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 112: 08/02/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we open with the first reading from Isaiah 55 that provides a picture of God's grace. Then we move to the second reading from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans and learn that it is impossible for us to be separated from God once His Spirit lives within us. Finally, we conclude with the Gospel lesson from Saint Matthew, in which we study Jesus' miracle of feeding the five thousand. We pray that your Bible study this week is enriching to you and helps perfect God's work in your life.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Prophet Isaiah, whom Bible commentators call a major prophet because of the length of the Book God inspired Him to write. The context of the reading is just after the depiction of Jesus as the Suffering Servant on the cross, something that happened over 700 years after Isaiah penned it (Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12). An interesting note about Isaiah 53 is that it is a forbidden Book in Jewish circles, something the rabbis avoid, and the vast majority of Jews have

never heard. "Who has believed our report and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed," Isaiah said (53:1). This powerful display of Jesus is followed by chapter 54, in which Isaiah shows God's everlasting kindness. "For a mere moment I have forsaken you, but with great mercies I will regather you. With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you, says the Lord your redeemer" (Isaiah 54:7-8). The reading today from Chapter 55 is just before God more fully revealed His plan to bring salvation to the Gentiles, who would be grafted into His eternal salvation (Isaiah 56). As you read, try to keep in mind the context in which Isaiah gave his message in a time when the Jews weren't listening to the voice of God.

First Reading:

> *1 Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk Without money and without cost. 2 Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And delight yourself in abundance. 3 Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, According to the faithful mercies shown to David. (Isaiah 55:1-3)*

Isaiah's message is a picture of God's grace and provides some important information about God and our relationship to Him. God is impartial (v. 1). "Everyone who thirsts" can come to Him. Second, God's grace cannot be earned (v.2); it is unmerited favor. Third, God's Word is life but we have to listen to it to obtain this life (v. 3). Fourth, God's promises to His people are eternal and specifically the ones in the Davidic Covenant will be fulfilled (v. 3). We can rest in the fact that God will complete the good work that He began with Israel regardless of how hopeless things may appear in the Middle East at any given instant.

As we move on to the next reading from Saint Paul, contemplate how this mighty saint may have felt hearing about the present-day attacks by Israel's enemies. Would he rest in God's promises and His "faithful mercies shown to David" (v. 3)?

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Paul's Letter to the Romans and continues the study from last week.

Note that we have included verse 36 that was skipped in the reading. This is unfortunate because the verse contains a quote from Psalm 44, in which the Psalmist recounts how he continued his walk with God despite his tribulations. Despite hardship, "All this has come upon us: But we have not forgotten You. Nor have we dealt falsely with Your covenant" (Psalm 44:17). God allowed these trials to come upon the Psalmist to accomplish His sovereign purposes. "But for Your sake we are killed all day long; We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered" (Psalm 44:22). The Psalmist closes with a call for God's mercy. "Rise up, be our help, And redeem us for the sake of Your lovingkindness" (v. 26). As you read the text, imagine why God inspired Paul to quote from this Psalm.

Second Reading:

> *35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35-39)*

One word that came to mind when we read this passage was "persistence." Paul said that we can persist and overcome our trials through patient persistence in prayer and trust in God, His nature, and His promises. Paul provided a list of things that attempt to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Regardless of what comes upon us, believers in the finished work of Jesus Christ, we can never become separated from the love of God that flows through our Savior. Paul was no stranger to hardship, and it's no wonder that he identified with the Psalmist's plea to God for mercy. He recorded some of these hardships in his Second Letter to the Corinthians:

> *24 Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. 26 I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; 27 I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. (2 Corinthians 11:24-28)*

Paul didn't boast about his hardships; rather, he boasted in the fact that he was weak (2 Corinthians 12:10). He said, "Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (12:10). "

This week is the anniversary of the time some years ago when we received news about a terrible tragedy in our neighborhood. A ten-year-old boy was riding his bike just before dark and ran through a stop sign in front of a truck. He was taken by ambulance to the hospital, then flown to a children's hospital. Despite the treatment, he passed away the next morning. His parents, who are strong Christians, made a statement to the media saying they wanted to let the truck driver know he hadn't done anything wrong and that he was forgiven. Would you have the strength and compassion to make such a statement in the midst of the most awful trial that could ever come upon a young family? "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (vv. 38-39). Or the sudden death of their beautiful son. The family has coped well with this tremendous loss. Sadly, the driver who hit the young boy passed away a few weeks later, likely as a result of the grief of the accident.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson is from Matthew 14 and recounts Jesus' miracle of feeding the five thousand who were gathered to hear Him speak. This is the first recorded incident of Jesus multiplying food to feed a large crowd; the second time happens later in Matthew 15:29-39. The reading opens and closes with something that Jesus was fond of doing: praying by Himself. When you examine the Gospel records closely, you will see that Jesus often retreated to a private place to pray just before performing public miracles. The context of the reading is just after Jesus heard of the death of John the Baptist, whom Jesus called the greatest man who ever lived (Matthew 11:11). As you read, note that we have included verses 22-23 to provide the most insight into the reading.

Gospel Reading:

> *13 Now when Jesus heard about John, He withdrew from there in a boat to a secluded place by Himself; and when the people heard of this, they followed Him on foot from the cities. 14 When He went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick. 15 When it was evening, the disciples came to Him and said, "This place is desolate and*

> *the hour is already late; so send the crowds away, that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." 16 But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away; you give them something to eat!" 17 They said to Him, "We have here only five loaves and two fish." 18 And He said, "Bring them here to Me." 19 Ordering the people to sit down on the grass, He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food, and breaking the loaves He gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds, 20 and they all ate and were satisfied. They picked up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve full baskets. 21 There were about five thousand men who ate, besides women and children. 22 Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away. 23 After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone. (Matthew 14:13-23)*

As we saw a picture of God's grace in the reading from Isaiah, so in the Gospel message, Jesus' feeding of the five thousand was also a picture of grace. The bread and the fish are a picture of God's grace as we celebrate Jesus' death on the cross for us through the communion meal. Let's examine the reading more closely to find some significant points about both Jesus and the disciples.

Matthew said that when Jesus heard about the death of John the Baptist, He retreated to a private place to pray. But Jesus wasn't going to have privacy that day as the crowds saw him get into the boat and followed Him (v. 13). In spite of His desire to pray by Himself, Matthew said that Jesus "felt compassion for them and healed their sick" (v. 14c). The word used in the original for "felt compassion" (Greek word "plagchnizomai") is unique to Jesus and found only in the Gospels. It is used to refer to Jesus some 12 times, mostly in Matthew (5 times), but also in Mark (4 times) and Luke (3 times), not in John. Jesus was particularly moved when He experienced large crowds of people in need. In Mark 6:34, He said, "When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion (plagchnizomai) for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things." This was once again the case in today's reading. Matthew tells us that Jesus "saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick" (v. 14b-ff).

The five loaves and two fish were a meager proportion. Imagine slicing five loaves of bread and then attempting to make sandwiches with them using just two fish. This didn't stop Jesus, who fed the crowd so much that they had twelve baskets left over (v. 20). Notice how the number of baskets that were left over coincided with the number of Jesus' disciples, which also coincided with the number of the tribes of Israel. The number 12 in the Bible is used as a picture of perfection and symbolizes God's power and authority. Although the disciples missed the significance of the number, the count of the leftover baskets will be important to them as they look back on the event. Jesus said later in Matthew, "Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how

many baskets full you picked up?" (Matthew 16:9).

Notice how both the disciples recognized Jesus authority over the crowds. In verse 15, Jesus' disciples asked Him to "send the crowds away." Then in verse 19, Matthew said, "Ordering the people to sit down on the grass." Their recognition of Jesus' supreme authority is significant because it shows the great faith the disciples had in Him, despite their completely missing the fact that Jesus could provide food for the crowd without the people having to return to town late, when the bakeries were probably already closed. Jesus surprised the disciples with the great miracle, yet they didn't understand it until Jesus explained it to them later (Matthew 16:9).

What does all of this mean for our lives? First, as we saw in the first reading, we need to listen to God, and this comes from reading the Bible. Second, we, like Jesus' disciples, must recognize Jesus' authority, but at the same time, we can rest in the fact that, because Jesus has authority, we can place our faith in Him. We can trust that God will provide for our basic needs, as Jesus did by feeding the crowd, and that He will also provide for our spiritual needs, especially by offering forgiveness for our sins and answering our prayers. Finally, God calls us to recount the blessings He has given us. The disciples didn't understand the significance of Jesus feeding the crowd until He had explained it to them later. It is helpful to us, when we are in the heat of the moment in the trials of our lives, to sense how God may be working in that particular instant. This not only glorifies God but also helps us trust in Him in future situations, as we recall His past provision for us.

Reflection Questions

1. We read in the Gospel lesson how Jesus' disciples underestimated Jesus' power, yet at the same time, they recognized His authority. Power flows from authority. Think of one particular instance in which you underestimated Jesus power in your life. Based upon what you studied today, how would you look at this situation differently in the future?

2. Saint Paul said in the second reading, "38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39). What are some things in your life that work to separate you from God? Based upon your study today, list one or two and how God provides power to maintain your relationship with Him for each of these circumstances.

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 114: 08-03-2025



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we begin with a reading from the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes, written by Solomon, king of Israel and the wisest man of his time. Although God inspires it, as is all Scripture–it is written from the perspective of a frustrated man seeking answers to life's hard questions. The second reading is from Paul's epistle to the early church in Colossae. Its theme is the Christian life centered in Jesus Christ and how that is lived out in everyday life. Finally, we look again at the Gospel of Luke and hear Jesus speak about the dangers of human greed.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Ecclesiastes is a hard book for many readers to understand because, at times, it seems to support ideas contrary to other biblical teachings. For example, "There is a time to kill" (3:3). Context is all-

important in interpreting Scripture, so we must remember that the author, though the wisest of all men, is looking at life from a purely secular perspective. He uses the expression "under the sun" more than two dozen times in the book.

First Reading:

> *Ecclesiastes 1:1-2 NAS95 1 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. 2 "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity."*
> *Ecclesiastes 2:21-23 NAS95 21 When there is a man who has labored with wisdom, knowledge and skill, then he gives his legacy to one who has not labored with them. This too is vanity and a great evil. 22 For what does a man get in all his labor and in his striving with which he labors under the sun? 23 Because all his days his task is painful and grievous; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is vanity.*

The authorship of this book is made clear from the very beginning. He is the third king of Israel, under whom the nation reached the pinnacle of its world prominence, especially regarding wealth. God had spoken to Solomon on at least two occasions and asked him what he wanted. Solomon asked not for riches or fame but for wisdom, and God granted his request (1 Kings 3:5-12). And it was Solomon who built the temple for God to dwell in by His Shekinah Glory.

To read the exploits of Solomon is to discover a man of great talent, having written three thousand proverbs and a thousand and five songs (1 Kings 4:32). He failed to keep his promises to God, however, and he took numerous foreign wives and accumulated thousands of horses in direct disobedience to God's commands. As a result, Solomon questions life's realities. What is life all about? What is its purpose? What good is it for a man to work hard when he gains little and cannot rest?

Today's reading records those questions and the completely unsatisfactory answers in Solomon's judgment. "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity," he writes. Another translation of this conclusion is "Completely meaningless! Everything is meaningless." We must remember, however, that this is not the end of all things. Solomon concludes this writing by acknowledging that his search "under the sun" has produced nothing, but a lesson must be learned. He writes, "Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind (12:13). Today, then, despite the apparent hopelessness of life sometimes, we are to keep God's commandments. That will give us the peace that Solomon was searching for.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Whenever a paragraph begins with the word "therefore," you must ask what has preceded and how it relates to what follows. As a consequence of what Paul has taught in Chapters 1 and 2, the believer should follow the instructions he is about to give. In other words, because the Christian recognizes that Jesus is God in the flesh (2:9), has "received Jesus as Lord" (2:6), and has been "made alive with Christ (2:13), he or she does not need to submit to the rules of the world that are controlled by Satan and his evil system (2:20).

Second Reading:

Note: Verses 6 – 8, which were omitted from the reading, are included below.

> *Colossians 3:1-11 NAS95 1 Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. 5 Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. 6 For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, 7 and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. 8 But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, 10 and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him– 11 a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.*

Instead of following the worldly way, the believer is to have a different motivation. The Christian has been raised with Christ and is to "keep seeking the things above" (3:1). His incentives should be spiritual, inspired from above, not worldly. Believers are to focus on "things above not on the things … on the earth (v. 2). The apostle uses the phrase, "set your mind," which reminds us of what he wrote in Romans 12, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters . . . Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (verses 1-2). It's a matter of the mind—what we think. Instructions like this have less to do with emotion and more with sound thinking and proper conduct.

How is all this possible? Paul makes it clear that the believer "has died" (to sin), his life is "hidden with Christ in God," and one day Christians will be "revealed with Him in glory." It begins with acknowledging these facts as accurate, considering our bodies dead to the evils that the writer lists (v. 5). Paul recognizes, as the Christian will, also, that we once walked in such sinful behavior. Still, now we are to put off all those sinful traits.

Since Christians are part of the body of Christ, the church, they must put off sinful behavior and put on the new characteristics of the believer who is born again of God and has a new nature. Paul concludes this portion of the reading by reminding us that when men and women come into a relationship with Jesus Christ by faith, they join a host of believers whose prior differences are of no significance now. The family of God is distinct in itself, but it no longer involves ethnic origins, religious distinctions, social positions, or any such differences. We are all in Christ, and He is the center of all things and the head of the body.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Jesus was speaking to a large crowd, "many thousands," the text says (Luke 12:1). He speaks first to His disciples, warning them about impending dangers. Even though there will be some who will try to kill them, they are not to fear because they belong to God. He encourages them to realize that God cares for every sparrow and that they are much more precious to Him than the birds. As Jesus was telling them what would occur, He was interrupted by a request from the crowd. It's a personal concern that Jesus addresses and uses to teach essential principles about possessions and greed.

Gospel Reading:

> *Luke 12:13-21 NAS95 13 Someone in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." 14 But He said to him, "Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?" 15 Then He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." 16 And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive. 17 And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' 18 Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 'And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.' 20 But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' 21 So is the man who stores up treasure for*

himself, and is not rich toward God."

The request: "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." Without responding to the specific request, Jesus uses it as a springboard to reveal real-life principles that are not widely recognized or practiced (either in His day or today). Good teachers, by the way, will wisely take such opportunities to launch a lesson with much broader application than the personal request or the question of an individual inquirer.

Jesus begins by saying, "Not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." Then, as He often did, Jesus tells a parable, a story, to illustrate His point. He tells about a rich man who could think only of how to accumulate more riches and how to hoard them. He felt that he would then be able to enjoy a life of ease and plenty. The rich man's plight sounds a lot like many of our 21st-century citizens in more affluent countries. To look at the size of people's houses and their overflowing garages, one might think that Jesus was wrong. "Stuff" does seem to be of great importance. Yet, as the Broadway play says, "You Can't Take It With You." So, we should consider our spiritual condition more than the abundance of things we own.

Jesus went on to share the climax of the story. God intervenes in the rich man's life and enlightens him—and us—of the insignificance of life if it is all wrapped up in what we have. There are two dire consequences of the rich man's plan. First, he has not thought of the future in eternal terms. His soul is lost forever. Second, he has not considered his possessions in terms of their actual value. What happens to them when he's gone? Perhaps we should also recognize that he did not consider how those possessions could be used for wider benefit than his enjoyment.

Jesus concludes, applying the lesson to all his hearers (and readers of the text today): "The man who stores up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God" is doomed, as was the rich fool. So, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19-21).

Reflection Questions

1. What are one or two ways you are storing up treasure **on earth** for yourself? In what ways does

Jesus' teaching inform your heart as a defense against this?

2. What are one or two ways in which you are actively storing up treasure **in heaven**?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 08-04-2024



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with a reading from Exodus, where God performed a miracle to feed the multitude of Hebrew people who had just been delivered from slavery in Egypt. We then move to the letter that Saint Paul wrote to the Ephesians, where he describes what being a Christian looks like, contrasting new life in Christ to the old way of life in darkness. Finally, we conclude with Jesus' declaration that he is the bread from heaven, harkening back to the manna that was described in the first reading from Exodus.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Exodus. The Hebrew people had just been delivered from the captivity of the Egyptians. God raised up Moses to lead His people out of Egypt. As we will see, even though God performed many miraculous signs and provisions in this first phase of the Exodus the people quickly complained against Him and wanted to return to their captivity. As you read, ask yourself in what ways you find it easy to complain about God's ways and would wish to return to captivity's predictability.

First Reading:

Exodus 16:1-15 NAS95 1 Then they set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the sons of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from the land of Egypt. 2 The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. 3 The sons of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the LORD'S hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." 4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction. 5 "On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily." 6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the sons of Israel, "At evening you will know that the LORD has brought you out of the land of Egypt; 7 and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, for He hears your grumblings against the LORD; and what are we, that you grumble against us?" 8 Moses said, "This will happen when the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening, and bread to the full in the morning; for the LORD hears your grumblings which you grumble against Him. And what are we? Your grumblings are not against us but against the LORD." 9 Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, 'Come near before the LORD, for He has heard your grumblings.'" 10 It came about as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. 11 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 12 "I have heard the grumblings of the sons of Israel; speak to them, saying, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'" 13 So it came about at evening that the quails came up and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. 14 When the layer of dew evaporated, behold, on the surface of the wilderness there was a fine flake-like thing, fine as the frost on the ground. 15 When the sons of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "It is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat.

The Hebrew people were in an interesting transition All of their lives, they had been slaves. Now slavery is not desirable in any context, but it is predictable and structured. You don't have to make any decisions, everything is decided for you. In the midst of the oppression, though, your basic needs are taken care of. While it was not luxurious living, the Hebrew slaves had a sense of security that was no longer available to them in their newfound freedom. Instead of looking at all that God had done to deliver them from their oppression and trust Him for their daunting future, they chose to rehearse the "good" points of their slavery (the security of food and shelter) and accused God of not caring about them.

This wasn't an isolated instance of grumbling, rather the text says, "The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness" (v. 2). In spite of their hard hearts, God heard the people and answered by telling Moses that He would "rain bread from heaven for you" even in the case when they did not obey Him (v. 4), which He knew they wouldn't. Moses explained to them that their complaints weren't against him but against God (v. 8). God made a special provision to provide for the Sabbath by making the manna quantitatively different (a double portion) on the day before as well as qualitatively different – it would not spoil during the Sabbath rest day. God then announced the miracle to Moses through the appearance of the Shekinah glory which the people saw (v. 10). In the meantime, in the evening before the raining of the manna from the sky began, God sent quail to the people (v. 13). The text concluded with the people seeing the manna and not recognizing what it was until Moses explained it to them (v. 15). The word "manna" in Hebrew means "what is it." As you can imagine, this was an extraordinary way for God to provide for His people. God seems to work in very unexpected ways.

There are many spiritual parallels in this reading between the provision of God through the manna and the person and work of Jesus Christ who, as we will see in the Gospel reading, called Himself "the bread of life" (John 6:35). In spite of the fact that the people grumbled against God He still provided food for them. The parallel in the New Testament is that in spite of the fact that most of the people didn't accept Jesus as their Messiah, God still provided salvation through Him. The manna was a very unique provision that was done only by God and could not come about by any natural means. In the same way, Jesus was God's supernatural provision and also did not come about by natural means but was instead born through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Ephesians, and the context is Paul's teaching on the spiritual unity of believers in the church and the unique calling to which God calls His people to walk together in a

new way outside of sensual and greedy practices.

Second Reading:

> *Ephesians 4:17-24 NAS95 17 So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; 19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. 20 But you did not learn Christ in this way, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, 22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.*

Paul typified the Gentiles as unbelievers who "walk[ed] in the futility of their mind[s], being darkened in their understanding" of the true salvation that comes only from God (v. 17). Their behavior is typical of the qualities displayed in the unbelieving world, and even among the grumbling Hebrews about whom we read in the first reading. In contrast, believers are called to set aside their former practices and walk in the newness of life, being renewed in their spirits and to put on the "new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth" (v. 24). Like the manna in the desert on the sixth day which was qualitatively different, believers are also called to be different from unbelievers who by their nature embrace ungodly behaviors because of the spiritual darkness that reigns in their hearts. As believers in Jesus, we now have a new nature in us. In order to understand our new nature, we must learn the truth about our identity in Christ, which Paul says begins when our minds are renewed. This renewing of our minds is why Bible study, prayer and being with other believers is so important for our growth in the Christian life. These practices help us to begin to see things as God sees them and then our lives become transformed as we let His ways be our ways (Romans 12:1-3).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from John 6 where Jesus reveals to the people the parallel between God's provision of the manna in the desert and to Himself as the "bread of life" that provides eternal life through faith in Him. Knowing what happened in the story before we pick up the reading will be

helpful. The immediate context of today's reading is just after the multiplying of the loaves and fishes in the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:1-15). Afterwards, Jesus fled from there because He sensed that the people were going to take Him by force to make Him their king (v. 15). Jesus, though, did not leave the region with the disciples on their boat, but he nonetheless showed up on the other side with them. This is why they ask Him when he got there and explains why they are confused in today's reading (v. 25). It was during this time that a storm arose and the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water (v. 19). Jesus got into the boat which was then immediately on the opposite shore (v. 21). In this instance, the text says that Jesus wasn't in the boat and never mentioned whether or not He calmed the sea (refer to Mark 4:35-41, Luke 8:22-25, and Matthew 8:23-27). But from these other references, we know that Jesus was able to do miraculous things, which was part of showing His legitimate right to claim Himself as the Messiah.

Gospel Reading:

> *John 6:24-35 NAS95 24 So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they themselves got into the small boats, and came to Capernaum seeking Jesus. 25 When they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, "Rabbi, when did You get here?" 26 Jesus answered them and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. 27 Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal." 28 Therefore they said to Him, "What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?" 29 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." 30 So they said to Him, "What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform? 31 "Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'HE GAVE THEM BREAD OUT OF HEAVEN TO EAT.'" 32 Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. 33 "For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world." 34 Then they said to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread." 35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst."*

Before we study the text, note that Jesus' point in this particular teaching wasn't whether or not He is spiritually present in the elements of communion. The main point of Jesus' teaching is that belief in Him is the only way to obtain eternal life through the Father God. Even though some of the people were familiar with Jesus, this shouldn't have stopped them from seeing the miraculous signs that He was doing and how His work confirmed the teaching of the Old Testament (John 6:45).

The reading is the third of many misunderstandings that the people had about Jesus and the nature of the promised Messiah. In each case, Jesus uses a common symbol to describe a spiritual reality. The first time this happened was back in Chapter 3 during His discussion with Nicodemus who misunderstood Jesus' reference to spiritual birth. Jesus explained the need to be born again or from above (John 3:3). The second case was Jesus' interaction with a Samaritan woman where Jesus equated trusting Him with "living water" that would satisfy the unquenchable thirst of the human soul (John 4:6-29). The symbolism that Jesus was using here with the Samaritan woman and the water was an illustration of the eternal life that can only come through faith in Him. Like Nicodemus (and to the Jews in today's reading), this connection between a concrete substance (birth, bread, water) and a spiritual reality wasn't obvious to the woman because she asked him to give her the water so she wouldn't have to keep coming to the well (John 4:15). Jesus gave a clue to His disciples about what was to come shortly after this interaction when they urged Him to eat something (John 4:31). Jesus answered them by saying, "I have food to eat that you do not know about," and "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work" (John 4:32, 34). This is very similar to what happened in the story today, but instead of water Jesus used the symbolism of bread. This opens the next chapter in which Jesus feeds the people with physical food to provide for their temporal needs but unveils their greater need of eternal life through faith in God's only spiritual provision: Jesus, the heavenly manna.

Paul sheds light on these allusions from Israel's past for those of us who are reading this as Gentiles, without the history of the Jewish people as our backdrop. He gave the following explanation about the water, manna, and the people's unbelief in Exodus about which we read in the first reading:

1 Corinthians 10:1-5 NAS95 1 For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; 3 and all ate the same spiritual food; 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.

Paul wanted New Testament believers to understand their spiritual heritage and to learn from their mistakes that led to disbelief and rejection of God's provision for their lives. Therefore, it is important to understand this passage in light of the broader context of Jewish history. Jesus claimed to be the promised Messiah, God's special and chosen servant to deliver people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). What they expected of the Messiah and what Jesus portrayed were two very different things. The people had a hard time accepting that God's unexpected ways (faith in the suffering servant as explained in Isaiah 53) was better than their visions of Messiah (a political ruler who would take care of their physical and material needs).

In today's story, people from among the five thousand whom Jesus fed earlier were searching for him (v. 24) Their reaction to finding Jesus miraculously on the other side of the lake was not what we would expect. They did not ask Him **how** He got there but rather **when** He got there, trying to piece together a plausible explanation (v. 25). Jesus didn't bother to answer their impertinent question, but rather cut to the heart of the matter of their deep spiritual need. They were overcome by their desire for physical bread, but Jesus saw their most critical need, spiritual food that would lead to eternal restoration and life. They followed Jesus there because they desired to eat their fill of the bread that He gave them last time, so Jesus explained to them that their physical need for bread was minor compared to their need for spiritual restoration with their Heavenly Father that came only from God. Jesus told them that although they saw the signs He did, they still didn't believe in Him as the Messiah from God, but rather approached Him as their physical provider, a sort of genie on demand (v. 26). Remember that Jesus had to flee from them right after the feeding of the five thousand because He knew that they were going to try and make Him their civil King because they saw Him as their provider. Instead of going along with their folly, Jesus instead told them, "Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you" (v. 27).

Looking back to the manna in the desert, had the people not been so hard hearted, they could have better understood God's provision. In the case of the manna it was collected for the first five days of the week and went bad overnight. But on the sixth day God provided a double amount of a special type which was preserved for a two-day period in order to provide for a Sabbath rest day. In the spiritual sense Jesus is our special manna, the one who provides our eternal Sabbath rest (Hebrews 4). The people in this story then bullheadedly asked Jesus for another sign, an attitude about which Jesus said later, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet" (Matthew 12:39). Jesus answered their request for a sign with an explanation of how God's provision of manna was similar to the spiritual nourishment that He desired to give them, if they would ask God to change their hearts so they could listen and receive God's provision for them through Christ as Messiah. We will see next week in verse 44 that Jesus continues to explain the way to God through Him by saying, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day." Jesus addresses their need for restoration in their relationship with the Father by referring back to Israel's history and said, "He gave them bread out of heaven to eat" (v. 31).

The people responded to Jesus' illustration of Himself as their spiritual bread in a similar way as did the Samaritan woman saying, "Lord, always give us this bread." Jesus answered them by using language which included the information about His interaction with the Samaritan woman and the sign of the living water. This he most likely did for the benefit of His disciples who had still not understood the sign of the feeding of the five thousand (Mark 8:17 – 21). Jesus used an "I am" statement which strongly indicated His divinity, saying "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me

will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst" (v. 34). Jesus was the double provision of the special manna that didn't perish on the sixth day that nourished the people into their Sabbath rest. The work of God is not "works", for Jesus clarified this in verse 29: "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." Jesus explained that the way to God was uniquely through faith in Him.

We will see this claim better next week as we study the continuation of Jesus' teaching on this matter where Jesus said, "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and **believes** in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day" (v. 40). The heart of the matter was **belief** in Jesus as the one and only Son of the Father, the only One through Whom came eternal life. Though the people sought physical bread to satisfy their physical needs, Jesus cut to their greatest need of spiritual healing which came only through belief in Him as the only way to God.

What does this mean for our lives? The main point of the reading was Jesus' profound statement that belief in Him as a type of spiritual manna was the only means of finding peace and eternal life with God. Unlike Nicodemus who seemingly believed Jesus later in his life (John 19:39), and the Samaritan woman who believed in Jesus immediately after listening to Him, many of the people in this story didn't believe and separated themselves from Him. This is evident in the infamous John 6-6-6- verse: "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore." After this statement, Saint Peter boldly identified Jesus as the Christ, saying, "To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68c – 69).

To whom will you go? Will you seek eternal life through the machinations of being a good person and observing religious activities? Will you be like the Samaritan woman and Nicodemus who surrendered their lives to the person of Jesus Christ, or will you respond like many in the crowd that separated themselves from Jesus because their Messiah didn't measure up to their expectations? Later in this discourse, Jesus said, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life" (John 6:63). May we be convinced from this passage to seek eternal life through faith in the One and Only means, Jesus Christ.

Reflection Questions

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1. What parallels do you see between the people of our day who want God on their own terms and the hard-hearted people of Israel in the Old and New Testament readings? What does the Ephesian's passage say about this way of thinking?

2. How can you be part of bringing a message of hope and light to people who are approaching God with an expectation of God being a genie on demand (and often being disillusioned with God's unexpected ways of interacting with them)? Are there areas of your own life that you need to work through disillusionment with the Lord's unexpected ways so that you can be freed up to minister to others authentically in their own struggles with surrendering to God?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 08-01-2021



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with a reading from Exodus, where God performed a miracle to feed the multitude of Hebrew people who had just been delivered from slavery in Egypt. We then move to the letter that Saint Paul wrote to the Ephesians, where he describes what being a Christian looks like, contrasting new life in Christ to the old way of life in darkness. Finally, we conclude with Jesus' declaration that he is bread from heaven, harkening back to the manna that was described in the first reading from Exodus.

Introduction to the First Reading:

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The first reading is from Exodus. The Hebrew people had just been delivered from the captivity of the Egyptians. God raised up Moses to lead His people out of Egypt. As we will see, even though God performed many miraculous signs and provisions in this first phase of the Exodus the people quickly complained against Him and wanted to return to their captivity. As you read, ask yourself in what ways you too find it easy to complain about God's ways and would wish to return to captivity's predictability.

First Reading:

Exodus 16:1-15 NAS95 1 Then they set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the sons of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from the land of Egypt. 2 The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. 3 The sons of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the LORD'S hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." 4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction. 5 "On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily." 6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the sons of Israel, "At evening you will know that the LORD has brought you out of the land of Egypt; 7 and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, for He hears your grumblings against the LORD; and what are we, that you grumble against us?" 8 Moses said, "This will happen when the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening, and bread to the full in the morning; for the LORD hears your grumblings which you grumble against Him. And what are we? Your grumblings are not against us but against the LORD." 9 Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, 'Come near before the LORD, for He has heard your grumblings.'" 10 It came about as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. 11 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 12 "I have heard the grumblings of the sons of Israel; speak to them, saying, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'" 13 So it came about at evening that the quails came up and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. 14 When the layer of dew evaporated, behold, on the surface of the wilderness there was a fine flake-like thing, fine as the frost on the ground. 15 When the sons of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "It is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat.

The Hebrew people were in an interesting transition All of their lives, they had been slaves. Now slavery is not desirable in any context, but it is predictable and structured. You don't have to make

any decisions, everything is decided for you. In the midst of the oppression, though, your basic needs are taken care of. While it was not luxurious living, the Hebrew slaves had a sense of security that was no longer available to them in their new-found freedom. Instead of looking at all that God had done to deliver them from their oppression and trust Him for their daunting future, they chose to rehearse the "good" points of their slavery (the security of food and shelter) and accused God of not caring about them.

This wasn't an isolated instance of grumbling, rather the text says, "The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness" (v. 2). In spite of their hard hearts, God heard the people and answered by telling Moses that He would "rain bread from heaven for you" even in the case when they did not obey Him (v. 4), which He knew they wouldn't. Moses explained to them that their complaints weren't against him but against God (v. 8). God made a special provision to provide for the sabbath by making the manna quantitatively different (a double portion) on the day before as well as qualitatively different – it would not spoil during the sabbath rest day. God then announced the miracle to Moses through the appearance of the Shekinah glory which the people saw (v. 10). In the meantime, in the evening before the raining of the manna from the sky began, God sent quail to the people (v. 13). The text concluded with the people seeing the manna and not recognizing what it was until Moses explained it to them (v. 15). The word "manna" in Hebrew means "what is it." As you can imagine, this was an extraordinary way for God to provide for His people. God seems to work in very unexpected ways.

There are many spiritual parallels in this reading between the provision of God through the manna and the person and work of Jesus Christ who, as we will see in the Gospel reading, called Himself "the bread of life" (John 6:35). In spite of the fact that the people grumbled against God He still provided food for them. The parallel in the New Testament is that in spite of the fact that most of the people didn't accept Jesus as their Messiah, God still provided salvation through Him. The manna was a very unique provision that was done only by God and could not come about by any natural means. In the same way, Jesus was God's supernatural provision and also did not come about by natural means but was instead born through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Ephesians and the context is Paul's teaching on the spiritual unity of believers in the church and the unique calling to which God calls His people to walk together in a new way outside of sensual and greedy practices.

Second Reading:

Ephesians 4:17-24 NAS95 17 So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; 19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. 20 But you did not learn Christ in this way, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, 22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

Paul typified the Gentiles as unbelievers who "walk[ed] in the futility of their mind[s], being darkened in their understanding" of the true salvation that comes only from God (v. 17). Their behavior is typical of the qualities displayed in the unbelieving world, and even among the grumbling Hebrews about whom we read in the first reading. In contrast, believers are called to set aside their former practices and walk in the newness of life, being renewed in their spirits and to put on the "new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth" (v. 24). Like the manna in the desert on the six day which was qualitatively different, believers are also called to be different from unbelievers who by their nature embrace ungodly behaviors because of the spiritual darkness that reigns in their hearts. As believers in Jesus, we now have a new nature in us. In order to understand our new nature, we must learn the truth about our identity in Christ, which Paul says begins when our minds are renewed. This renewing of our minds is why Bible study, prayer and being with other believers is so important for our growth in the Christian life. These practices help us to begin to see things as God sees them and then our lives become transformed as we let His ways be our ways (Romans 12:1-3).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from John 6 where Jesus reveals to the people the parallel between God's provision of the manna in the desert and to Himself as the "bread of life" that provides eternal life through faith in Him. Knowing what happened in the story before we pick up the reading will be helpful. The immediate context of today's reading is just after the multiplying of the loaves and fishes in the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:1-15). Afterwards Jesus fled from there because He sensed that the people were going to take Him by force to make Him their king (v. 15). Jesus,

though, did not leave the region with the disciples on their boat, but he nonetheless showed up on the other side with them. This is why they ask Him when he got there and explains why they are confused in today's reading (v. 25). It was during this time that a storm arose and the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water (v. 19). Jesus got into the boat which was then immediately at the opposite shore (v. 21). In this instance, the text says that Jesus wasn't in the boat and never mentioned whether or not He calmed the sea (refer to Mark 4:35-41, Luke 8:22-25, and Matthew 8:23-27). But from these other references, we know that Jesus was able to do miraculous things, which was part of Him showing His legitimate right to claim Himself as the Messiah.

Gospel Reading:

John 6:24-35 NAS95 24 So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they themselves got into the small boats, and came to Capernaum seeking Jesus. 25 When they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, "Rabbi, when did You get here?" 26 Jesus answered them and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. 27 Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal." 28 Therefore they said to Him, "What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?" 29 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." 30 So they said to Him, "What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform? 31 "Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'HE GAVE THEM BREAD OUT OF HEAVEN TO EAT.'" 32 Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. 33 "For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world." 34 Then they said to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread." 35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst."

Before we study the text, note that Jesus' point in this particular teaching wasn't whether or not He is spiritually present in the elements of communion. The main point of Jesus' teaching is that belief in Him is the only way to obtain eternal life through the Father God. Even though some of the people were familiar with Jesus, this shouldn't have stopped them from seeing the miraculous signs that He was doing and how His work confirmed the teaching of the Old Testament (John 6:45).

The reading is the third of many misunderstandings that the people had about Jesus and the nature of the promised Messiah. In each case Jesus uses a common symbol to describe a spiritual reality.

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will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst" (v. 34). Jesus was the double provision of the special manna that didn't perish on the sixth day that nourished the people into their Sabbath rest. The work of God is not "works", for Jesus clarified this in verse 29: "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." Jesus explained that the way to God was uniquely through faith in Him.

We will see this claim better next week as we study the continuation of Jesus' teaching on this matter where Jesus said, "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and **believes** in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day" (v. 40). The heart of the matter was **belief** in Jesus as the one and only Son of the Father, the only One through Whom came eternal life. Though the people sought physical bread to satisfy their physical needs, Jesus cut to their greater need of spiritual healing which came only through belief in Him as the only way to God.

What does this mean for our lives? The main point of the reading was Jesus' profound statement that belief in Him as a type of spiritual manna was the only means of finding peace and eternal life with God. Unlike Nicodemus who seemingly believed Jesus later in his life (John 19:39), and the Samaritan woman who believed in Jesus immediately after listening to Him, many of the people in this story didn't believe and separated themselves from Him. This is evident in the infamous John 6-6-6- verse: "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore." After this statement Saint Peter boldly identified Jesus as the Christ, saying, "To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68c – 69).

To whom will you go? Will you seek eternal life through the machinations of being a good person and observing religious activities? Will you be like the Samaritan woman and Nicodemus who surrendered their lives to the person of Jesus Christ, or will you respond like many in the crowd that separated themselves from Jesus because their Messiah didn't measure up to their expectations? Later in this discourse Jesus said, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life" (John 6:63). May we be convinced from this passage to seek eternal life through faith in the One and Only means, Jesus Christ.

Reflection Questions

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1. What parallels do you see between the people of our day who want God on their own terms and the hard-hearted people of Israel in the Old and New Testament readings? What does the Ephesian's passage say about this way of thinking?

2. How can you be part of bringing a message of hope and light to people who are approaching God with an expectation of God being a genie on demand (and often being disillusioned with God's unexpected ways of interacting with them)? Are there areas of your own life that you need to work through disillusionment with the Lord's unexpected ways so that you can be freed up to minister to others authentically in their own struggles with surrendering to God?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 08-04-2019



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we begin with a reading from the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes, written by Solomon, king of Israel, and the wisest man of his time. Although it is inspired by God—as is all Scripture–it is written from the perspective of a frustrated man who is seeking for answers to life's hard questions. The second reading is from Paul's epistle to the early church in Colossae. Its theme is the Christian life that is centered in Jesus Christ and how that is

lived out in everyday life. Finally, we look once again at the Gospel of Luke and hear Jesus speak about the dangers of human greed.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Ecclesiastes is a hard book for many readers to understand, because at times it seems to support ideas that are contrary to other biblical teachings. For example, "There is a time to kill" (3:3). Of course, context is all important in interpreting Scripture, so we have to remember that the author, though the wisest of all men, is looking at life from a purely secular perspective. He uses the expression, "under the sun" more than two dozen times in the book.

First Reading:

> *Ecclesiastes 1:1-2 NAS95 1 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. 2 "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity."*
>
> *Ecclesiastes 2:21-23 NAS95 21 When there is a man who has labored with wisdom, knowledge and skill, then he gives his legacy to one who has not labored with them. This too is vanity and a great evil. 22 For what does a man get in all his labor and in his striving with which he labors under the sun? 23 Because all his days his task is painful and grievous; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is vanity.*

The authorship of this book is made perfectly clear from the very beginning. He is the third king of Israel, under whose reign the nation reaches the pinnacle of its world prominence, especially in terms of wealth. God had spoken to Solomon on at least two occasions and had asked him what he wanted above all else. Solomon asked not for riches or fame, but for wisdom, and God granted his request (1 Kings 3:5-12). And it was Solomon who built the temple for God to dwell in by His Shekinah Glory.

To read the exploits of Solomon is to discover a man of great talent, having written three thousand proverbs and a thousand and five songs (1 Kings 4:32). He failed to keep his promises to God, however, and he took numerous foreign wives and accumulated thousands of horses in direct disobedience to God's commands. As a result, Solomon questions life's realities. What is life all about? What is its purpose? What good is it for man to work hard when he gains little and cannot rest?

Today's reading records those questions and the completely unsatisfactory answers in Solomon's

judgment. "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity," he writes. Another translation of this conclusion is "Completely meaningless! Everything is meaningless." We must remember, however, that this is not the end of all things. Solomon concludes this writing by acknowledging that his search "under the sun" has produced nothing, but there is a lesson to be learned. He writes, "Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind (12:13). Today, then, in spite of the apparent hopelessness of life sometimes, we are to keep God's commandments. That will give us the peace that Solomon was searching for.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Whenever a paragraph begins with the word "therefore," you have to ask what has preceded and how is it related to what is to follow. As a consequence to what Paul has taught in chapters 1 and 2, the believer should follow the instructions he is about to give. In other words, because the Christian recognizes that Jesus is God in the flesh (2:9), has "received Jesus as Lord" (2:6), and has been "made alive with Christ (2:13), he or she does not need to submit to the rules of the world that is controlled by Satan and his evil system (2:20).

Second Reading:

Note: Verses 6 – 8 which were omitted from the reading are included below.

> *Colossians 3:1-11 NAS95 1 Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. 5 Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. 6 For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, 7 and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. 8 But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, 10 and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him– 11 a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.*

Instead of following the worldly way, the believer is to have a different motivation. The Christian has been raised up with Christ and is to "keep seeking the things above" (3:1). That is, his incentives should be spiritual, inspired from above, not worldly. Believers are to focus on "things above not on the things … on the earth (v. 2). The apostle uses the phrase, "set your mind," which reminds us of

what he wrote in Romans 12, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters . . . Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (verses 1-2). It's a matter of the mind—what we think. Instructions like this have less to do with emotion and more to do with sound thinking and proper conduct as a result.

How is all this possible? Paul makes it clear; the believer "has died" (to sin), his life is "hidden with Christ in God," and one day Christians will be "revealed with Him in glory." It all begins with acknowledging these facts as true, considering our bodies as being dead to the evils that the writer lists (v. 5). Paul recognizes, as the Christian will, also, that we once walked in such sinful behavior, but now we are to put off all those sinful traits.

Since the Christian is part of the body of Christ, the church, he must put off sinful behavior and put on the new characteristics of the believer who is born again of God and has a new nature. Paul concludes this portion of the reading by reminding us that when men and women come into a relationship with Jesus Christ by faith, they join a host of believers whose prior differences are of no significance now. The family of God is distinct in itself but it no longer involves ethnic origins, religious distinctions, social positions, or any such differences. We are all in Christ and He is the center of all things and the head of the body.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Jesus was speaking to a large crowd, "many thousands," the text says (Luke 12:1). He speaks first to His disciples, warning them about dangers to come. Even though there will be some who will try to kill them, they are not to fear, because they belong to God. He encourages them to realize that God cares for every sparrow, and they are much more precious to Him than the birds. As Jesus was telling them about what would occur, He is interrupted by a request from the crowd. It's a personal concern that Jesus addresses and uses to teach important principles about possessions and greed.

Gospel Reading:

> *Luke 12:13-21 NAS95 13 Someone in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." 14 But He said to him, "Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?" 15 Then He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." 16 And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive. 17 And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' 18 Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 'And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.' 20 But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' 21 So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."*

The request: "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." Without responding to the specific request, Jesus uses it as a springboard to reveal real-life principles that are not widely recognized or practiced (either in His day or today). Good teachers, by the way, will wisely take such opportunities to launch a lesson that has much broader application than the personal request or question of an individual inquirer.

Jesus begins by saying, "Not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." Then, as He often did, Jesus tells a parable, a story, to illustrate His point. He tells about a rich man who could think only of how to accumulate more riches and how to hoard them. He thought that he would then be able to enjoy a life of ease and plenty. The rich man's plight sounds a lot like many of our 21st century citizens in more affluent countries. To look at the size of people's houses and their overflowing garages, one might think that Jesus was wrong. "Stuff" does seem to be of great importance. Yet, as the Broadway play says, "You Can't Take It With You." So, we should consider our spiritual condition more than the abundance of things we own.

Jesus went on to share the climax of the story. God intervenes in the rich man's life and enlightens him—and us—of the insignificance of life if it is all wrapped up in what we have. There are two dire consequences of the rich man's plan. First, he has not thought of the future in eternal terms. His soul is lost forever. Second, he has not thought of his possessions in terms of their true value. What happens to them when he's gone? Perhaps we should also recognize that he gave no consideration to how those possessions could be used for wider benefit than his own personal enjoyment.

Jesus concludes, applying the lesson to all his hearers (and readers of the text today): "The man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" is doomed as was the rich fool. So, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19-21).

Reflection Questions

1. What are one or two ways in which you are storing up for yourself treasure on earth? In what ways does Jesus' teaching inform you heart as a defense against this?
2. What are one or two ways in which you are actively storing up treasure in heaven?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 08-05-2018



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with a reading from Exodus, where God performed a miracle to feed the multitude of Hebrew people who had just been delivered from slavery in Egypt. We then move to the letter that Saint Paul wrote to the Ephesians, where he describes what being a Christian looks like, contrasting new life in Christ to the old way of life in darkness. Finally, we conclude with Jesus' declaration that he is bread from heaven, harkening back to the manna that was described in the first reading from Exodus.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Exodus. The Hebrew people had just been delivered from the captivity of the Egyptians. God raised up Moses to lead His people out of Egypt. As we will see, even though God performed many miraculous signs and provisions in this first phase of the Exodus the people quickly complained against Him and wanted to return to their captivity. As you read, ask yourself in what ways you too find it easy to complain about God's ways and would wish to return to captivity's predictability.

First Reading:

Exodus 16:1-15 NAS95 1 Then they set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the sons of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from the land of Egypt. 2 The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. 3 The sons of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the LORD'S hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." 4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction. 5 "On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily." 6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the sons of Israel, "At evening you will know that the LORD has brought you out of the land of Egypt; 7 and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, for He hears your grumblings against the LORD; and what are we, that you grumble against us?" 8 Moses said, "This will happen when the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening, and bread to the full in the morning; for the LORD hears your grumblings which you grumble against Him. And what are we? Your grumblings are not against us but against the LORD." 9 Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, 'Come near before the LORD, for He has heard your grumblings.'" 10 It came about as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. 11 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 12 "I have heard the grumblings of the sons of Israel; speak to them, saying, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'" 13 So it came about at evening that the quails came up and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. 14 When the layer of dew evaporated, behold, on the surface of the wilderness there was a fine flake-like thing, fine as the frost on the ground. 15 When the sons of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "It is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat.

The Hebrew people were in an interesting transition All of their lives, they had been slaves. Now slavery is not desirable in any context, but it is predictable and structured. You don't have to make any decisions, everything is decided for you. In the midst of the oppression, though, your basic needs are taken care of. While it was not luxurious living, the Hebrew slaves had a sense of security that was no longer available to them in their new-found freedom. Instead of looking at all that God had done to deliver them from their oppression and trust Him for their daunting future, they chose to rehearse the "good" points of their slavery (the security of food and shelter) and accused God of not caring about them.

This wasn't an isolated instance of grumbling, rather the text says, "The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness" (v. 2). In spite of their hard hearts, God heard the people and answered by telling Moses that He would "rain bread from heaven

for you" even in the case when they did not obey Him (v. 4), which He knew they wouldn't. Moses explained to them that their complaints weren't against him but against God (v. 8). God made a special provision to provide for the sabbath by making the manna quantitatively different (a double portion) on the day before as well as qualitatively different – it would not spoil during the sabbath rest day. God then announced the miracle to Moses through the appearance of the Shekinah glory which the people saw (v. 10). In the meantime, in the evening before the raining of the manna from the sky began, God sent quail to the people (v. 13). The text concluded with the people seeing the manna and not recognizing what it was until Moses explained it to them (v. 15). The word "manna" in Hebrew means "what is it." As you can imagine, this was an extraordinary way for God to provide for His people. God seems to work in very unexpected ways.

There are many spiritual parallels in this reading between the provision of God through the manna and the person and work of Jesus Christ who, as we will see in the Gospel reading, called Himself "the bread of life" (John 6:35). In spite of the fact that the people grumbled against God He still provided food for them. The parallel in the New Testament is that in spite of the fact that most of the people didn't accept Jesus as their Messiah, God still provided salvation through Him. The manna was a very unique provision that was done only by God and could not come about by any natural means. In the same way, Jesus was God's supernatural provision and also did not come about by natural means but was instead born through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Ephesians and the context is Paul's teaching on the spiritual unity of believers in the church and the unique calling to which God calls His people to walk together in a new way outside of sensual and greedy practices.

Second Reading:

> *Ephesians 4:17-24 NAS95 17 So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; 19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. 20 But you did not learn Christ in this way, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, 22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.*

Paul typified the Gentiles as unbelievers who "walk[ed] in the futility of their mind[s], being darkened in their understanding" of the true salvation that comes only from God (v. 17). Their behavior is typical of the qualities displayed in the unbelieving world, and even among the grumbling Hebrews about whom we read in the first reading. In contrast, believers are called to set

aside their former practices and walk in the newness of life, being renewed in their spirits and to put on the "new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth" (v. 24). Like the manna in the desert on the six day which was qualitatively different, believers are also called to be different from unbelievers who by their nature embrace ungodly behaviors because of the spiritual darkness that reigns in their hearts. As believers in Jesus, we now have a new nature in us. In order to understand our new nature, we must learn the truth about our identity in Christ, which Paul says begins when our minds are renewed. This renewing of our minds is why Bible study, prayer and being with other believers is so important for our growth in the Christian life. These practices help us to begin to see things as God sees them and then our lives become transformed as we let His ways be our ways (Romans 12:1-3).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from John 6 where Jesus reveals to the people the parallel between God's provision of the manna in the desert and to Himself as the "bread of life" that provides eternal life through faith in Him. Knowing what happened in the story before we pick up the reading will be helpful. The immediate context of today's reading is just after the multiplying of the loaves and fishes in the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:1-15). Afterwards Jesus fled from there because He sensed that the people were going to take Him by force to make Him their king (v. 15). Jesus, though, did not leave the region with the disciples on their boat, but he nonetheless showed up on the other side with them. This is why they ask Him when he got there and explains why they are confused in today's reading (v. 25). It was during this time that a storm arose and the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water (v. 19). Jesus got into the boat which was then immediately at the opposite shore (v. 21). In this instance, the text says that Jesus wasn't in the boat and never mentioned whether or not He calmed the sea (refer to Mark 4:35-41, Luke 8:22-25, and Matthew 8:23-27). But from these other references, we know that Jesus was able to do miraculous things, which was part of Him showing His legitimate right to claim Himself as the Messiah.

Gospel Reading:

> *John 6:24-35 NAS95 24 So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they themselves got into the small boats, and came to Capernaum seeking Jesus. 25 When they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, "Rabbi, when did You get here?" 26 Jesus answered them and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. 27 Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal." 28 Therefore they said to Him, "What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?" 29 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." 30 So they said to Him, "What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform? 31 "Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'HE GAVE THEM BREAD OUT OF HEAVEN TO EAT.'" 32 Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. 33 "For the bread of*

> *God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world." 34 Then they said to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread." 35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst."*

Before we study the text, note that Jesus' point in this particular teaching wasn't whether or not He is spiritually present in the elements of communion. The main point of Jesus' teaching is that belief in Him is the only way to obtain eternal life through the Father God. Even though some of the people were familiar with Jesus, this shouldn't have stopped them from seeing the miraculous signs that He was doing and how His work confirmed the teaching of the Old Testament (John 6:45).

The reading is the third of many misunderstandings that the people had about Jesus and the nature of the promised Messiah. In each case Jesus uses a common symbol to describe a spiritual reality. The first time this happened was back in Chapter 3 during His discussion with Nicodemus who misunderstood Jesus' reference to spiritual birth. Jesus explained the need to be born again or from above (John 3:3). The second case was Jesus' interaction with a Samaritan woman where Jesus equated trusting Him with "living water" that would satisfy the unquenchable thirst of the human soul (John 4:6-29). The symbolism that Jesus was using here with the Samaritan woman and the water was an illustration of the eternal life that can only come through faith in Him. Like Nicodemus (and to the Jews in today's reading), this connection between a concrete substance (birth, bread, water) and a spiritual reality wasn't obvious to the woman because she asked him to give her the water so she wouldn't have to keep coming to the well (John 4:15). Jesus gave a clue to His disciples about what was to come shortly after this interaction when they urged Him to eat something (John 4:31). Jesus answered them by saying, "I have food to eat that you do not know about," and "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work" (John 4:32, 34).This is very similar to what happened in the story today but instead of water Jesus used the symbolism of bread. This opens the next chapter in which Jesus feeds the people with physical food to provide for their temporal needs but unveils their greater need of eternal life through faith in God's only spiritual provision: Jesus, the heavenly manna.

Paul sheds light on these allusions from Israel's past for those of us who are reading this as Gentiles, without the history of the Jewish people as our backdrop. He gave the following explanation about the water, manna, and the people's unbelief in Exodus about which we read in the first reading:

> *1 Corinthians 10:1-5 NAS95 1 For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; 3 and all ate the same spiritual food; 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.*

Paul wanted New Testament believers to understand the spiritual heritage and to learn from the mistakes that led to disbelief and rejection of God's provision for their lives. Therefore, it is important to understand this passage in light of the broader context of Jewish history. Jesus claimed

to be the promised Messiah, God's special and chosen servant to deliver people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). What they expected of the Messiah and what Jesus portrayed were two very different things. The people had a hard time accepting that God's unexpected ways (faith in the suffering servant as explained in Isaiah 53) was better than their visions of Messiah (a political ruler who would take care of their physical and material needs).

In today's story, people from among the five thousand whom Jesus fed earlier were searching for him (v. 24) Their reaction to finding Jesus miraculously on the other side of the lake was not what we would expect. They did not ask Him **how** He got there but rather **when** He got there, trying to piece together a plausible explanation (v. 25). Jesus didn't bother to answer their impertinent question, but rather cut to the heart of the matter of their deep spiritual need. They were overcome by their desire for physical bread, but Jesus saw their more critical need, spiritual food that would lead to eternal restoration and life. They followed Jesus there because they desired to eat their fill of the bread that He gave them last time, so Jesus explained to them that their physical need for bread was minor compared to their need for spiritual restoration with their Heavenly Father that came only from God. Jesus told them that although they saw the signs He did they still didn't believe in Him as the Messiah from God, but rather approached Him as their physical provider, a sort of genie on demand (v. 26). Remember that Jesus had to flee from them right after the feeding of the five thousand because He knew that they were going to try and make Him their civil King because they saw Him as their provider. Instead of going along with their folly, Jesus instead told them, "Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you" (v. 27).

Looking back to the manna in the desert, had the people not been so hard hearted they could have better understood God's provision. In the case of the manna it was collected for the first five days of the week and went bad overnight. But on the sixth day God provided a double amount of a special type which was preserved for a two-day period in order to provide for a sabbath rest day. In the spiritual sense Jesus is our special manna, the one who provides our eternal Sabbath rest (Hebrews 4). The people in this story then bullheadedly asked Jesus for another sign, an attitude about which Jesus said later, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet" (Matthew 12:39). Jesus answered their request for a sign with an explanation of how God's provision of manna was similar to the spiritual nourishment that He desired to give them, if they would ask God to change their hearts so they could listen and receive God's provision to them through Christ as Messiah. We will see next week in verse 44 that Jesus continues to explain the way to God through Him by saying, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day." Jesus addresses their need for restoration in their relationship with the Father by referring back to Israel's history and said, "He gave them bread out of heaven to eat" (v. 31).

The people responded to Jesus' illustration of Himself as their spiritual bread in a similar way as did the Samaritan woman saying, "Lord, always give us this bread." Jesus answered them by using language which included the information about His interaction with the Samaritan woman and the sign of the living water. This he most likely did for the benefit of His disciples who had still not

understood the sign of the feeding of the five thousand (Mark 8:17 – 21). Jesus used an "I am" statement which strongly indicated His divinity, saying "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst" (v. 34). Jesus was the double provision of the special manna that didn't perish on the sixth day that nourished the people into their Sabbath rest. The work of God is not "works", for Jesus clarified this in verse 29: "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." Jesus explained that the way to God was uniquely through faith in Him.

We will see this claim better next week as we study the continuation of Jesus' teaching on this matter where Jesus said, "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and **believes** in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day" (v. 40). The heart of the matter was **belief** in Jesus as the one and only Son of the Father, the only One through Whom came eternal life. Though the people sought physical bread to satisfy their physical needs, Jesus cut to their greater need of spiritual healing which came only through belief in Him as the only way to God.

What does this mean for our lives? The main point of the reading was Jesus' profound statement that belief in Him as a type of spiritual manna was the only means of finding peace and eternal life with God. Unlike Nicodemus who seemingly believed Jesus later in his life (John 19:39), and the Samaritan woman who believed in Jesus immediately after listening to Him, many of the people in this story didn't believe and separated themselves from Him. This is evident in the infamous John 6-6-6- verse: "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore." After this statement Saint Peter boldly identified Jesus as the Christ, saying, "To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68c – 69).

To whom will you go? Will you seek eternal life through the machinations of being a good person and observing religious activities? Will you be like the Samaritan woman and Nicodemus who surrendered their lives to the person of Jesus Christ, or will you respond like many in the crowd that separated themselves from Jesus because their Messiah didn't measure up to their expectations? Later in this discourse Jesus said, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life" (John 6:63). May we be convinced from this passage to seek eternal life through faith in the One and Only means, Jesus Christ.

Reflection Questions

1. What parallels do you see between the people of our day who want God on their own terms and the hard-hearted people of Israel in the Old and New Testament readings? What does the Ephesian's passage say about this way of thinking?

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2. How can you be part of bringing a message of hope and light to people who are approaching God with an expectation of God being a genie on demand (and often being disillusioned with God's unexpected ways of interacting with them)? Are there areas of your own life that you need to work through disillusionment with the Lord's unexpected ways so that you can be freed up to minister to others authentically in their own struggles with surrendering to God?

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