distance). Here Mary allows Martha to serve while sitting down and listening to Jesus. This bothered Martha who then spoke up to Jesus about the situation. Jesus gently corrected Martha's misunderstanding of Mary's motives, thinking that she was being lazy and neglecting in the serving of their important guest. Jesus told Martha that Mary did choose correctly to sit and listen at the feet of Jesus.

It's not a bad thing that Martha desired to serve Jesus, but there can be a service that is devoid of relationship. This is inferred by the way that Martha talks to Jesus about Mary. Her service was no longer about meeting the needs of Jesus but was about keeping score and trying to validate herself. Mary on the other hand was willing to appear culturally inappropriate by sitting at the feet of Jesus with the rest of the men. She felt comfortable sitting at the feet of Jesus, which is normal place for the disciple in that cultural context. Mary seems to be the only that truly understood that Jesus had to die. We know that the Gospels record how Mary anointed Jesus that evening. It is very likely that Jesus could smell Mary's anointing while He was hanging on the cross which would serve as a small comfort and blessing.

The main point of the reading is not that Jesus is reprimanding Martha for serving Him, but that He is saying that our serving needs to be connected to relationship (sitting at Jesus' feet). Mary showed

true devotion to Christ not just by serving Him a meal but by being present and listening to Him. She understood that Jesus' time on the earth was drawing to a close, something that Jesus' own disciples failed to understand (Luke 18:34).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Abraham is the father of faith and needed confirmation of God's reliability. What promises of God are you standing on and how is God reconfirming your faith to trust Him? How can others support you in your journey to walk by faith?

2. In the Gospel reading we saw how Mary sat and listened to Jesus while Martha busied herself with the preparation of the meal. In what ways was Martha jealous of Mary? Was Mary being lazy? Why or who not?

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass, visit this web site:

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/071716.cfm

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 108

Source(s):

Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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Mass Study Notes for Sunday 3-1-2015

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 3-1-2015. This week we begin with the first reading from Genesis in which we see Abraham's journey to sacrifice his son Isaac and discuss the typology of Isaac. Then we move to the second reading from Romans where we discover more about God's special relationship with His believers. We conclude with the Gospel lesson from Mark in which we see Jesus' transfiguration in which a glimpse of his divinity is revealed to this very special subset of believers including Peter, James, and John.

Before we begin this week I want to note something about the various formats in which we make these study notes available each week. For readers who have subscribed to the Mass Notes by email they receive the text of the study along with a link to both the PDF and the html version published on the web site. The version on the web site has the advantage of "mouse over" links for all of the verse references. This means that anytime an online reader positions their mouse over a verse reference the full text of that reference is made available to them. [In the cases where the text of the verse isn't provided this is a very handy feature.] Being able to see how Scripture interprets itself or correlates with other passages is a good skill to develop as you read and study God's Word. Please keep this in mind as you do your own studies.

The first reading is from the Book of Genesis. The context is the story of Abraham traveling to Mount Moriah to sacrifice his firstborn son Isaac. As you read, highlight any similarities that you find between Father Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac and God the Father's giving of His Son Jesus for a sacrifice on Calvary. *Note: All of the intermediate verses between 1 and 18 were included in order to provide the full context and meaning.*

Genesis 22:1-18 NAS95 1 Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 2 He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom

you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you." 3 So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. 4 On the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance. 5 Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you." 6 Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son, and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. 7 Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." And he said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" 8 Abraham said, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together. 9 Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 12 He said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." 13 Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son. 14 Abraham called the name of that place The LORD Will Provide, as it is said to this day, "In the mount of the LORD it will be provided." 15 Then the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, 16 and said, "By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. 18 In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."

Abraham fulfilled God's commandment to journey to the mountain in order to sacrifice his son, the son of promise born to him and Sarah. Abraham likely believed that since God had already provided him a son through supernatural means in his old age He could provide him with another son once he sacrificed Isaac or He could raise Isaac from the dead . One thing that stands out is both Abraham and Isaac's faithfulness in obeying God. Abraham was obedient to his Father God, while Isaac was obedient to his father to the point of even carrying the wood for his own sacrifice and allowing himself to be bound. We wonder what was going through Isaac's mind during all of this. At the last possible moment, God provided a substitute sacrifice (v. 13). In the end, God complemented Abraham for his obedience (v. 18).

There are two main applications of the reading. First, God took note of Abraham's radical faith that was manifested in his obedience and blessed him for it. In the same way, we as believers and the seed of Abraham we are blessed by God for our radical faith that is manifested in daring steps of obedience. As children of Abraham, we are called to obey God even when it means taking radical measures in what He has revealed in His word for us to do. A second application has to do with the typology of Isaac. Isaac is what is called a "type of Christ." Here are a few of the similarities

between Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac and the once and for all sacrifice of Jesus for sin on the cross (1 Peter 3:18).

- Abraham journeyed and on the third day reached the mountain (v. 4). Isaac was bound but then released on the third day because God provided a substitutionary sacrificial lamb. Jesus, God's sacrificial lamb (John 1:29), laid in the grave for three days and rose from the dead on the third day (1 Corinthians 15:4) whose sacrifice was a substitute for our sins. Both physical people were given back to their fathers on the third day.
- Both Isaac and Jesus were willing to offer their bodies as a sacrifice (vv. 7-8, Colossians 2:6-8).
- Father Abraham surrendered his son Isaac to God's will (v. 10). God surrendered His Son Jesus for His own will. The Scripture says, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).
- Isaac carried the wood for his own sacrifice (v. 6) and Jesus carried his wood for His sacrifice (John 19:17)
- Ishmael was technically Abraham's first son, but he was a child of the flesh born to the slave Hagar, not the child of promise born to Sarah. Therefore Isaac was his father's one and only son (v. 2). Jesus was God's one and only Son (John 3:16), Whom He loves (Matthew 3:17).
- Isaac was obedient to his father to the point of death. Jesus was obedient to His Father to the point of death and beyond (Philippians 2:8).

We see this story of a Father's sacrifice echoing the ultimate story of God's sacrifice that was made through Christ's death on the cross for us.

The second reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans. The context is Paul's teaching on the very special relationship that exists between God and the believer. He said in the opening of this chapter, "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Next, he teaches on the difference between those living in the flesh and those living in the spirit. He said that those that live in the flesh cannot please God (v. 8), but as believers we are not in the flesh but in the spirit (v. 9). Next, there is a connection to the first reading as Paul said, "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him" (vv. 16 – 17). Like Abraham and Isaac, we are heirs with God through our faith in Christ. As you study the text of the second reading, remember the special relationship that you have with your Father God through faith in Jesus.

Romans 8:31-34 NAS95 31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? 33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

We learn a few things from this short passage. God let Abraham off the hook in sacrificing Isaac, but did not allow such a provision for Himself when it came to the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus. His Son

was the "Lamb slain since before the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). If God was willing to go to such great lengths to save us, we can be assured that He will continue to provide all we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). Later in his ministry Paul said that since God is our justifier, and this does not come through our own performance or good works, how could anyone say that we are guilty when we have already been forever forgiven (v. 33)? Paul noted that Jesus is the One that intercedes for us. Later Paul said, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). We can have absolute confidence in the fact that since Jesus is our one and only intercessor with God the Father, nobody can bring a charge against us because we stand holy and blameless before Him. In the midst of our trials we can take hope that God is still in control and that He is at work for our good. A few verses previous to this concluding though Paul says that "God works all things together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purposes" (Romans 8:28). God is in the business of conforming us to the image of His Son and no one can stop Him (Romans 8:29).

The Gospel reading is from Saint Mark and follows the miraculous feeding of the four thousand (Mark 8:9) which was after Jesus had also fed the five thousand (Mark 6:44). The disciples didn't yet understand that these two events were miracles (Mark 6:52) whereas the people continued to follow Jesus because they liked the good food that He provided them (John 6:26). After Jesus fed the 4,000, He left with the disciples in the boat and they forgot to take along enough food and had only one loaf of bread (Mark 8:14) even though seven large baskets had been left over after feeding the crowds (Mark 8:8). At this point Jesus knew about their lack of bread and told them to "Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod" (Mark 8:15). This confused the disciples so Jesus went on to explain to them about the two miraculous feedings. We are including this because it shows how Jesus corrected His disciples' unbelief in the events leading up to the revelation of His glory on the Mount of Transfiguration about which we will be studying in the Gospel reading.

*"17 And Jesus, aware of this, *said to them, "Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? 18 "HAVING EYES, DO YOU NOT SEE? AND HAVING EARS, DO YOU NOT HEAR? And do you not remember, 19 when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces you picked up?" They *said to Him, "Twelve." 20 "When I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?" And they *said to Him, "Seven." 21 And He was saying to them, "Do you not yet understand?" (Mark 8:17-21) Note: The asterisks (*) denote a verb with the historical present tense, something that does not exist in the English language.*

For at least this instant, the disciples were being as hard hearted as were the people who were following Jesus for no other reasons than He provided them with food and healed their sick. Jesus, because of His kindness and special relationship with the disciples, especially the unique group of three (Peter, James, and John), explained to them the meaning of what had happened during the feeding of the two large groups. At this point the Holy Spirit moved mightily in Peter's heart and he proclaimed through the power of the Spirit, "You are the Christ" (Mark 8:29). This leads to the opening of Chapter 9 in which we as readers of God's Holy Word are honored with being able to

partake in Jesus' transfiguration that included not only Peter, James, and John but also two additional biblical characters from the Old Testament living in heaven (Mark 12:26 – 27).

Mark 9:1-10 NAS95 1 And Jesus was saying to them, "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power." 2 Six days later, Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John, and brought them up on a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; 3 and His garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them. 4 Elijah appeared to them along with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus. 5 Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 6 For he did not know what to answer; for they became terrified. 7 Then a cloud formed, overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!" 8 All at once they looked around and saw no one with them anymore, except Jesus alone. 9 As they were coming down from the mountain, He gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man rose from the dead. 10 They seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead meant.

After the disciples had continually misunderstood the miraculous events surrounding the feeding of the two large groups of people, Jesus chose this special subset of His disciples to experience yet another miraculous event, His transfiguration before them. This event revealed an important aspect of Jesus. While He was fully man, He was also fully God. Moses and Elijah appeared with Him in this supernatural and surreal glimpse into Jesus' divinity (v. 4). Peter, a man who it seemed always wanted to solve problems, opened his mouth to suggest that since it was the Feast of Tabernacles that they should build three booths, one for each of the three men. He said this because he was terrified and didn't know what else to say (v. 6). At this point God spoke to them out of the cloud and commanded them to listen to Jesus, God's beloved Son (v. 7), His "Isaac."

What can we learn from the reading about living our lives as Christians? Peter, my personal favorite among all of the disciples by a large measure, sought to be the "fixer" of the problem at hand. Not knowing what to say he just said the first thing that came into his mind. Which of us wouldn't have done the same thing? How many of us have gotten into trouble by not exercising good control of our internal filters and just saying what pops into our minds? The difference between Peter and us is that Peter had the first hand testimony of Jesus fresh in his heart. Technically, Peter wasn't mistaken in what he said, but God corrected him and told him to simply listen to Jesus instead of rushing in to fix perceived problems. That is good advice for all of us; just listen to Jesus by reading and understanding His words given to us through the Bible and not rushing in with both of our gun barrels blazing!

I remember one time many years ago when I was working as an engineer at Ford. I was attending a small luncheon party given in my honor as I was transitioning to a new department as a part of my rotational training program (the FCGP as readers may be familiar). While standing in line at the salad bar my boss gave me a very good complement and I immediately responded by saying the first

thing that popped into my head. Instead of just accepting the complement, I denied it by saying that I really hadn't done a very good job! I knew immediately that I had messed up, but this wasn't something that was easy to take back. To this day, I regret my knee jerk response. Joe Wisniewski, if you ever read this, please accept my apology, and realize that I was acting somewhat like the Apostle Peter.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the first reading, we read about Abraham's willingness to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice to God. However, Isaac was also obedient and as we saw is a type of Christ. A second type is also evident in the reading. In what ways can you determine that Isaac a type of believer similar to you and me?

2. Pay attention to the "voices" or messages you hear coming to you on a regular basis. When you hear accusation and condemnation what is your natural response? Do you hide, pretend, or defend yourself? Alternatively, do you run to the Savior and remind yourself of truth? In the second reading, Saint Paul gives us a glimpse of God's heart for those who are in Christ. What concepts resonate with you and how will you seek to live in light of these truths?

3. Have you ever gotten yourself in trouble by saying the first thing that came into your mind? What was the particular circumstance, and is there any way in which you can be redeemed in your mind through what you read about in the Gospel lesson?

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/030115.cfm

First Reading GN 22:1-2, 9A, 10-13, 15-18

Second Reading ROM 8:31B-34

Gospel Reading MK 9:2-10

Source(s):

Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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Mass Study Notes for Sunday 12-28-2014



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 12-28-2014. This week we open with the first reading from Genesis 21. Next we look at two readings for the second reading, one from Hebrews and the second from Colossians. Finally we conclude with the Gospel lesson from Luke.

There are two first readings, either from the Apocrypha or the Book of Genesis, we will cover the one from Genesis. The reading is from Genesis chapters 15 and 21.

> *1 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great." 2 Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 And Abram said, "Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir." 4 Then behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir." 5 And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." 6 Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:1-6)*

> *1 Then the LORD took note of Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had promised. 2 So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him. 3 Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac. (Genesis 21:1-3)*

In the first passage, we see that Abram was concerned that he did not have an heir. However, God comforted him by telling him that he would not remain childless. God promised to give him a son that would eventually start the line of descendants that would outnumber the stars (v. 5). They key verse is "Abraham believed in the Lord, and He reckoned it to him as righteousness" (v. 6). This is an important point that Paul brings out in the Book of Romans that salvation is by faith and not by works (Romans 4:3). This story is important to us because it clarifies the foundation of a people saved by faith in God. We are part of the offspring of Abraham when we walk by faith, as Abraham is the father of all who believe (Romans 4:16).

In the second passage, we see the fulfillment of God's promise made to Abram, now called Abraham. Sarah bore Isaac in her old age, something that was impossible but was not too difficult for God. You can imagine how hard it would be to believe in God's promises when it seems so impossible. But now they experienced the reality of God's blessing through the birth of Isaac, the child of promise. Likewise, God calls us to live by faith and His promises even when the feels the odds are against us.

There were two passages given this week for the second reading, we will cover each of them. The second of the readings was from Hebrews chapter 11. *Note: We included the intermediate verses that were skipped in the reading.*

8 By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; 10 for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. 11 By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE. 13 All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. 14 For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. 15 And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them. 17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; 18 it was he to whom it was said, "IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED." 19 He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type. (Hebrews 11:8-19)

We see in this passage of God has commended Abraham and Sarah for their faith. In the beginning of this chapter we find that "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6). With all of these examples including Abraham who is the father of faith, we find inspiration for our own journey of faith in God. Abraham was called out of his own land to go to a place that God would show him.

He didn't have a map of God's plan but walked in faith day by day of what he did know. Then God promised him a son after Sarah was beyond the age of childbearing. By faith Abraham believed that God could perform this miracle. As we read earlier, Sarah conceived and gave birth to Isaac. When we walk by faith in God we are living as Abraham's children.

The other of the first readings was from Saint Paul's Letter to the Colossians.

12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. 18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them. 20 Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart. (Colossians 3:12-21)

Looking at the full context of this reading, we must understand that we first "put off" the old man because of who we are in Christ. Paul said in the opening of this chapter, "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God" (Colossians 3:1). That is a big "if." This passage is conditional upon a having a heart that has been changed by God (John 3:3, born from above). Paul continued, "For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3). After putting off the "old man" with its practices (v. 9), we are to put on the new man as explained by Paul in the reading. Paul culminates the list of things to "put on" by describing how love is the anchor for all of these good character qualities that we see in this passage. He said, "Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity" (v. 14).

The Gospel reading is from the second chapter of Luke.

22 And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "EVERY firstborn MALE THAT OPENS THE WOMB SHALL BE CALLED HOLY TO THE LORD"), 24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, "A PAIR OF TURTLEDOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS." 25 And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, 28 then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, 29 "Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to

depart in peace, According to Your word; 30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation, 31 Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, And the glory of Your people Israel." 33 And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him. 34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed– 35 and a sword will pierce even your own soul–to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." 36 And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers. 38 At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. 39 When they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth. 40 The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. (Luke 2:22-40)

In the opening verses, Mary and Joseph were fulfilling the requirements of the Law that called them to provide a sin offering in the temple 41 days after the birth of Jesus. Next, Simeon comes into the story as man of faith of faith that patiently waited for the fulfillment of God's promise through the birth of the Messiah. Four hundred years had passed from the time of God's last revelation during which the Jews waited for the fulfillment of the promises. This time of silence was suddenly broken with the various miraculous events surrounding the birth of Jesus. This story tells of yet another miraculous outpouring of God's spirit of prophecy through Simeon and Anna. Simeon's prophecy focused upon Jesus being God's salvation prepared for all people, both Jews and Gentiles. He also prophesied to Mary about the grief she would bear over the Child's destiny. Anna, who was a prophetess, also verified that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

What do all of these things mean for us during this Christmas season? First, we can be confident that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's prophecies concerning the coming Messiah. He is the One who provides salvation to all people. Like Simeon, Anna, Abraham, and Sarah who waited almost their entire lives to see the fulfillment of God's promises we too need to remember to be patient and wait for God's fulfillment of His plan in our own lives. This means that even when we encounter extremely difficult circumstances we can still trust that God is working behind the scenes and will finish the good work that He has begun in is (Philippians 1:6). In this Christmas season if you are having a difficult time finding joy amongst the celebration, you can turn to Jesus who is the "consolation of Israel" (Luke 2:25).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the first reading, we read how Abraham patiently waited for the fulfillment of God's promises. In what ways do you identify with Abraham and Sarah who waited for the fulfillment of an impossible promise? How does their story of faith give you direction and hope for your own journey of faith?

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2. In the second reading, Paul provides a list of qualities that flow out of being set apart and loved by God that should affect how we live our lives. How does being "holy and beloved" (Colossians 3:12) change how you approach relating to God, yourself, and others? Re-read the list of character qualities (Colossians 3:12-21) and consider how each of them are expressed relationally in your own life.

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/122814.cfm

First Reading SIR 3:2-6, 12-14 or GN 15:1-6; 21:1-3

Second Reading COL 3:12-21 or HEB 11:8, 11-12, 17-19

Gospel Reading LK 2:22-40

Source(s):

Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Keywords:

Abraham, Sarah, Simeon, Anna

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 3-16-2014

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Welcome back to the Mass Notes for 3-16-2014. This week we return to Genesis, the first Book in the Bible to see God's unconditional promise of blessing on Abram, whose name God later changed to the more familiar Abraham. Then we will study Saint Paul's Second Letter to Timothy and conclude with the Gospel lesson from Matthew 17 in which we will see Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain.

Let's step back for a moment and talk about how we go about studying the readings each week in order to give you some insights into our method. When we study the readings we use the following procedure counting down from the letter "C" in the alphabet: **C**ontext, **B**ig Idea, and **A**pplication. First, we examine the context of the passage in light of the surrounding passages (the textual context) along with the historical information (the historical context). Second, we determine the theological big idea that emerged from the study of the text. What was God saying to the people in the original context, and what theological principles can we extract from the text? Finally, we determine the contemporary application(s) – what does it mean to us today? As we move through the readings each week try and see what theological big ideas you can garner from the text and how these could then be applied to your life. As you focus upon the **A**pplication, first pray that God would reveal to you what He would have you do with what you learned. You may be amazed at how God sheds light differently on each passage as you encounter and study it again in the liturgical cycle over the years. Perhaps you will find, as my wife likes to say, that you have been ruined for the ordinary!

The first reading is from Genesis Chapter 12. The context of this section was just after Abram, who later became Abraham the Father of all believers, left with his father Terah from his birthplace in the region called "Ur of the Chaldeans" and settled in Haran (Genesis 11:31). These were the circumstances leading up to God's call of Abram. Looking at the bigger picture, Noah's Flood was in

the somewhat distant history, and he had died back in Chapter 9 (v. 28). The era of the city building had begun under Nimrod (10:8), beginning with the city of Babel (10:10). Chapter 10 contained what was called the "Table of Nations" that represented the nations that developed after Noah and his sons departed from the ark. "These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, by their nations; and out of these the nations were separated on the earth after the flood" (v. 32, emphasis added). The division (or "separated in some versions) happened at the Tower of Babel where God acted to confuse the languages of the nation states for several reasons including their idolatry and unwillingness to spread out and populate the earth (9:1, 11:4). "They said, 'Come, let **us** build for **ourselves** a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let **us** make for **ourselves** a name, otherwise **we** will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth'" (Genesis 11:4, emphasis added). Many Bible commentators agree that the tower spoken of in verse 12 was a "ziggurat," which was a tall structure associated with the worship of pagan deities. Notice that the focus of the people's efforts was upon themselves (see the five bolded words in the text), rather than upon God's commandment to spread out and populate the earth. As we will see later in the Gospel lesson, they were not setting their mind on God's interests, but on man's, something which Jesus called Satanic (Matthew 16:23). We must remember that God cautions us against building shrines, regardless of the purity of our intentions. Otherwise these shrines, or towers, ziggurats, may become stumbling stones in serving God.

With this context in mind let's read the text. Note that as you read about God's promises to Abram, who was later renamed "Abraham," see if you can uncover the theological **b**ig ideas in the text.

> *1 Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; 2 And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; 3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." 4 So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. (Genesis 12:1-4 NAS95)*

This account is the first recorded encounter of God's call to Abram, which was a call to bless him. We don't know how the LORD communicated with Abram, but it seems very clear that Abram understood and immediately obeyed (v. 4). While this call would be one of blessing, it required some sacrifice on Abram's part. He had to leave his country, his relatives and his father's house. The progression goes from more general to very specific. God did not give him the GPS coordinates of the destination; He just told him that He would show Abram the land when he got there. How's that for literally walking by faith? That is why Abram is called the father of faith, since he had the unique privilege of becoming the father of a great nation that was called to walk by faith in God, as a unique light and blessing to the other nations on earth. God's blessing included not only making him into a great nation, but also making Abram's name great. The promise was that Abram would be a blessing to other people groups.

In verses 2 – 3 we see an unconditional blessing of Abraham and all of the future Jews as well. "And I

will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; 3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." Notice the warning that God gave to those who won't bless the Jews. "And the one who curses you I will curse" (v.3b). It's impossible to understand all of the implications of this timeless principle. Although we may not understand how God will deal with those who have harmed the Jews, we can rest assured that God will hold true to His unconditional promises to both bless those who bless the Jews and curse those who curse them.

God called Abram to make a great sacrifice in leaving his country, his relatives and his father's house. Is God calling you to leave some area of comfort to you? Is it possible that we are drawing our personal identity from our country, our relatives or our father's house? Whatever the case may be, God calls each of us to walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). Romans 4:3 says that Abram believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. So this text helps us to understand what pleases God's heart. Our belief in who He says He is and our willingness to walk by faith is what God is looking for in each of our lives.

As we move into the second reading, ponder for a moment how God speaks to us in the present day in order to call us to take certain actions for Him. In the first reading God spoke to Abram through a clear and specific call. The author of the Book of Hebrews provided some insights into how God spoke in the past and how He speaks to us today. "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world" (Hebrews 1:1-2). God's final method of communication to His people is through the words and life of His Son Jesus. As you read from Saint Paul's Second Letter to Timothy notice how throughout this letter, and in all of his letters, Paul's central focus in on the good news of Jesus – the Gospel.

> *8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, 9 who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, 10 but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, (2 Timothy 1:8-10)*

Paul reminded us not be ashamed of suffering for the good news of the Gospel, Jesus' eternal ministry, the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8). God saved us not because of our works, said Paul, but for His divine purposes (Titus 3:5). This reminds us of Paul's teaching to the Ephesians. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Ephesians 2:8-10). We can celebrate that when we believe in God's promises through Jesus we have obtained immortality (v. 10b). In the same way that Abram listened to God, we are to listen to Him through the Gospel. You can see why Paul was not ashamed of this good news! We, as well, can learn from Paul's example. Even though the world around us wants us to feel

timid about our faith, we of all people can be assured that the free gift of eternal life is something to be excited about. There are people in your life who need to hear this good news, not only from your words, but from your transformed life.

As we move onto the Gospel lesson, we will see the importance of first listening to God, even when we feel that we need to take immediate actions. The Gospel lesson today is from Matthew Chapter 17. The context was just after Peter proclaimed to Jesus under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that Jesus was the Christ, the promised Messiah of God (Matthew 16:16). Jesus then revealed to His disciples that He would be handed over to the elders, chief priests and scribes, and be killed then raised up on the third day (v.21). Peter responded to this information by immediately and impulsively responding to Jesus by saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You" (v. 222b) to which Jesus said, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's" (v.23). Peter was a man of action, and Jesus reprimanded him for attempting to take matters into his hands rather than allowing God to accomplish His divine plan through Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection.

Read the Gospel account of what is known as the "transfiguration" of Jesus in which we see a glimpse of God's glory revealed through the Person of Jesus Christ.

> *1 Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. 2 And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. 3 And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. 4 Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" 6 When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified. 7 And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, "Get up, and do not be afraid." 8 And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone. 9 As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead" (Matthew 17:1-9).*

The central focus of the passage was the Father revealing Jesus' glory as God in the flesh. He chose to reveal Jesus' true identity to a subset of Jesus' disciples. It's significant that Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him to the mountain. Peter, formerly a fisherman named Simon, was the foremost of the disciples, since every time that he is mentioned along with a list of disciples he is always listed first. Simon Peter was a man of action, as he is the one that cut off the ear of the high priest's servant when the mob came to arrest Jesus on the evening before His crucifixion (John 18:10). Peter became a leader of the church among the Jews, as Paul became a leader of the church to the Gentiles. James and John, known as the Sons of Thunder (Mark 3:17), were also significant in their influence in the early church. James (known as James the Greater) was the first martyr among the disciples. James, along with his brother John, were known for their zeal and energy for their ministry with the Lord. Together with Peter, James and John formed the triad of disciples who

shared special privileges with the Lord Jesus. These privileged three men were chosen by God to be the first ones to experience the glory of Jesus.

As we move deeper into the text, notice that the passage centered around the Father's message to Jesus' disciples. This contains an important hint as to the theological big idea of the text. God the Father said, "**This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!** (v. 5d). Throughout Matthew's Gospel Jesus had explained to His disciples the nature of the coming kingdom. He said in the previous chapter that His kingdom would not come until after the Jewish religious authorities had Him killed and He was raised up on the third day (Matthew 16:21). What God the Father was saying boiled down to something like this:

> "Jesus is telling you about His Kingdom. You have different ideas, like setting up your own shrines and bringing in the kingdom through your own efforts, but you need to listen to Him for the truth about how it must play out according to the plan foreordained from before the beginning of time."

Which of us would not have wanted to have responded in a similar way as Peter? I remember an incident that happened between me and my wife that helps to shed some light on how Peter acted impulsively during the transfiguration incident from the Gospel lesson. Just after we got married, my wife and I had gone out to a quiet dinner at a local restaurant in a lakeshore community in a nearby town. As we settled down to eat, my wife's cell phone rang. It was bad news. After she hung up the call, I sprang into action with a five-point plan on how we would overcome this obstacle and how we should proceed. As I moved onto the next four points, the first hint that I had that she wasn't receiving my plan very well was a slight tremor that began in her upper lip. "That's strange," I thought, "was she feeling ill, was it something in the soup that was causing this shake?" Soon the small tremor advanced until her whole body began shaking and then an all-out cry began! What had I done wrong, I was only trying to help? What my wife needed at that moment was just for me to be with her, hold her, and to listen.

My story about the need for me to just shut up and listen is similar to what happened to Peter when he responded impulsively to Jesus during the transfiguration experience. God the father responded to Peter's three-point plan by saying, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him" (v.5c). Peter, though well intentioned, simply needed to listen to God. When we are confronted with the glory of our Lord Jesus and the love of the Father for Him (which by the way is the same love Jesus has for us based on John 15:9), the appropriate response is to surrender our whole lives to God. Sometimes we just need to listen to God and not feel the need to respond with our own three-point plan.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In what ways is God calling you to walk by faith? How are the examples of Abram and Paul helpful to you?
2. Does the fact that salvation comes by grace and not by works sound like good news to you?

When we accept this free gift from God, we are exercising faith. How is faith necessary for salvation to be imparted to us? How are you exercising faith in God's grace and not putting your faith in your own good works to bring you eternal life?

3. Jesus' true identity as God was revealed at the transfiguration. His face was radiant, shining like the sun. How can a vision of Jesus' true identity spur you on in your everyday life? What would need to change in your life in order to obey God's voice and "listen to Him"?

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/031614.cfm

First Reading GN 12:1-4A (plus extra verses for context)

Genesis 12:1-4 NAS95 1 Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; 2 And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; 3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." 4 So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

Second Reading 2 TIM 1:8B-10

2 Timothy 1:8-10 NAS95 8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, 9 who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, 10 but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,

Gospel Reading MT 17:1-9

Matthew 17:1-9 NAS95 1 Six days later Jesus *took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and *led them up on a high mountain by themselves. 2 And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. 3 And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. 4 Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" 6 When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified. 7 And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, "Get up, and do not be afraid." 8 And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone. 9 As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead."

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Source(s):

Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB