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

Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 2-28-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **2-28-2016**. Why do bad things happen to "good" people? In the Gospel reading today Jesus addressed a related question posed to Him by the crowd except with a twist. Their question was whether when bad things happened to people were they worse sinners than the ones who avoided the same fate? We will see how Jesus cut to the heart of the matter, the people's universal need for repentance and faith for the forgiveness of sin. This week we also look at a story of Moses in the Book of Exodus and a passage from 1 Corinthians which relates another story from Exodus.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Exodus. The context of the reading is Moses' calling by God to lead the Hebrews out of their captivity under the Pharaoh. In chapter 1, after the Israelites had settled in Egypt under Joseph's guardianship (in the seven-year famine), "there arose a new king in Egypt who did not know Joseph" (Exodus 1:8). After Moses saw the injustices being done against his people, he killed an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrews (Exodus 2:12). After he fled from the Pharaoh who found out about it, he helped Jethro's daughters water their flock (Exodus 2:17). Afterwards, Jethro, "the priest of Midian," gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses as his wife (v. 21). Thereafter he had his first son Gershom there in the land of Midian during this time of his first "exodus" because of his flight from the Pharaoh. All of this is leading up to today's reading in chapter three which begins the period of time known as "The Exodus" during which Moses under the direction of God led the Hebrew people out of Egypt. In today's reading we see Moses' first recorded experience with a divine revelation from God which happened during his stewardship of his

father-in-law's flock.

First Reading:

Note: Verses 8b – 12 that were omitted from the reading have been included below.

Exodus 3:1-15 NAS95 1 Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. 3 So Moses said, "I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up." 4 When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." 5 Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 6 He said also, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. 7 The LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. 8 So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. 9 Now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them. 10 Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt." 11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?" 12 And He said, "Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain." 13 Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?" 14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" 15 God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations.

In the reading, we see Moses receiving direct revelation from God, first in the form of a sign (a bush burning but not consumed) and then in the form of the voice of God calling him by name (v. 4). This was the formal calling of the prophet Moses for the specific purpose of delivering the people from their oppression in Egypt (v. 10). Moses questioned God as to how he, as a humble man, could ever accomplish such a great task (v. 11). In contrast to the proud characteristics often exhibited in leaders such as the Pharaoh, we see in Numbers 12:3 how Moses was called the most humble man on the earth. God answered Moses by giving him a sign, saying that once he led the people out of Egypt that he would worship Him again at this same mountain (v. 12). Again, Moses questioned God asking what he should tell his people about the Person from whom he received his commission to

deliver them from their oppression. God answered, ""I AM WHO I AM" (v. 14) and to tell them that "I AM has sent me to you" (v. 14). Finally, God connected His "I AM" name, the self-existent One, to the lineage of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (v. 15). In addition to the introduction of the "I AM" designation for God, in verse 2 we also see the use of the word "LORD." This word when used in all capitals denotes the Hebrew word (without vowels) "YHWH," the "tetragrammaton," often translated Yahweh. The first occurrence of this word is found back in Geneses 2:4 and then in 15:6 in which it says about Abraham, "And he believed the LORD and it was counted to him for righteousness." "YHWH" is a reflection of God's divine being, His self-existent nature, something made clear in His words to Moses. This bounding of the reading by opening and closing it with the word "LORD" (v. 2, 15) and the introduction of the heretofore unknown name for God of "I Am" indicates a very strong expression of the sovereignty of God in directing the affairs of Moses to accomplish God's purposes. Moses was to be God's chosen agent to affect the freeing of the Hebrew Nation, the one through whom God would pour pronouncements of blessings to those who obey and curses for those who didn't.

There is plenty that we can we learn from the reading that we can apply to our lives. God works through the lives of frail, imperfect people, like Moses. Although Moses sinned in the killing of the Egyptian (Exodus 2:12) God used him in spite of his sin. If God can use a humble man like Moses to accomplish His purposes, we should assume that God would use ordinary people like ourselves in working out His plan. Second, when God places a specific calling upon our life He expects our obedience, but it's okay to seek answers to our questions. In our day and age, we can seek guidance from a variety of sources when we sense that God has placed a specific calling upon our lives. These include direct statements from Scripture, principles from Scripture, counsel from godly people (especially those with whom we collaborate in praying), and sensing the circumstances that God has placed in our lives. In the reading, we saw how God used Moses' circumstances to lead him to the exact spot to which he needed to be.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

In this reading, 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 an explanation about the water, manna, and the people's unbelief using a quote from the Old Testament Book of Exodus from which we read in the first reading. Paul's readers would have been familiar with the Old Testament events surrounding the Exodus. Keep in mind the context of chapter 10 in that it follows Paul's explanation of the legitimacy of his apostleship, having just confronted the Corinthians over a very serious matter of sin in their church (see 1 Corinthians 5:1).

Some background on the manna is helpful to understand the big picture and the application to Jesus Christ. 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. In the desert, the Hebrews collected the manna for the first five days of the week that then went bad overnight. However, on the sixth day God provided a double amount of a special type that 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). Yet, like us, the people God led out from among slavery during the Exodus sinned. Yet, this wasn't an isolated instance of grumbling. It says in Exodus, "The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness" (Exodus 16:2). 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 (Exodus 16:4), which He knew they wouldn't. Moses explained to them that their complaints weren't against him but against God (Exodus 16:8). 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 (Exodus 16:10, c.f.). In the meantime, in the evening before the raining of the manna from the sky began, God sent quail to the people (Exodus 16:13). The text concluded with the people seeing the manna and not recognizing what it was until Moses explained it to them (Exodus 16:15).

Second Reading:

Note: Verses 7 – 9 that were omitted from the reading are included below.

1 Corinthians 10:1-12 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. 6 Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. 7 Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY." 8 Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. 9 Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. 10 Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 11 Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. 12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.

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. Had the people not been so hard hearted they could have better understood God's provision through the spiritual "manna" that was Christ (v. 4). Yet the Hebrew people in the desert continued to sin, and the sin had dire consequences for them. The heart of the matter was this. "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall" (vv. 11-12).

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, 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.

Another point in the reading concerns Paul's use of the term "spiritual rock" (v. 4). When Paul said "they were drinking from the spiritual rock" and "the rock was Christ" (v. 4) both times he used the word "petra." Jesus was the foundation stone, the One Who provided sustenance to the Hebrews escaping from the Pharaoh during the Exodus. Jesus Himself explained the necessity of a sure foundation in Luke Chapter 6. " Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house on the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great" (Luke 6:47-49).

Finally, Paul stated, "*these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. 12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall*" (vv. 11 – 12). The meaning of this is self-evident. We should take great pains to 1. Become familiar with Scripture so that we even have the principles to apply, and 2. Actually, apply them to our lives by learning from those that went before us. Why do we continue to sin when we know so much? Perhaps a better question is, why does God continue to use sinners like us? We know that He does, but this doesn't lessen the call of holiness that God has placed upon our lives.

As we transition to the Gospel lesson, we will learn about the ultimate consequence of the unforgivable sin, the forsaking of repentance of sin and belief in the forgiveness offered only through faith in Jesus Christ.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is chapter 13 of Saint Luke. The context is after Jesus' long discourse on the truths of the good news of the Gospel in contrast to the heresies and legalism taught by His antagonists the Pharisees. Jesus told them to "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (Luke 12:1b). The Pharisees thought that they had contrived the secret code for living a faith-filled life, which at its root was hypocrisy (Luke 12:1). In contrast to the Pharisees' law code derived in secret, Jesus taught publicly. Jesus said, "But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known" (Luke 12:2). He told them not to fear those that could kill their bodies (i.e. the Pharisees), but to fear the One that could after they were killed cast them into hell (i.e. God). They were not to fear the Pharisees and their hypocritical legal code, a portion

of which we will see in today's reading.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 13:1-9 NAS95 1 Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. 2 And Jesus said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? 3 "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. 4 "Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? 5 "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." 6 And He began telling this parable: "A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any. 7 "And he said to the vineyard-keeper, 'Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?' 8 "And he answered and said to him, 'Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; 9 and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.'"

Jesus confronted the people's false doctrine that bad things happened to bad people because of their sin. He did this by giving them the truth of the Gospel. The big idea in the reading is that the people whom the tower fell weren't worse sinners, but that **everyone** was in need of repentance and finding faith in Jesus Christ as the only means of forgiveness for their sin. Jesus told them, "unless you repent, you will all likewise perish," (v. 3), meaning spiritual not physical death. Scripture tells us, "it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). Jesus was clear that He was the only way to God, and He said this using the same language about Himself that we saw in the first reading, meaning Jesus is God. He said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). Jesus closed the reading by revealing God's patience in waiting for His people to bear fruit, meaning to repent of their sin and come to the knowledge of eternal life (vv. 6 – 8). Scripture tells us that "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Although there may be points of light in all religions, the only way to God is through faith in Jesus Christ – exclusively by becoming a Christian. This may not jive with the politically correct culture in which we find ourselves today, but the fact remains that this is the truth of God.

We shouldn't dismiss the fact that God judges sin, whether it's in the life of a believer or a non-believer. In our day, God operates according to the New Covenant in which he prunes believers during their earthly lives (John 15:2) while storing up His judgement for unbelievers largely until the end of their lives (John 15:6, "cast in the fire and burned"). Even during the Old Testament times, God revealed His grace for the unbelieving world by lavishing His material blessings upon them, although their eternal destination was hell. This is very clear from both Psalm 37 and Psalm 73. God calls us to remember those who went before us, such as the story of Ananias and Sapphira in the Book of Acts (Acts 5:1-11), or Paul's teaching about some being sick and some have died because of their unholy behavior in the love feast and communion meal (1 Corinthians 11:30). A key point that

we need to see is that there are consequences for sin, but not in perhaps the ways we can imagine or according to the ways the people (including the Pharisees addressed in the adjacent verses) contrived.

As Christians just because we do everything right doesn't mean that we will be blessed in the earthly sense in which we might expect, including material blessings and protection from sudden death. Instead, God allows challenges in our lives to lead us to a fuller relationship with Him including the death of loved ones (our ourselves) in order to accomplish His purposes. Our Christian lives are not like baking a cake. We can't just put together the exact right ingredients using a measured formula and follow the recipe exactly and have the cake turn out perfectly well each and every time. Sometimes God throws a monkey wrench into our plans in order to achieve His purposes. What's more, we may not even know or understand these purposes during out natural lifetimes. Unlike the Pharisees who taught salvation by works and outward obedience to their own set of laws, God calls us to walk in faith alone while behaving in ways as directed by the Holy Spirit. This does include closely understanding the biblical principles taught in the New Testament and the Ten Commandments of the Old. However, we should not live our lives formulaically, doing things for God and expecting Him to "bless" us on our terms. He will surely bless us, but His definition of blessing is a lot broader than our limited perspective. May we learn to walk by faith and not our feelings or our sight.

Many of us have had nice young men dressed in white shirts wearing nametags and backpacks knock on our door. The Mormons, although very well intentioned, teach a doctrine similar to that confronted by Jesus in the Gospel reading today. Would you recognize false doctrine when it knocked on your door? As we ponder what Jesus said about those that perish, we have to remember that we are not just talking about the false doctrine of Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses and Muslims, but anyone who holds the doctrine that good works cause salvation rather than flow from it (Ephesians 2:8-9). Jesus taught us not that we shouldn't judge but rather than when we do judge we are to use a righteous standard (John 7:24, Matthew 7:2). Jesus was clear that belief in Him is the only way to God, and that many would not travel this road. Less we think that those in our community are immune, we can say that many who claim Christianity truly live as practical atheists except they go to church on Sunday while negating Christian principles and practices during the week including prayer, fellowship with other Christians, study Scripture, following God's calling for them (Ephesians 2:10). Jesus told this group, "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles? And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS'" (Matthew 7:21-23).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. We saw in the Gospel reading how Jesus upended the people's beliefs about sin and salvation. 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?

2. The "bigger" idea in the Gospel reading is evangelism, reaching out to those trapped in false belief systems with the truth of the Gospel. What are two practical ways in which you can begin to reach out to those holding false beliefs? If you pray for God to change a person's heart (an important first step), will you be confident in how you speak to them about Jesus? What verses will you have them read in order to begin to show them the truth of the Gospel?

Readings for the Week

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

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/022816-third-sunday-lent.cfm

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **10-11-2015**. I remember the time when I came home from the office and I saw an ambulance in my neighbor's driveway. Harvey was a man that had retired from the assembly line at General Motors. He was a rough-around-the-edges kind of guy, not someone that you would find going to church each Sunday although his wife did regularly attend. Harvey had struggled with sepsis and had been very close to dying. I had wondered about his spiritual beliefs, and I was sad that I had never shared with him the faith that I had in Jesus Christ. He pulled through this episode, but had horrible ongoing issues including kidney failure and the need for dialysis three times a week. After Harvey returned home, I finally got up the courage to send him a letter explaining the facts of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Even though I could not break through to him face to face, I figured that he would at least read the letter. I explained that his continuing life was evidence of a miracle from God. Later I moved to a far-away state, but I kept in frequent touch with Harvey by cell phone. I never saw any signs of spiritual life in him, but I maintained the relationship, and we developed a closer relationship than we had had when he was living across the street.

This week we will examine two very deep readings dealing with the important subject of eternal life. We will see in the first reading that the author used the Old Testament as a means of providing an important spiritual lesson for his readers. Then we will learn how Jesus answered a bold question about how to obtain eternal life. If you stick with us, you will also learn about what happened to my friend Harvey.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Apocrypha. This body of work provides important historical insights into the 400-year silent period just prior to the birth of Jesus. We encourage our readers to become

familiar with the cultural and historical context leading up to the publishing of the New Testament.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from the Book of Hebrews, which we also studied last week. This week's reading follows the author's warning in chapter 4 about falling short of true salvation. The writer is providing a clear warning about the sin of unbelief by using the story about what had happened to the unbelieving Jews wandering in the desert. Saint Paul explained the use of the Old Testament Scriptures this way. "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4). The writer of Hebrews expects his readers to be aware of the Old Testament writings and to take them to heart!

Hebrews 4 begins with the conjunction "therefore," connecting what he is about to say with the previous section. The author had explained the danger of the sin of unbelief. Those that don't believe, he said, would not enter God's rest, meaning the Promised Land. "And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief" (Hebrews 3:18-19). He is referring to the report of the spies after they had checked out the land they were to enter. "So they gave out to the sons of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, 'The land through which we have gone, in spying it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great size'" (Numbers 13:32). The unbelievers were those who had accepted the majority report given by the spies after they had surveyed the Land. Moses said that the people wouldn't enter their physical rest through entrance into the Promised Land because of their unbelief, but the writer uses this Old Testament story as a metaphor to teach a much more significant application.

Unbelievers then and now will also not enter into God's eternal rest, since the only unforgivable sin in the Bible is the sin of unbelief (Mark 3:28-30). This explanation provides clarity to chapter 4:1, "Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it." The author is drawing a metaphor from the Old Testament experience. There the people's physical rest was gained through entrance into the Promised Land. This is compared with his contemporary readers' finding eternal rest by entrance into a relationship with God through faith. Everyone throughout history gains eternal life the same way—through faith in the One True God and his Savior, so the author used the illustration of the unbelieving Jews in the exodus as a warning to his readers about the danger of this unforgivable sin.

As we move toward verse 12, where today's reading begins, we see the author's summary statement about the heart of the matter, belief in God's written Word. "For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard" (Hebrews 4:2). The writer goes on to explain that entrance into God's rest comes through faith, not works. "For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His" (Hebrews 4:10). Saint Paul, also, emphasized that faith

is the basis for salvation: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). With this extensive introduction, which we included because of its direct connection to the Gospel lesson, let us now study the text from today's reading. As you read, keep in mind the key concept of the saving value of faith.

Second Reading:

Note: Verse 11, which was omitted from the reading, has been included because it provides crucial information about the context and brings out the full meaning.
Hebrews 4:11-13 NAS95 11 Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience. 12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

The author warns his readers not to follow the example of disobedience set by the unbelieving Jews in the exodus. The wandering Jews in the wilderness had God's direct testimony to them in many ways, including revelation of His Law to Moses and His presence with them through the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night (Exodus 13:21-22). Yet, the Hebrew people still didn't believe God's promises about finding rest in the Promised Land. When Moses sent out spies to survey the Promised Land, only Joshua and Caleb came back bearing the good news about what they saw in the land, and that they were confident about God's promises to them about taking control of it (Numbers 14:6-9). Instead of following this "minority report," the Hebrews believed the majority's view that it would be better to return to Egypt than to attempt to enter the Land. And they then began making plans to do just that (Numbers 14:1-4).

The author uses this spiritual metaphor to warn us not to follow their example of gross disobedience, not believing God, the only unforgivable sin in the Bible. Interestingly, verse 12 opens with the preposition "for," which provides a natural linkage with the immediate preceding context. The opening verse, then, could be read this way, "[With] these previous things in mind, the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword . . . ." In the case of the Hebrews in the exodus the Word of God came to them directly through Moses and the priests. In the case of the New Testament context the Word of God comes through God's written Word. It is this written Word that is "living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword (v. 12a). The author says that the Word is "able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (v. 12d). The Word of God convicts us of our sin through the ***illumination*** provided by God's Holy Spirit. "Illumination," in the spiritual sense, is the turning on of the light bulb in the mind of a person regarding the things of God. There are levels of illumination, and the knowledge of sin is the very first and most basic level. This is what the author of Hebrews is getting at in the reading, where he later criticizes his readers because they are spiritual babies able only to partake of spiritual milk and not solid food (Hebrews 5:12). He cautions his readers in the closing verse to remember that they cannot fool God about all of this

because "all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him" (v. 13b).

There is one primary application of the reading for us today. The testimony of God given through the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Bible must not be neglected by anyone. We must not follow the example of the disobedient Jews in the exodus who did not believe God's promises. Rather we should believe and follow the only way to God which is through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus has made this perfectly clear. He said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). Peter warned the unbelievers in the Book of Acts about rejecting Jesus, when he said, "He (Jesus) is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, but WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone. And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:11-12). As believers we follow the minority report given by the godly patriarchs of the faith like Joshua and Caleb. We don't follow the majority view of the unbelieving world, and we work to fulfill the Great Commission in leading others who are on this broad road to the narrow way of life through faith in Jesus Christ (Matthew 7:13-14)

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading continues with the study in Mark. This week's story occurs just after Jesus was confronted by the Pharisees who attempted to trap Him with a question about divorce (Mark 10:2). Jesus referred them to biblical truths from the Old Testament and then privately explained them in further detail to His disciples. Afterwards the crowds brought children to Jesus, and the disciples tried o turn them away, which caused Jesus' rebuke of them (Mark 10:13). As Jesus was preparing to leave this area, He was confronted by a man who asked Him a very important question.

Gospel Reading:
Mark 10:17-30 NAS95 17 As He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 18 And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. 19 You know the commandments, 'DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, Do not defraud, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.'" 20 And he said to Him, "Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up." 21 Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." 22 But at these words he was saddened, and he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property. 23 And Jesus, looking around, said to His disciples, "How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!" 24 The disciples were amazed at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." 26 They were even more astonished and said to Him, "Then who can be saved?" 27 Looking at them, Jesus said, "With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God." 28 Peter began to say to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You." 29 Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake,

30 but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life."

In the reading we see a man who just asked Jesus the most important question in the universe, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (v. 17). Yet in the man's question there is an inherent fallacy. As the crowd was fresh from Jesus' confrontation with the Pharisees who were committed "doers" of the Law, the man asked Jesus what ***he*** should do to inherit eternal life. Jesus, knowing the man's heart, knew that this man had kept the Ten Commandments, and so He recited the ones dealing with things to do and not to do (v. 19). However, although Jesus didn't question his observance of the Law, He cut to the heart of the matter for him, his stumbling stone, which was the worship of his personal treasures over the worship of God. Jesus knew that, although the inquirer was following most of the commandments, it was the first one over which he was stumbling: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:2-3). Saint Paul said that it wasn't riches itself that created evil, but that the ***love of money*** was the root of all evil (1 Timothy 6:10).

Jesus then went on to explain the quandary using an illustration of a needle and camel (v. 25). Some have thought that Jesus was referring to a certain very low gate in Jerusalem which required the rider and camel to duck down in order to enter. No such gate has ever been located in Jerusalem, and if there were such a gate, it wouldn't prove that a man can enter the kingdom of heaven through his good works. Instead, what Jesus was teaching was it is impossible to gain eternal life through any good works, but that it is offered only by God's gracious provision alone. Even rich people, Jesus explained, can enter the kingdom through faith because "all things are possible with God" (v. 27). Entrance into this kingdom does require sacrifice though, because one must give up the things he trusts in in order to trust fully and only in God's grace. In the case of the rich man this would mean giving up the "worship" of his riches and turning only to the worship of God. Remember that Jesus had just told the people to take drastic actions regarding the things which were keeping them from following Him: "If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire" (Mark 9:43 On one occasion Peter told Jesus that he had given up everything to follow Him, to which Jesus replied that he, and anyone who gave up something for Jesus, would receive a hundred times what was given up (v. 30). In other words, the investment in Jesus would be worth it, with a ten thousand percent return on investment in the present age, with eternal life thrown in, to boot.

What does this mean for us today? We cannot overstate the importance of the application of Jesus' teaching in these few verses. First, we cannot earn eternal life by doing anything; that comes only through belief in Jesus Christ alone. Saint Paul said, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). We are all sinners and cannot change that without the outside intervention of God, no matter how hard we try. The rich man in the story tried very hard, yet even he was unable to cleanse his heart through keeping the commandments. When measured against God's perfect standard, he fell far short, and Jesus revealed to him that he had disobeyed the first and most important commandment, loving God above everything else. If we think we can be saved by our good

works, or that our good works are meritorious towards salvation, Paul explains the relationship between faith and works. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **for good works**, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10, emphasis added). Paul said, "He saved us, **not on the basis of deeds** which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5, emphasis added). Our good works flow out of our faith in Jesus Christ as the result of a heart that has been changed by God, or "born from above (or again)." Jesus told Nicodemus, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3b). Nicodemus didn't understand Jesus until later in his life, but God saw to it that his story was recorded in the Bible so that we could identify with this "Nick at Night."

What about us, are we relying upon something other than God to earn our way into heaven? Are we like the rich man, who was likely very generous in giving, withholding our true worship for God alone? Are we believing the minority report offered up by men of faith, or following the majority view of those who shrink back from following God, or who try to purchase their way into heaven through their supposed good works, no matter how valid they may be? Do we think that we can duck low enough to ride our camel through some super-secret entrance gate into heaven? These are powerful things for us to ponder, and we can be overjoyed that God has given us clear answers from His Holy Word. "Our good works are the true riches that we will be able to present to God as evidence of salvation. Jesus called it our "bearing of fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matthew 3:8).

I introduced my former neighbor Harvey in the introduction to this week's lesson. After I moved away I kept in touch with Harvey and also developed a closer relationship with his wife who kept me up to date on the various emergencies that developed concerning my friend. One weekend I travelled back to my former town to visit some friends who just happened to live down the street from my former home and my friend Harvey. One night I had a strange sense that something was going on with Harvey and I planned to visit him the following morning. After I awoke the next morning, I received a call from his daughter who told me that Harvey had passed away early that morning. She explained that the local pastor was with Harvey, and that he had requested to be baptized before he died. Harvey evidently gave testimony regarding his faith in Jesus. Harvey proceeded with this bold testimony of faith by submitting to baptism and died a short time later. A few days later I had the opportunity to meet the pastor at the funeral luncheon. I explained to him how Harvey had been deeply moved by the frequent visits of his church's members during years as he suffered from declining health. As his eyes began to well up with tears, along with my own, I told him that his faithful service and that of his church were the reasons that Harvey trusted in the Lord Jesus. I told him that Harvey often spoke about their visits and how thankful I was that they had served him in this way.

As I reflect upon what Harvey meant to me, I remember that at some point God had prompted me to begin praying for Harvey. God gave me a sense that salvation was possible even for Harvey, no matter what my feelings told me about the matter. Just to check, I plugged his name into a Google search and was greeted with his smiling face from his memorial page. That reminded me that Harvey is alive forever in heaven, and one day I will visit him again. I have asked God to make this

man one of the first people that I meet when I get to heaven. The evidence of his changed life just before he died has been a life-changing event for me. His testimony provides me with hope that God can reach even those we think are too hard to reach.

What about you, is there someone in your life who you feel is would never believe but yet God seems to keep having you bump into them? Will you pray to begin reaching out to them in even the smallest ways, and that God would embolden you to share the story of how Jesus has changed your life?

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. We saw in the opening verse of the passage from Hebrews (which was omitted from the reading) this key sentence: "*11 Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience*" (Hebrews 4:11). Later we provided this verse from Saint Paul. "*Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come*" (1 Corinthians 10:11).

List and discuss how you have benefited from studying the lives of two specific biblical characters in the Old Testament. In what ways have you learned from their obedience or disobedience?

2. What you understand about the relationship between faith and works in terms of gaining eternal life? Second, how does your position correspond to what James said, "Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself" (James 2:17).

Readings for the Week

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

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/101115.cfm

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 8-30-2015

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



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **8-30-2015**. This week we open with a study of a reading from the Book of Deuteronomy in which Moses pours out his heart to the Israelites just before they were to begin their final conquest and enter the Promised Land. Moses cautions the people not to add to or take from the Law but to just simply follow it. Second, we look at a reading from the Book of James, said to be "the Proverbs" of the New Testament. Then we close with the Gospel reading from Saint Mark in which Jesus scolds the scribes and Pharisees for doing exactly what Moses told the people not to do by creating religious traditions, which they held above the Mosaic Law. In application, we will address the tendency toward formulaic religion and how God uses hardship to accomplish His purposes.

Do you believe that if you obey the government, pretty much keep the Ten Commandments and go to church every week that God will reward you with a life filled with some level of prosperity and good health? What if you sensed and were obedient to a call from God to uproot your life in order to engage in missions? Would you then be upset if things didn't turn out perfectly for you in your new life? I know a man named Dave that studied hard to become a missionary and moved to France with his wife to reach people for Jesus in this spiritually dark but civilized nation. He worked there for many years, had a good degree of success in his ministry and followed biblical teaching in all that he did. However, after being in France several decades, his health began to decline. As the months went by, his condition continued to worsen and at some point he was told that he would need a liver transplant or he would die. You may ask, how could God allow this life threatening condition in his life which threatened to end his ministry? How could God allow this situation in his life when he had sacrificed so much to move there, was faithful in his following the Bible, and was obedient in every way to the laws of his adopted nation? Later in this lesson you will hear what happened to Dave.

According to Scripture God allows challenges in the lives of believers which goes against what is

known in our times as "health and wealth" or the prosperity gospel. This week we are going to see in the Gospel reading how Jesus confronted the false teachings occurring during His ministry from a Jewish religious group called the Pharisees. These were a sect that taught, in effect, salvation by works and held some of the same false beliefs as the modern prosperity gospel preachers of today.

It would be easy to misread the first reading if we have this formulaic or prosperity gospel in mind. The formula goes like this: I am obedient to God's commands, then He has to give me the circumstances in life that I think I deserve. The problem behind this formula is that is lacks the relational underpinning that God desires for us. We obey Him out of our own effort and then feel justified in our sense of entitlement. We will need to read the Old Testament through the eyes of relationship with God now made possible through grace (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Deuteronomy, a word which means literally "second law." The Book begins with a chronicle of the events of the Hebrew people in the period just after the wilderness wanderings. Because of the people's disobedience they were forbidden from entering the Promised Land and spent thirty eight years wandering in the desert under the leadership of Moses. During this time God revealed the Law to Moses and began the Levitical Priesthood with his brother Aaron as the first high priest. At the end of these thirty eight years God prompted Moses to lead military campaigns against the two regional leaders on the "other side" (meaning the east) of the Jordan River. The Hebrew army soundly defeated both King Sihon of Heshbon and King Og of Bashan. According to this Scripture, the Hebrews "captured all [their] cities at that time and devoted to destruction every city, men, women, and children. We left no survivors. Only the livestock we took as spoil for ourselves with the plunder of the cities we captured" (Deuteronomy 2:34-35). These events occurred over the final two years which closed out the full forty years of wandering in the desert outside of God's Promised Land (to the west of the Jordan).

Even more so than in previous readings in order to glean the proper meaning from the passages that follow, it is necessary to clearly understand the context. Reflect upon each of the following points that will help to lead you to the proper contextual understanding for today's lesson.

- God does not change (Malachi 3:6, James 1:17), but He does change the terms through which He deals with His people according to His covenants. There are five covenants in the Old Testament Bible.

  I. First was the Noahic (pronounced "no ay ick") Covenant spoken of in Genesis Chapter 9 in which God promised never to destroy the earth again with a flood. The New Testament records that instead the earth will be renewed by fire (2 Peter 3:7).

  II. The second covenant was the Abrahamic Covenant found in Genesis Chapter 12. In this God promised that Israel would be a great nation (Genesis 12:2), that they would be led to the Promised Land (v.1), and that through Israel the entire world would be blessed (v.3). These

unconditional promises will be fulfilled through the Nation of Israel, somehow, in the future.

III. The third covenant was the Mosaic Covenant through which God introduced the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19), and the context of the first reading today. The promises of this Covenant were conditioned upon the people's obedience to the Law, something that only Jesus could fulfill. The Law was clear and exact, unlike the religious traditions that were derived from it over the centuries (as we will read about in the Gospel lesson). Moses spent forty years teaching the people the Law, and they spent forty years breaking it! Point of Fact: Had I lived during that time I wouldn't have done any better than they did.

IV. The forth covenant was the Davidic Covenant in which God promised that David and his descendants would rule over the House of Israel forever. This covenant was and will be fulfilled through Jesus Christ, who is of David's kingly line of Judah.

IV. The last covenant of the Old Testament (and the entire Bible) was the New Covenant spoken of in Jeremiah 31. God promised in the New Covenant that He would forgive the sins of His people (Jeremiah 31:34b), and give them new hearts with a desire to follow Him (v.34). The New Covenant was ultimately fulfilled in the Person of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ gives all believers a new heart through sending His Holy Spirit to live inside us (John 7:38-39, 2 Corinthians 5:17). This Covenant is the terms through which God deals with us as believers today.

- God's plan of salvation for people has never changed, whether in the Old or New Testaments, although God has revealed His plan more clearly through the revelation of Jesus Christ (see Colossians 1:26 and Hebrews 1:1). Everyone is saved by faith in God's Savior whether it was Jews in the Old Testament, Jews in the New Testament, or Gentiles during either of the Testaments. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). God is clear that there is only one unforgivable sin, which is rejection of His only provision for the forgiveness of sin.

Finally, this is the key point which we need to remember as we study the first reading showing the sinful behavior of the Jews and how Jesus confronted the false teachings of the Pharisees in the Gospel lesson:

- God assesses different short-term penalties for sin according to each era and covenant. For example, before the Noahic Covenant when Cain killed Abel, God dealt immediately with this sin by putting a mark on Cain, exiling him to a foreign land, and causing him to tirelessly till unfruitful soil (Genesis 4:12-15). As a second example, in the first reading today we will see Moses' mention of an instance in which God acted quickly and harshly to judge sin among the Jewish exiles. Later during the time of the Exodus which is the context of the first reading, God ruled His people as a "theocratic kingdom." During this time Moses, his successor Joshua (and later the prophets and King David) received direct guidance from God. During the "theocratic

> kingdom" God levied heavy consequences upon those who broke the Law. In John's Gospel Jesus used the metaphor of God's pruning in the life of a believer in order to bring about more fruit (John 15:2). God's pruning in the context of the theocratic kingdom may have meant sudden death for the disobedient Jew, whether it came from God or as a result of capital punishment levied by the Israelite priests (and later Kings).

In our era God operates according to the New Covenant in which he prunes believers during their earthly lives (john 15:2) while storing up His judgement for unbelievers largely until the end of their lives (John 15:6, "cast in the fire and burned"). Even during the Old Testament times God revealed His grace for the unbelieving world by lavishing His material blessings upon them, although their eternal destination was hell. This is very clear from both Psalm 37 and Psalm 73. Lest we think that God doesn't immediately judge sin in some cases, we must remember the story of Ananias and Sapphira in the Book of Acts (Acts 5:1-11), as well as Saint Paul's teaching about some being sick and some have died because of their unholy behavior in the love feast and communion meal (1 Corinthians 11:30).

Now, with this context in mind let's move to today's reading which is an address by Moses to the people as he prepares to appoint Joshua his successor (3:28) who would soon lead the people into the new land. Although Moses himself was forbidden by God to enter (Deuteronomy 3:23-26), God did allow him to travel to the top of Mount Pisgah to see a divine vision of the land just before his death (3:27).

First Reading:

Deuteronomy 4:1-8 NAS95 1 "Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I am teaching you to perform, so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. 2 You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you. 3 Your eyes have seen what the LORD has done in the case of Baal-peor, for all the men who followed Baal-peor, the LORD your God has destroyed them from among you. 4 But you who held fast to the LORD your God are alive today, every one of you. 5 See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it. 6 So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' 7 For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him? 8 Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today?"

Moses urged the people to follow the Levitical Law without adding to it or taking from it (v. 2) so that they may "live and go in and take possession of the land" being given by God to them (v. 1). We will see later in the Gospel reading that the people didn't heed God's warning not to add to the law. Interestingly, God repeated this admonition in the very last Book of the New Testament not to add to or take from the Scriptures (Revelation 22:18). God's marching orders were for the people to just do

what He has clearly told them through the Law delivered to Moses. Twice in this reading Moses tells the people to keep the commandments of the Law (v. 1, v. 2). Keeping the Law in the context of the reading does bring with it the promise of material blessing because God had promised the people entrance to the Promised Land. The recipients of the blessing were the minority of those in the Exodus, those who were still alive and the ones whom had "held fast to the LORD" (v. 4). If God killed a person because of their sin, then obviously, they didn't receive the blessings of the Promised Land. As we noted in the introduction, the consequences of disobedience during the theocratic kingdom could be severe and immediate. Beginning in verse 3 Moses recounted what God did to the disobedient people as recorded in the Book of Numbers. The people had become immersed in the worship of the god "Baal of Peor" (Numbers 25:5). In that Numbers it says, "The LORD said to Moses, 'Take all the leaders of the people and execute them in broad daylight before the LORD, so that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel'" (Numbers 25:4). A plague followed in which 24,000 people died (Numbers 25:9). This was God's way of purging the evil in order to protect the integrity of those who were seeking to follow God with a pure heart.

Another point from the reading was that God had established the Nation of Israel as a light to everyone in the world. God's "chosen people" were not chosen just for their own sake, but for the salvation of all people groups through their testimony of God's greatness (see also John 4:22). Moses addressed the people just before they were to begin the final conquest(s) to claim the land, saying "So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the **sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes** and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people'" (v. 6, emphasis added). The Jews whose hearts were pointed towards the worship of the true God expressed their beliefs through the observance of the Law. The Jews' unique lifestyle served as God's showplace to the Gentile nations surrounding them. Their unique civil, moral, and ceremonial Laws were designed by God as a herald to the idolatrous people of the world. This was especially true when the Jews were dispersed around the world during the various captivities that God allowed throughout history, a pattern which continues to this very day. As Christians we are called by God in a way similar to be like the Jew, living in a peculiar way, heralding the good news of God's grace and shining biblical light to our sin darkened world (Matthew 5:14, Ephesians 5:8). This ministry isn't just reserved for vocational works like my missionary friend Dave in France.

As we transition to the second reading we will see some practical ways in which we are believers in Jesus Christ can live our lives as a beacon shining on the pathway for people to find God.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from the Book of James, a letter often called the "Proverbs of the New Testament." James is a Book filled with practical wisdom and the application of godly principles drawn from throughout Scripture. The message woven into the entire book of James is the principle stated by Jesus, "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). In a letter such as written by James, the literary context (knowing the verses before and after the reading, and the flow of the author's thought) is very important for understanding the original author's intent. In the reading today the verse immediately prior to the reading was omitted (verse

16). Once that is included there is a nice connection created between the first reading we just studied and the Gospel lesson we will look at below.

Second Reading:

James 1:16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

James 1:17-27 NAS95 17 Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. 18 In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures. 19 This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. 21 Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. 22 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; 24 for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. 25 But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does. 26 If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless. 27 Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

James cautioned the people to "not be deceived" (v. 16), but about what? His caution was to not be deceived about the source of good things. The enemy subtly tries to convince us that God's gifts are not good or that good can come from any other source besides God. The source of every authentic blessing is God (v. 17). He encourages them by pointing out that they are the first fruits of the future believers (v. 18). This is much like the Jews we saw in the first reading who were uniquely commissioned by God as a light to the nations.

You'll notice that James called the people "my beloved brethren" twice in the first four verses to give a loving context for his more confrontational statements in this passage. He gets to the heart of the matter by hitting his readers square between the eyes with teaching on the danger of the tongue (v. 19, v. 26, also repeated in chapter 3), and the falseness of believers who profess one thing, but live another way. In God's economy, there is no such thing as not "living up" to our beliefs. Instead, our lifestyle and choices are merely reflecting our true beliefs. Basic religion, James says, is "to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world" (v. 27). While not everyone has a direct ministry to orphans and widows, James is highlighting the need for us to express our religion in practical acts of service to the "least of these" (Matthew 25:40). The orphans and widows of his day would have been those who are marginalized by society, vulnerable to exploitation and overlooked because of their inability to reward those who serve them. Serving those who cannot give you any "kick back" helps to ensure that our motives are pure.

In the closing verse James said to "keep oneself unstained by the world." This is an important admonition that, if heeded daily, could help all of us live a more abundant life in the Lord. This is akin to "being in the world, but not of it" (Matthew 17:14-16), which allows us to be a witness to those who do not know the Lord as we live with a different mindset. The Book of James provides many such godly proverbs which can help us to live fully surrendered lives for Jesus. In the first reading we saw where Moses called the people to obey the Law of God. James calls people to obey not only the teachings of Jesus but also the spirit of the New Covenant. He also provides additional instruction in practical ways to implement this new relationship with God. We don't have to be motivated by guilt or shame as we consider serving God. When we truly listen to the Holy Spirit, Who is the life giving force empowering us to perform things including (and exceeding) "basic religion," He teaches us how to follow through with our particular race to run (Hebrews 12:1). In this way we look to fulfill not just the letter of the law, but we truly start to see how to be God's hands and feet in the world, thus fulfilling the spirit of His ways. This contrast between the letter of the law and the spirit of the law connects us to the Gospel lesson, where we will see Jesus' teaching against the falsehoods taught by the Pharisees who embraced the letter of the Law but disregarded the spirit of the Law altogether.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Today's reading is, pardon the pun, sandwiched between Jesus' feeding of the five thousand (Mark 6:30-34) and His feeding of the four thousand (Mark 8:1-10). Just prior to the events in the reading today Jesus had walked on the water (Mark 6:48) and healed many sick people in the lakeside community of Gennesaret (Mark 6:53-56).

Gospel Reading:

Mark 7:1-23 NAS95 1 The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, 2 and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. 3 (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders; 4 and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.) 5 The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?" 6 And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. 7 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.' 8 "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men." 9 He was also saying to them, "You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. 10 "For Moses said, 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER'; and, 'HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH'; 11 but you say, 'If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God),' 12 you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother; 13 thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and

you do many things such as that." 14 After He called the crowd to Him again, He began saying to them, "Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: 15 there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man. 16 "If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear." 17 When he had left the crowd and entered the house, His disciples questioned Him about the parable. 18 And He said to them, "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, 19 because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" (Thus He declared all foods clean.) 20 And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. 21 "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, 22 deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. 23 "All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man."

The scribes and Pharisees formed their own flavor of "Deuteronomy," or second law, not heeding Moses' call we read about in the first reading. As James warned, they were deceived about even doing the works of the Law regarding basic religion including the honoring of the parents, a clear commandment of God (Exodus 20:12). The behaviors associated with basic religion were the things that the Pharisees were consciously choosing not to do! Because the scribes and Pharisees were the religious leaders of the day, it was vitally important for Jesus to point out the hypocrisy of their ways and to warn people against their bad influence.

There were a few things in this passage that the religious leaders did that were opposing true heart religion. The first was their insistence on having pure hands, but neglecting to have a pure heart. The second was that they had contrived a religious practice that provided a means to neglect financial assistance to their parents by saying those resources were instead given to God ("Corban," v. 11). The scribes' and Pharisees' "traditions" did in fact trump the first Law of God, that given by Moses and taught throughout the first five Books of the Bible. Jesus explained that what defiles a person is not what goes into their body, but it is what comes out of their heart. The uncleanness is already apart of us, it just takes the right variables to have it come out and show itself. The sin-sickness of the human heart is the issue that Jesus wanted them to see, so that they might see turn to Him for healing as the soul physician (Luke 5:31).

The big idea in the reading is the difference between following human traditions and dead religion versus possessing a life giving relationship with the lover of a believer's soul through the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. The Pharisees were teaching a false message of salvation by works. Their non-gospel would accord well with the "health and wealth" teachers of today or the tendency to reduce God down to a formula. Either way, these false messages set us up to expect God to act in certain ways based on our good behavior and subtly demand that He hold up His end of the "bargain." Unfortunately, this is a misguided understanding of how to relate to God.

In the opening I mentioned the story of a missionary who walked with God in every way but still experienced tremendous difficulties. As a result of some excellent medical care he was able to receive the liver transplant that he needed to sustain his life. He has recovered and is continuing to

serve overseas even in light of the fact that he will remain on rejection drugs and suffer from their side effects for the rest of his life.

I met with Dave recently to discuss what he has learned so far through his experiences. He told me that one of the things that really sustained him was when he called together a group of leaders from his church who prayed over him and anointed him with oil in obedience to what James wrote, "Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord" (James 5:14). Dave said that this really helped him to turn the matter over to God. Second, the church came around him and offered excellent prayer support during his most difficult time. He told me that many people reached out to him and told them that they were praying for him. These things gave him confidence that regardless of what happened it would all be for the glory of God. Interestingly, some of the French people told him everything would turn out okay because, "he was a Christian." These sentiments provided Dave with many teaching moments in which he was able to explain to the people that God allows hardships in the lives of Christians and perhaps even more so than those who don't believe. He knew that everything ultimately would turn out okay, but that believing in God did not guarantee a good and long-lived life.

As Christians just because we do everything right doesn't mean that we will be blessed in the earthly sense in which we might expect, including material blessings and good health. Instead, God allows challenges in our lives to lead us to a fuller relationship with Him. Our Christian lives are not like baking a cake. We can't just put together the exact right ingredients using a measured formula and follow the recipe exactly and have the cake turn out perfectly well each and every time. Sometimes God throws a monkey wrench into our plans in order to achieve His purposes. What's more, we may not even know or understand these purposes during out natural lifetimes. Unlike the Pharisees who taught salvation by works and outward obedience to their own set of laws, God calls us to walk in faith alone while behaving in ways as directed by the Holy Spirit. This does include closely understanding the biblical principles taught in the New Testament and the Ten Commandments of the Old. But we should not live our lives formulaically, doing things for God and expecting Him to "bless" us on our terms. He will surely bless us, but His definition of blessing is a lot broader than our limited perspective. May we learn to walk by faith and not our feelings or our sight.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the second reading James said, *27 Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world (James 1:27)*. This admonition can weigh heavy on the minds of some Christians because they don't often find themselves busy visiting orphans and widows in distress.

A. In what ways do you obey the spirit of James' calling through the activities that you do engage in for God.

B. In what ways can you create connections in your life between the first part of verse 27 (Pure and

undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress) and the last part (keep oneself unstained by the world)? List at least two ways in which you do.

2. Do you catch yourself being a Pharisee, overlooking the motives of the heart and instead, focusing upon minor, outward faults in yourself and others?

A. How does knowing that God looks on the heart change how you evaluate what's important in your own life and in relationship with others?

B. Ask God to reveal to you in what areas you are glossing over God's goodness in a certain person and missing His heart for them.

Readings for the Week

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

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/083015.cfm

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 6-22-2014

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 6-22-2014. The focus of the readings this week is on the background and importance of communion. We open with a reading from Exodus in which Moses recounted God's provision of manna to the Hebrew people during their desert wanderings. Then we move to Saint Paul's Letter to the Corinthians with some teaching on the communion meal and then conclude with the Gospel lesson from John in which Jesus taught the people that He was the "bread that came down from heaven" (John 6:51). As you study this week keep in mind Saint Paul's admonition to examine ourselves before we partake of communion that will be covered in the reflection questions.

The first reading is from Deuteronomy 8. The context is God's giving of the Law to Moses after they had escaped from the wrath of the Pharaoh and struggled for forty years in the desert. The main audience whom Moses addressed were those who were either born during this 40-year period or those who were under twenty when it began. This was because all of the adults where were 20 years and older at the time of the Exodus perished except for Moses, Joshua, and Caleb (Numbers 14:29). The context of the reading today is Moses final address to the people about to enter the Promised Land. "Then Moses summoned all Israel and said to them: 'Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the ordinances which I am speaking today in your hearing, that you may learn them and observe them carefully'" (Deuteronomy 5:1). He continued in the next chapter, "Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the LORD your God has commanded me to teach you, that you might do them in the land where you are going over to possess it (Deuteronomy 6:1). He then proceed to recount the main points of the Law.

The reading that follows includes all of the verses that were skipped in order to provide the full

context and to illuminate the complete meaning of the text.

> *2You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. 3 He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD. 4 Your clothing did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. 5 Thus you are to know in your heart that the LORD your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son. 6 Therefore, you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him. 7 For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills; 8 a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; 9 a land where you will eat food without scarcity, in which you will not lack anything; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. 10 When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you. 11 Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; 12 otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, 13 and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, 14 then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 15 He led you through the great and terrible wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water; He brought water for you out of the rock of flint. 16 "In the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end. (Deuteronomy 8:2-16)*

Moses purpose of this address was to remind the people of God's miraculous provision and protection of them during their desert wanderings (v. 2). First, Moses recounted God's provision of clothing that did not wear out (v. 4a) as well as protection from injury (v. 4b). Second, Moses reminded the people that they were disciplined by a loving God in the same way that a father disciplines his child (v. 5). He reminded them of the manna that God provided (v. 2) a food that pointed to God's supernatural provision as well as to looking forward to His coming Son the Lord Jesus who called Himself the "Bread of Life" (John 6:35) that we will talk about later in this study. Next, Moses gave the people some insights into the nature of the Promised Land that they were about to enter (vv. 7-9) and warned them about the dangers of forgetting the Lord and His commandments (v.11). He said that if they forget the Lord by not keeping His commandments their hearts would become proud in spite of His supernatural provision (v. 14). Finally, he reminded them of how God had delivered them from the fiery serpents (v. 15) provided water for them in the desert (v. 15), and fed them manna from heaven (v.16). Both the manna and the incident of the people with the fiery serpents prefigured the Lord Jesus Christ. The latter incident was recorded in Numbers 21 in which Moses instructed the people to construct a bronze image of a fiery serpent and place it on a

stick. When the people looked in faith to the healing power provided by God through the symbol, they were saved from the danger inflicted by the snakes (Numbers 21:8). Jesus said about Himself, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up" (John 3:14). People who looked at the bronze serpent with faith in God were healed. In a similar way, those who look to Jesus in faith are forgiven of their sin and given eternal life as a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-9). In both cases the people were (or are being) saved by God's grace through faith in God.

As we saw in the first reading, the Old Testament provided many important parallels for the disciples and first Christians as they understood Jesus as the fulfillment of God's predictions concerning Jesus Christ. As we move to the second reading, we will see how Saint Paul spoke against the idolatry that was prevalent among the people of Corinth in the First Century. Paul reminded the people about the curse that was placed on them for grumbling against God as recorded in the Book of Exodus from which we read in the first reading (Exodus 16:2). Paul said, "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction" (1 Corinthians 10:11) and urged the people to flee from idolatry (v. 14), "Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry." The issue that he was confronting here was the objection that some had to eating food that had been sacrificed to idols (1 Corinthians 10:18-33). The reading today is sandwiched right in the middle of this important discussion.

> *16 Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? 17 Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread. (1 Corinthians 10:16-17)*

Paul said is that in order to partake of the communion service we must be in unity together and in fellowship with God. Matthew Henry said it this way. "By partaking of one broken loaf, the emblem of our Saviour's broken body, who is the only true bread that came down from heaven, we coalesce into one body, become members of him and one another." Unlike the pagan sacrifices which were repeated and never brought and redemption to those participating, Jesus' single sacrifice resulted in salvation for all those who believe (1 Peter 3:18). Also, unlike the continual sacrifices offered by the Jews that looked forward to Jesus, Jesus can never be sacrificed again because after he made one sacrifice for sins forever He sat down at the right hand of God (Hebrews 10:12). "By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10:10). When we celebrate communion we remember the single, final sacrifice that Jesus made for us on the cross (Luke 22:19). We celebrate the fact that when we share in the communion cup and the bread we unite in the belief that Jesus poured out His blood and allowed His body to be broken to pay the penalty for our sin.

The Gospel lesson is from John Chapter 6. The context of the reading is after Jesus went from Jerusalem where He had healed a paralyzed man to the "other side of the Sea of Galilee" (John 6:1). It was here on the east coast of the lake that Jesus went up on the mountain near Bethsaida to teach His disciples and was followed by a large crowd (v. 2). He evidently ended up teaching this discourse in the synagogue in Capernaum (John 6:59). Jesus opened this section of teaching with a bold statement regarding His deity. He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life"

(John 6:47). This is the core of the Gospel message, the Good News, that anyone who believes in Jesus as his or her Savior has eternal life. Next, Jesus made another of His bold statements that He was God in the flesh, the manna sent from heaven when He said, "I am the bread of life" (v. 48). The Jews would have clearly understood His use of the Greek phrase "ego eimi," translated in English "I am." Jesus is the eternal God, the preexistent One, the "bread of life" sent from God the Father (John 6:46) as the supreme and final sacrifice for sin (Hebrews 10:12). Both of these statements resulted in the objection of some of the Jews (John 6:52).

As you read, notice Jesus additional use of the "I am" phrase, and how Jesus used this to confirm His identity as God in the flesh.

> *51 "I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh." 52 Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" 53 So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. 54 "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. 55 "For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. 56 "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. 57 "As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me. 58 "This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever." (John 6:51-58)*

Jesus again affirmed His divinity when he said, "I am the living bread that came down out of heaven" (v. 51a). Next He said that the way to eternal life was by partaking of His body (v. 51b), something which was a stumbling stone to the religious Jews and Pharisees (v. 52b). Jesus answered their objection by telling them that although their forefathers ate the bread of God (manna, see Exodus 16:1-36) and later died (v. 58b), anyone that partook of belief in Jesus would have eternal life. Jesus said, "he who eats this bread will live forever" (v. 58c). In the Jewish world there was a high emphasis given upon the value of community that occurred around a meal. What Jesus said he was in part that in order to partake of Jesus, the bread of life, you must commune with Him. One of the ways that we as believer commune with Jesus is through the communion meal.

The celebration of the Lord's Supper is a very important ordinance given to us by the Lord Jesus before He returned to heaven. Each time we celebrate communion we commemorate Jesus' death on the cross for us on which He gave his body and poured His blood for us. Jesus instituted the communion celebration during His Last Supper with the disciples on the eve of the Jewish holiday known as Passover. This important feast commemorated the Jews deliverance from the final plague brought against the Pharaoh as recorded in Exodus 12. On the solemn even many millennium ago, the Hebrew people were instructed to slaughter a lamb and mark their doorway with its blood. On that evening the Death Angel passed through the land and killed the firstborn of every living thing, both humans beings and animals, except those whom had followed God's commandment in faith by marking their doorways with the symbol of the Lamb of God. The Feast of Unleavened Bread in

which the Jews eat bread without the yeast rising agent follows Passover. The absence of leaven is symbolic of the Jew's rapid flight from Egypt immediately after that Passover evening in which the lamb was slaughtered in obedience to God command for the salvation of each household. The absence of leaven also came to be associated in later Jewish thought with the purification from sin, i.e. leaven is sin, such as Jesus noted when He said to be on watch for the "leaven of the Pharisees" (Matthew 16:6). The symbolism is clear; Jesus is *our* Passover Lamb, the Lamb of God that takes away our sin. John the Baptist said about Jesus, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Jesus is the "Lamb slain since before the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8).

Saint Paul said about the celebration of communion, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26, emphasis added). This teaching placed a clear time limit on the celebration of this important ordinance. As we look forward to the return of the Lord we, like the Jews on the evening of the Passover, walk in obedience to the Lord's commandment to celebrate communion *until* He returns.

What do the teachings from the readings and Gospel lesson mean for our lives? First, God calls us not to forsake the assembly together in the communion service (Hebrews 10:25). As we celebrate communion from now until the day the Lord Jesus returns we look back to the one sacrifice that He made for our sins. Second, we can recognize that we are saved by grace through faith in God (Ephesians 2:8-9) the same as Moses and the other believers in the Old Testament. They looked forward to Jesus through the symbols of God's supernatural provision through manna and the healing by faith in God by humbly kneeling before the bronze serpent. The elements of communion are the way in which we remember Jesus' body broken for us and His blood shed to pay the debts for our sin. "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In First Corinthians 11 beyond what we read in the second reading today, Saint Paul called for believers to make a serious self-examination before the partook in communion. "But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup" (1 Corinthians 11:28). He warned, "Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord" (v. 27) and even went so far as to say that "For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep" (v. 30).

If you take communion this week, as yourself the following questions.

A. What does it mean to "examine yourself" before communion? List two or three things that you could bring before God in prayer this week prior to communion?

B. Read the following quote from Jesus that He said in the Sermon on the Mount.

> *"Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your*

> *brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. (Matthew 5:23-24).*

What are some ways in which this verse speaks to the practice of examining ourselves before communion?

2. Saint Paul said the following about the communion meal:

> 1Co 11:24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me."
>
> 1Co 11:25 In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

Read the following verses and answer the questions that follow. As you read, mark any repeated words since repetition of words, phrases and ideas in a narrow context is important to understand the meaning of the text.

> Hebrews 7:26-27 NAS95 26 For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; 27 who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.
>
> Hebrews 9:12 NAS95 12 and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.
>
> Hebrews 9:26 NAS95 26 Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.
>
> Hebrews 9:27-28 NAS95 27 And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, 28 so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.
>
> Hebrews 10:1-4 NAS95 1 For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. 2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? 3 But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. 4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.
>
> Hebrews 10:10 NAS95 10 By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

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> Hebrews 10:10-12 NAS95 10 By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. 11 Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; 12 but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD,

A. In contrast to the continually repeated sacrifices offered by the Jews according to the Law, how many times did Jesus offer His body as a sacrifice?

B. How many times did you count the repetition of the words "one" or "once" in this section of Hebrews? Why do you think that God placed so much emphasis upon the single sacrifice of Jesus by repeating this concept over and over again in the Book of Hebrews?

C. In light of what you learned from the Book of Hebrews, can Jesus ever be offered as a sacrifice again? How does this impact your understanding of the communion meal?

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/062214.cfm

First Reading DT 8:2-3, 14B-16A (Plus skipped verses)

Second Reading 1 COR 10:16-17

Gospel Reading JN 6:51-58

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB