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

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 2: 11/29/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the first reading from Isaiah 63, which includes much of the surrounding context and shows God's frustration with the Jewish people in this era. Then we move to the second reading, which is the opening verses of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. We conclude with a lengthy analysis of Mark's Gospel in the section known as the Olivet Discourse.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is in Isaiah 63-64. Israel was experiencing the consequences of turning away from God. Isaiah, who was God's spokesperson, cried out to God on behalf of the people. The people were suffering as a result of keeping God out of their lives. But this was a necessary part of the training process, for how else would they know that surrendering to God was actually for their good unless they experienced the harsh reality of living apart from God? We will examine the portion of the reading in chapter 63 first, then continue with the rest.

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The bold text is what will be read at Mass; the normal text is the biblical verses that provide context.

First Reading:

> *16 For You are our Father, though Abraham does not know us And Israel does not recognize us. You, O LORD, are our Father, Our Redeemer from of old is Your name. 17 Why, O LORD, do You cause us to stray from Your ways And harden our heart from fearing You? Return for the sake of Your servants, the tribes of Your heritage. 18 Your holy people possessed Your sanctuary for a little while, Our adversaries have trodden it down. 19 We have become like those over whom You have never ruled, Like those who were not called by Your name. (Isaiah 63:16-19)*

As a prophet, Isaiah was in a tough position. He desired to see God move in the hearts of the people, but he knew that the Israelites were unwilling. God is a "gentleman" and does not barge in where He is not wanted. And so the people's hearts grew harder and harder, to the point where God's protective presence was no longer felt in Israel. Isaiah's complaint was that they had become like the surrounding nations, which did not have a covenant relationship with God. He said, "We have become like those over whom You have never ruled, like those who were not called by Your name" (v. 19).

The reading continues below beginning in chapter 64.

> *1 Oh, that You would rend the heavens and come down, That the mountains might quake at Your presence– 2 As fire kindles the brushwood, as fire causes water to boil–To make Your name known to Your adversaries, That the nations may tremble at Your presence! 3 When You did awesome things which we did not expect, You came down, the mountains quaked at Your presence. 4 For from days of old they have not heard or perceived by ear, Nor has the eye seen a God besides You, Who acts in behalf of the one who waits for*

> *Him. 5 You meet him who rejoices in doing righteousness, Who remembers You in Your ways. Behold, You were angry, for we sinned, We continued in them a long time; And shall we be saved? 6 For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. 7 There is no one who calls on Your name, Who arouses himself to take hold of You; For You have hidden Your face from us And have delivered us into the power of our iniquities. 8 But now, O LORD, You are our Father, We are the clay, and You our potter; And all of us are the work of Your hand. (Isaiah 63:16 – 64:8)*

Isaiah's response to their predicament was to call on God to hurl down His judgment on the nations attacking them (vv. 1-3). He looked back and remembered God's power when He did "awesome things [they] did not expect" (v. 3) and finally admitted their great sin. Isaiah said, "For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away" (v. 6). The connotation of the "filthy garments" here is that of a woman's menstrual rags. This is a strong word picture of how God views our "good deeds" done in our own power. This theme is echoed in the words of King David, who said in Psalm 14, "They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, not even one" (Psalm 14:3). Seven hundred years later, Saint Paul quoted these verses to explain how every person stands condemned before God because of the stain of sin. He said, "for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). He further explained that as a result of our sin, the penalty is death (Romans 6:23). This passage teaches that we cannot save ourselves. No cosmic scale weighs our good deeds against our bad deeds. All of our deeds, even the so-called "good deeds," are as filthy garments, good only for the trash heap. If this is the case, we must examine what we trust for salvation. If we trust in ourselves, we will be sorely lacking.

Isaiah points to a redemptive solution in this passage by showing the need to trust in God's righteousness. He describes God's character: "Who acts in behalf of the one who waits for Him. You meet him who rejoices in doing righteousness, who remembers You in Your ways" (vv. 4-5). Isaiah points to an implied sense of relational dependence. He continues this theme of relational dependence at the end of the section, saying: "But now, O LORD, You are our Father, we are the clay, and You are our potter; and all of us are the work of Your hand" (v. 8). The redemptive solution to the dire situation we find ourselves in as sinners is to throw ourselves on God's mercy and to trust in Him to save us. In the New Testament, we see God's redemption in Jesus even more clearly. He bore the wrath of God and forgives us of our sin and cleanses us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). As believers in the finished work of Jesus, we are forgiven of our sin and have a special

relationship with God, who, at the moment we believed, sent His Holy Spirit to live within us (Ephesians 1:13).

What does this mean for us today? We must consider carefully in what/whom we are trusting for salvation. Isaiah is very clear that we cannot be good enough to be saved on our own merit. Becoming a Christian means leaning your full weight on Jesus and trusting His righteousness to save you. As believers, we have a special relationship with God, in a way that is similar but yet unique from God's chosen people, Israel. Untold blessings await all believers as they pass into eternity with God the moment they die. Saint Paul quoted from the first reading and said about believers in the Lord Jesus, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). God allowed judgment to come upon the people of Israel for the purpose of bringing them back to the Lord. As we transition to the second reading, which is also from 1 Corinthians, Paul celebrates with the believers in that region the forgiveness they received through Jesus, who "died for their sins according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3). We can celebrate that we have come to believe even without having to endure a military invasion and being carried captive into a foreign land, as happened with the Jews. Although the Jewish people Isaiah wrote about in the reading had turned away from the Lord, one day all of Israel will repent of their sin and be saved (Romans 11:26).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading opens Saint Paul's Letter to the Corinthians. Paul founded this church on his second missionary journey as recorded in Acts 18. The Corinthian church was in a major cosmopolitan city in southern Greece, immersed in the surrounding godless culture of a worldly crossroads city. This was Paul's second letter to the Corinthians; he mentioned the first letter in 1 Corinthians 5:9, which was subsequently lost.

This study includes verses 1-2, which were omitted in the mass reading.

Second Reading:

1 Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,

> *2 To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 4 I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, 5 that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, 6 even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, 7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Corinthians 1:1-9)*

Paul began by affirming his apostleship, meaning he saw the resurrected Lord Jesus and was personally called by the Lord to his ministry. This happened while he journeyed on the road to Damascus, as recorded in the Book of Acts (Acts 9:3-5). Second, Paul names Sosthenes, who was most likely his secretary. This man suffered for the Lord when he was beaten for taking Paul before a Corinthian civil court (Acts 18:12-17). The mention of Sosthenes is significant because it shows that this important Jewish synagogue leader in that region (Acts 18:17) came to faith in the Lord Jesus. Third, Paul affirmed the holiness of someone who believes in the Lord Jesus. He said, "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours (v. 2). Sanctification is the concept of being set apart for the purposes of God. This word comes from the Greek "hagios," meaning "separation," and is the same Greek word that is translated "holiness."

This is a one-time, forever event, but also has an ongoing, growing element, in that as the author of Hebrews stated, "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14). Finally, Paul says that in the end, believers in the Lord will be "blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 8). This is a common theme for Paul, we also see it in 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 as well as in Philippians 1:6 and 2:15. Paul said in Colossians, "yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach–if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister" (Colossians 1:22-23). Believers are blameless before the Lord, meaning they are justified as if they had never sinned. However, the ungodly behavior that Paul noted later in 1 Corinthians was not indicative of true believers, for only true believers are blameless before the Lord. Paul said in the closing verse of the reading, "God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (v. 9).

Although, as we saw in the first reading, "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), continuing in the faith is a sign of a true believer.

We can celebrate that, as believers, we have been set apart from the world to serve God. Most of us don't get too excited about holiness because holiness has the connotation of being no fun. But that's the Enemy's deception, which makes us think holiness is a drag. Holiness means being set apart for special use, and who doesn't want to be "special"? That is a longing that everyone has. We see a world full of people trying to be special by the world's value system, using their looks, personality, wit, charm, money, and talents to stand out from the rest of the crowd. Wanting to feel special is a legitimate longing, but unless it's met in Christ, we will try to meet it in some illegitimate way, which is sinful (even if it is not immoral). So the moral of the story is to recognize that God's imparted holiness meets this deep longing to be set apart for special use.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Something Paul said in the second reading provides an entry point for the Gospel lesson. Paul said that the Corinthian believers were "awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:7). In the Gospel lesson from Mark Chapter 13, Jesus provides some important insight into just how that event will come about. This reading is from the portion of Scripture known as the Olivet Discourse because Jesus told it while on the Mount of Olives just across the Kidron Valley from the Jerusalem temple. The Discourse is found in the Gospels of Matthew (chapter 24), Luke (chapter 21), and Mark (chapter 13). There are slight differences between them, and understanding them helps guide the overall interpretation. Although today's reading covers only the last portion of this message, the overall message is that the Lord predicts the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. He also offers a glimpse of the distant future, when God will pour out His judgments on the world just before He returns to usher in His Millennial reign on earth.

To understand today's reading from the end of the Olivet Discourse, it is important to recognize the context and meaning of the previous section and the Discourse overall. The Discourse opens with Jesus' prediction of the temple's destruction. Although this prophecy was partially fulfilled with the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in AD 70, its final fulfillment will come in the future, when the Old Testament prophecies regarding the "Day of the Lord" are poured out upon the unbelieving world. A worldly figure known as the "Antichrist" will arise and wreak havoc upon the Jewish people worshiping in a restored temple in Jerusalem.

In the end times, a period that began when the Lord returned to heaven (Acts 1:11), some events run in parallel throughout our current age until the Lord's return; others run sequentially, as the end-time tribulation proceeds according to prophecies in the Bible. Some of the parallel events are as follows. Quotations are provided from Mark's version of the Discourse when appropriate.

- The persecution of believers (Mark 13 4:9).

- An overall decline in morality and godly living (2 Timothy 3:13). Both conditions will worsen, and persecution of believers will intensify until the close of this age and the return of the Lord Jesus.

- An increase in natural and manmade disasters (Mark 13:6-10). In Mark 13, beginning in verse 6, Jesus provided an overall description of the age preceding His return. This period was to be marked by "wars and rumors of wars" (v. 6), earthquakes and famines (v. 8), world wars (v. 8), and the emergence of many false Messiahs (christs, v. 6). Jesus said that the Gospel must first go out to the entire world (v. 10), which we see will be fulfilled by an angel in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 14:6), in spite of the best efforts of Christian missionaries to achieve this goal.

- The coming of many antichrists (Mark 13:22). Many antichrists have arisen in our age, including figures like David Koresh, Joseph Smith (Mormons), and Charles Taze Russell (JW's). One interesting case is a man named Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson. This rabbi from New York was a highly influential Jewish leader worldwide. When he died in 1994, his followers expected him to rise from the dead in, you guessed it, three days. As of this writing, he is still in the grave.

Some events are sequential; here are a few.

- Jesus' prediction in Mark 13:1-3 of the destruction of the temple, which was fulfilled in AD 70. In examining the parallel accounts in Matthew and especially Luke, it is apparent that this

event foreshadowed the ultimate destructive event heralded by the Antichrist at some future time.

- The Prophet Daniel and the Book of Revelation speak of the coming of the ultimate Antichrist. Saint John said in his day that many antichrists had already come (1 John 2:18), but the Bible predicts the coming of one known as the Man of Sin (2 Thessalonians 2:3). This is the one that will bring about the "abomination of desolation" described by Jesus in verse 14. This will mark the establishment of a global ruler known as the Antichrist (1 John 2:18, Daniel 7:8 "the little horn," Revelation 6:2 –the rider on the white horse), and the false holy spirit figure known as the false prophet (Revelation 13:11-15).

- Persecution of believers on a tremendous scale unknown throughout history (Mark 13: 9-13).

- There will be signs in the sky (Mark 13:24-25).

- God's judgments will be unveiled in the Book of Revelation, including the seven seals, trumpets, and bowls (Revelation 6, 8, 11, 15, 16). These are judgments of God as declared in Revelation: "You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve. … Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments" (Revelation 16:5-7).

- The return of the Lord Jesus at some unknown time; I call it the return, resurrection, and rapture (R-R-R). This event is a resurrection of dead believers throughout the ages, both Christians (1 Thess 4:13-18) and Jews (Ezekiel 37:12), along with a "catching up" or rapture of living believers to meet Jesus in the air. This will begin with believers who have already died, then with those alive at that time. Saint Paul clearly reveals this in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). Ezekiel describes the same event from a Jewish perspective. "*Thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel'"* (Ezekiel 37:12).

- Once the church is removed from the world because "God has not appointed us to wrath" (1 Thessalonians 5:9), the cascading series of events known as the Great Tribulation period will commence. Scripture calls the time that follows the "Day of the Lord."

- Supernatural protection of the Nation of Israel in a special place prepared by God (Revelation 12:6).

- The "abomination of desolation" (Mark 13:14). This is when the Antichrist figure will establish himself as God and set up his own image in the temple for worship. Paul said this about the Antichrist: "who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God" (2Thessalonians 2:4). The Jews were familiar with something like this happening before when Antiochus IV Epiphanes sacked the temple and rededicated it to the god Zeus in 167 BC, and sacrificed a pig in the temple to his god. This "abomination of desolation" was a type of the one to come, a prefiguring of the time that the Antichrist would establish himself as God in the temple to be worshiped by everyone in the world, not just Jerusalem, as happened in the earlier time.

- The destruction of the Antichrist's religious and civil empire known as "Mystery Babylon" (Revelation 18:2).

- Marriage Supper of the Lamb with all believers in heaven (Revelation 19:7).

- The Lord Jesus returns to earth with his victorious church (Revelation 19:11-19).

- Antichrist and False Prophet are thrown into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 19:20).

- Satan is bound for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:3), then released for a final battle (Revelation 20:7)

- Satan is thrown into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:10).

With context in mind, read today's Gospel passage, which focuses upon the theme of being prepared for the return of the Lord Jesus.

Gospel Reading:

> *33 Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time will come. 34 It is like a man away on a journey, who upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, assigning to each one his task, also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert. 35 Therefore, be on the alert–for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning– 36 in case he should come suddenly and find you asleep. 37 What I say to you I say to all, 'Be on the alert!'" (Mark 13:33 -37)*

Jesus told His disciples, and by extension, all believers, to be prepared for His return. He did so by telling them (and us) a parable about a master who went on a journey, leaving his servants in charge. An appointed doorkeeper was to keep careful watch at the door, even during the midnight hours, to watch for the return of his master. The parable means that Jesus is the Master who went away by ascending into heaven, a foretaste of the resurrection that will happen at the R-R-R event. Jesus the Master appointed pastors to shepherd His servants (believers). Paul said, "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers" (Ephesians 4:11). Jesus commanded His doorkeepers to be alert, meaning that our pastors are to be alert for His return and to teach others to do the same. As the reading closes, Jesus repeated the principle application, "Be on the alert!" (v. 37b).

What does all of this mean for us today? First, Jesus cautioned His disciples to be aware of their future destiny so they would live rightly today. By using the parable of the fig tree earlier in the Discourse (Mark 13:28), something the people in the Mediterranean region were very familiar with, Jesus helped them see the signs of the times and live in a watchful and purposeful way. Just as Jesus cautioned His disciples to beware by watching for the signs, we can know that Jesus' return is imminent by watching for the signs ourselves. This means we should not delay in doing the work God has placed in our hearts. 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).

Because God's prophets so accurately predicted events that have already occurred, including Jesus' (the greatest prophet of all) prediction of the destruction of the temple, we can trust that the events will play out exactly as God has described in the Scriptures. Because God has so accurately predicted the future, we can trust Him when He tells us how to enter into an eternal relationship with Him through faith in His Son, the risen Lord Jesus Christ. We can rest in the fact that everything will turn out fine for anyone who trusts in the Lord Jesus alone for salvation. Those with faith in the Lord can trust that even if they find themselves thrown into tribulation, they will forever be with the Lord in peace.

Finally, although Scripture provides phenomenal insights into how the end times will play out, we must be careful not to overestimate or underestimate the significance of current world events. Instead, we are to go about the Lord's business while being watchful for His return, since nobody knows when that will happen. Although we can know the season of Jesus' return, including the events we described in the introduction to the Gospel reading, nobody knows exactly how it will all play out. Until then, we are called to work as God's good and faithful servants (Matthew 25:23) until the day He returns. Although God tells us we will suffer tribulation, and those alive when the Lord returns will suffer even more, we can rest on God's promises for our eternal life and peace with Him. Peace with God is given to us the moment we believe (Philippians 4:7).

Reflection Questions

1. How does knowing how the Grand Story ends influence how you live today? What values do you have because you know God wins in the end? What values do you want God to develop in you based on this knowledge of the end times?

2. The first two readings dealt with humankind's lack of righteousness (Isaiah) and the Corinthians being called saints. Think about this contrast that is spoken about throughout the Bible. The worse the bad news, the better the good news. Explain why the coming of Christ to die on the cross for our sins is called "the good news." How has this become good news for your life?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for 12-01-2024



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open to the teaching of the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah then move to one of the Apostle Paul's letters to a young church in the earliest years of Christianity. Finally, we look at a prophetic portion of the Gospel of Luke. These are not easy passages to understand, but we'll take a careful but brief look at each one.

Introduction to the First Reading:

It's helpful to remember that Jeremiah lived during the time of Judah's spiritual downfall and the beginning of her captivity about 500 B.C. Assyria had been the dominant nation of the time, but was tottering on the brink of ruin, while Babylon and Egypt were struggling to take over world control. Jeremiah warned of Babylon's victory, but Judah failed to repent and ignored his warnings. As a result, Judah suffered destruction, but the prophet announced that she would one day be restored and come into worldwide blessing.

Jeremiah's prophecy reveals God in two aspects like the two sides of a single coin. The book demonstrates His demands and judgment, but it also shows the tenderness of His love. He had chosen this particular prophet to give His message, perhaps, because of Jeremiah's sensibilities and tenderness. One writer has suggested that in that way Jeremiah was "the true forerunner of our Lord."

The purpose of this Old Testament book is twofold: to reveal God's attitude toward sin (thus, the punishment of Israel who had sinned against Him) and to reveal the coming restoration of Israel under their coming king.

First Reading:

> *Jeremiah 33:14-16 NAS95 14 'Behold, days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will fulfill the good word which I have spoken concerning the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 15 'In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch of David to spring forth; and He shall execute justice and righteousness on the earth. 16 'In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell in safety; and this is the name by which she will be called: the LORD is our righteousness.'*

Jeremiah 33 is the final chapter in a section, beginning with chapter 30, that has to do with the restoration of Israel. The opening words in this passage are obviously prophetic; that is, they are referring to some events yet in the future. But there is no clear indication of when these events will occur—relatively soon or at some distant point in the future. There are a few inferences, however, that give us some understanding of God's plan for His people. It's evident, for example, that the writer is revealing God's program for "the house of Israel and the house of Judah." These terms identify the two segments of the nation of Israel that had been divided after the reign and death of King Solomon. God's "good word" about His chosen people will be fulfilled. What He has planned and now intimates will be completed at His chosen time.

At some future point in time ("in those days and at that time"), a "Branch of David" will appear. This term takes us back to chapter 22, verses 2 and 4 where the writer makes reference to the "king of Judah, who sits on David's throne" and "kings will enter the gates of this house, sitting in David's place on his throne." Again, we are made to think of God's covenant spoken of in 2 Samuel 7:8-17 where God promised that David and his heirs would rule over Israel. God said, "Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16).

The promises of verses 15 and 16 of today's reading should have been a great encouragement to Israel, who was to suffer certain captivity and removal from her land. In the future, the promised king is to execute justice and righteousness on the earth." As a result, "In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell in safety." That will be a time unlike anything in Israel's previous history. She has always been attacked by godless nations, and, even in our day, the persecution continues for today's Jewish people. Praise God, some day that will end!

The final statement of our reading suggests an unusual name for God's people. Jeremiah wrote, "And this is the name by which she will be called: the LORD is our righteousness.'" Perhaps the intention is to remind Jeremiah's audience that righteousness is not the result of anything one can do—offer sacrifices, observe the sacraments, serve others, etc., but righteousness is found only in Jesus Christ. As the Christian identifies with Jesus and His finished work on the cross, it is the righteousness of Jesus that is conferred upon the believer. "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). "Not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith (Philippians 3:9).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Some scholars think that 1 Thessalonians may have been the earliest book written in the New Testament. The church in the city of Thessalonica (in modern day Greece) was launched in the second of the Apostle Paul's missionary journeys. He was there for about three weeks, teaching about the suffering and resurrection of Jesus, whom he identified as the Messiah (Christ). Some responded well to Paul, but others rejected his message (because of jealousy, Acts 17:5) and forced him to leave town.

Paul wrote this letter to encourage the Thessalonian Christians and to give them further teaching, especially about the return of Christ, which is a common topic in the book, referred to in all five chapters.

In many of his letters to the young churches in the first century, Paul offers significant prayers on the readers' behalf, also asking them to pray for him. Today's reading begins with a part of one of those prayers (3:11-13) and concludes with a challenge to the people (4:1-2).

Second Reading:

> *1 Thessalonians 3:12 – 4:2 NAS95 12 and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you; 13 so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints. 1 Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more. 2 For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.*

Paul's great love and concern for his learners is evident in his frequent mention of wanting to visit with them and his continual prayers for them. Before his prayer, beginning in verse 11, Paul tells them that he prays "earnestly . . . night and day" that he might see them face-to-face. Why? Not only because he loves them, but he also wants to continue his ministry to them, completing "what is lacking in your faith," that is, giving them a full understanding of the truth they have adopted.

In his prayer, Paul makes four requests: 1) that God might clear the way so that he could see the Thessalonians again; 2) that he might be able to supply what was incomplete in their fledgling faith; 3) that their love for one another might increase; and 4) that they would be spiritually strengthened and be found blameless and holy.

Regarding their love, we should note that it begins with one another and then includes "all people." Jesus said that his disciples were to be known by their love for one another (John 13:35). It's truly unfortunate that Christians and churches are sometimes criticized by outsiders because of the divisions and animosity that seem to characterize some groups of professing believers. As the people of the church learn to love one another more fully, their testimony to the world will be enhanced. But, love is not to be limited to within the church family. As God "so loved the world" (John 3:16), so should His people love those who need the Savior. Paul uses himself as an example of love; he says he abounds in love for them. And, of course, the greatest example is Jesus himself, who gave his life for those He loved, the perfect fulfillment of John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."

Somehow, Paul relates the fulfilling of the instruction to love with a proper standing before God as "blameless in holiness." It is the clear teaching of Scripture that no one can stand in the presence of God on his own behalf. A holy and perfect God cannot be approached by anyone tainted by sin—and we all are (Romans 3:23). Paul refers to the "coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints," an event

to occur when Jesus returns to establish His promised kingdom on earth. The saints who return with Him will have been saved by His grace and clothed in His righteousness (Revelation 19:8). At that point they will be blameless and holy. Perhaps Paul is suggesting that when the Christian demonstrates godlike love toward others, he is giving evidence of his genuine conversion, a born-again experience that, by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, presents him holy and blameless before God.

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Jesus warns His hearers that they must be prepared for the day of His return, even though that date has not been revealed. When the signs begin to appear, it's a warning to the faithful to look beyond the frightful circumstances and anticipate their final redemption. Redemption is a significant term regarding the believer in Christ. He has been lost in his sin and, as a result, separated from God. But in God's grace and out of His unending love, He has provided a way for the sinner to be redeemed—to be bought with a price and restored to God. That price, of course, is the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross where He paid the infinite penalty of sin.

Jesus broke into the narrative to tell a story about trees. When trees sprout leaves in the spring, you can begin to anticipate the fruit they will produce in the fall. Parables are stories that use the common elements of life to illustrate spiritual truth in language anyone can understand. Jesus makes the application. As buds on trees anticipate a harvest, so the signs of the times anticipate the culmination of God's plan in the return of Jesus and the establishment of His eternal kingdom on earth. The last statement in the paragraph is the wonderful affirmation that God's Word is eternally true. But the sentence preceding that has been difficult for Christians to understand. What did Jesus mean when He said, "This generation will not pass until all things take place"? Obviously, it cannot mean the generation to which Jesus was speaking. They're gone, and the predicted events have not yet occurred. It may be best to understand that Jesus was likely referring to the generation that would be alive when the predicted signs actually occur.

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Reflection Questions

1. In what ways are you trusting in your own efforts to please God or in the sacrifice of Jesus and His resurrection for your righteousness?

2. Describe how your life reflects the love of God in the way you act toward other Christians and to the people of the world?

3. In what ways are you heeding the warnings of Jesus so that you are "on guard" and "on the alert," as you anticipate the return of Jesus? List two ways in which you are doing this.

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for 11-28-2021



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with teaching from the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah then move to one of the Apostle Paul's letters to a young church in the earliest years of Christianity. Finally, we look at a prophetic portion of the Gospel of Luke. These are not easy passages to understand, but we'll take a careful but brief look at each one.

Introduction to the First Reading:

It's helpful to remember that Jeremiah lived during the time of Judah's spiritual downfall and the beginning of her captivity about 500 B.C. Assyria had been the dominant nation of the time, but was tottering on the brink of ruin, while Babylon and Egypt were struggling to take over world control. Jeremiah warned of Babylon's victory, but Judah failed to repent and ignored his warnings. As a result, Judah suffered destruction, but the prophet announced that she would one day be restored and come into worldwide blessing.

Jeremiah's prophecy reveals God in two aspects like the two sides of a single coin. The book

demonstrates His demands and judgment, but it also shows the tenderness of His love. He had chosen this particular prophet to give His message, perhaps, because of Jeremiah's sensibilities and tenderness. One writer has suggested that in that way Jeremiah was "the true forerunner of our Lord."

The purpose of this Old Testament book is twofold: to reveal God's attitude toward sin (thus, the punishment of Israel who had sinned against Him) and to reveal the coming restoration of Israel under their coming king.

First Reading:

Jeremiah 33:14-16 NAS95 14 'Behold, days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will fulfill the good word which I have spoken concerning the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 15 'In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch of David to spring forth; and He shall execute justice and righteousness on the earth. 16 'In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell in safety; and this is the name by which she will be called: the LORD is our righteousness.'

Jeremiah 33 is the final chapter in a section, beginning with chapter 30, that has to do with the restoration of Israel. The opening words in this passage are obviously prophetic; that is, they are referring to some events yet in the future. But there is no clear indication of when these events will occur—relatively soon or at some distant point in the future. There are a few inferences, however, that give us some understanding of God's plan for His people. It's evident, for example, that the writer is revealing God's program for "the house of Israel and the house of Judah." These terms identify the two segments of the nation of Israel that had been divided after the reign and death of King Solomon. God's "good word" about His chosen people will be fulfilled. What He has planned and now intimates will be completed at His chosen time.

At some future point in time ("in those days and at that time") a "Branch of David" will appear. This term takes us back to chapter 22, verses 2 and 4 where the writer makes reference to the "king of Judah, who sits on David's throne" and "kings will enter the gates of this house, sitting in David's place on his throne." Again, we are made to think of God's covenant spoken of in 2 Samuel 7:8-17 where God promised that David and his heirs would rule over Israel. God said, "Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16).

The promises of verses 15 and 16 of today's reading should have been a great encouragement to Israel, who was to suffer certain captivity and removal from her land. In the future, the promised king is to execute justice and righteousness on the earth." As a result, "In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell in safety." That will be a time unlike anything in Israel's previous history. She has always been attacked by godless nations, and, even in our day, the persecution continues for today's Jewish people. Praise God, some day that will end!

The final statement of our reading suggests an unusual name for God's people. Jeremiah wrote, "And this is the name by which she will be called: the LORD is our righteousness.'" Perhaps the intention is to remind Jeremiah's audience that righteousness is not the result of anything one can do—offer sacrifices, observe the sacraments, serve others, etc., but righteousness is found only in Jesus Christ. As the Christian identifies with Jesus and His finished work on the cross, it is the righteousness of Jesus that is conferred upon the believer. "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). "Not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith (Philippians 3:9).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Some scholars think that 1 Thessalonians may have been the earliest book written in the New Testament. The church in the city of Thessalonica (in modern day Greece) was launched in the second of the Apostle Paul's missionary journeys. He was there for about three weeks, teaching about the suffering and resurrection of Jesus, whom he identified as the Messiah (Christ). Some responded well to Paul, but others rejected his message (because of jealousy, Acts 17:5) and forced him to leave town.

Paul wrote this letter to encourage the Thessalonian Christians and to give them further teaching, especially about the return of Christ, which is a common topic in the book, referred to in all five chapters.

In many of his letters to the young churches in the first century Paul offers significant prayers on the readers' behalf, also asking them to pray for him. Today's reading begins with a part of one of those prayers (3:11-13) and concludes with a challenge to the people (4:1-2).

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Second Reading:

1 Thessalonians 3:12 – 4:2 NAS95 12 and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you; 13 so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints. 1 Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more. 2 For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

Paul's great love and concern for his learners is evident in his frequent mention of wanting to visit with them and his continual prayers for them. Before his prayer, beginning in verse 11, Paul tells them that he prays "earnestly . . . night and day" that he might see them face-to-face. Why? Not only because he loves them, but he also wants to continue his ministry to them, completing "what is lacking in your faith," that is, giving them a full understanding of the truth they have adopted.

In his prayer, Paul makes four requests: 1) that God might clear the way so that he could see the Thessalonians again; 2) that he might be able to supply what was incomplete in their fledgling faith; 3) that their love for one another might increase; and 4) that they would be spiritually strengthened and be found blameless and holy.

Regarding their love, we should note that it begins with one another and then includes "all people." Jesus said that his disciples were to be known by their love for one another (John 13:35). It's truly unfortunate that Christians and churches are sometimes criticized by outsiders because of the divisions and animosity that seem to characterize some groups of professing believers. As the people of the church learn to love one another more fully, their testimony to the world will be enhanced. But, love is not to be limited to within the church family. As God "so loved the world" (John 3:16), so should His people love those who need the Savior. Paul uses himself as an example of love; he says he abounds in love for them. And, of course, the greatest example is Jesus himself, who gave his life for those He loved, the perfect fulfillment of John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for 11-29-2020



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Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is in Isaiah 63-64. Israel was experiencing the consequences of turning away from God. Isaiah, who was God's spokesperson, cried out to God on behalf of the people. The people were suffering as a result of keeping God out of their lives. But this was a necessary part of the training process, for how else would they know that surrendering to God was actually for their good unless they experienced the harsh reality of living apart from God? We will examine the portion of the reading in chapter 63 first, then continue with the rest.

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The bold text is what will be read in the mass, the normal text is the biblical verses that provide the context.

First Reading:

16 For You are our Father, though Abraham does not know us And Israel does not recognize us. ***You, O LORD, are our Father, Our Redeemer from of old is Your name. 17 Why, O LORD, do You cause us to stray from Your ways And harden our heart from fearing You? Return for the sake of Your servants, the tribes of Your heritage. 18 Your holy people possessed Your sanctuary for a little while, Our adversaries have trodden it down.*** *19 We have become like those over whom You have never ruled, Like those who were not called by Your name. (Isaiah 63:16-19)*

As a prophet, Isaiah was in a tough position. He desired to see God move in the hearts of the people, but he knew that the Israelites were unwilling. God is a "gentleman" and does not barge in where He is not wanted. And so the people's hearts grew harder and harder, to the point where God's protective presence was no longer felt in Israel. Isaiah's complaint was that they had become just like the surrounding nations that did not have a covenantal relationship with God. He said, "We have become like those over whom You have never ruled, Like those who were not called by Your name" (v. 19).

The reading continues below beginning in chapter 64.

1 Oh, that You would rend the heavens and come down, That the mountains might quake at Your presence– 2 As fire kindles the brushwood, as fire causes water to boil–To make Your name known to Your adversaries, That the nations may tremble at Your presence! 3 When You did awesome things which we did not expect, You came down, the mountains quaked at Your presence. 4 For from days of old they have not heard or perceived by ear, Nor has the eye seen a God besides You, Who acts in behalf of the one who waits for Him. 5 You meet him who rejoices in doing righteousness, Who remembers You in Your ways. Behold, You were angry, for we sinned, We continued in them a long time; And shall we be saved? 6 For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. 7 There is no one who calls on Your name, Who arouses himself to take hold of You; For You have hidden Your face from us And have delivered us into the power of our iniquities. 8 But

now, O LORD, You are our Father, We are the clay, and You our potter; And all of us are the work of Your hand. *(Isaiah 63:16 – 64:8)*

Isaiah's response to their predicament was to call God to hurl down His judgment upon the nations that were attacking them (vv. 1-3). He looked back and remembered God's power when He did "awesome things [they] did not expect" (v. 3) and finally admitted their great sin. Isaiah said, "For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away" (v. 6). The connotation of the "filthy garments" here is that of a woman's menstrual rags. This is a strong word picture of how God views our "good deeds" done in our own power. This theme is echoed in the words of King David who said in Psalm 14, "They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, not even one" (Psalm 14:3). Seven hundred years later Saint Paul quoted these verses to explain how every person stands condemned before God because of the stain of sin. He said, "for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). He further explained that as result of our sin the penalty is death (Romans 6:23). This passage teaches that we cannot save ourselves. There is no such thing as a cosmic scale that weighs our good deeds versus our bad deeds. All of our deeds, even the so-called "good deeds" are as filthy garments, good only for the trash heap. If this is the case, we must analyze what we are trusting in for salvation. If we are trusting in ourselves, we are going to be sorely lacking.

Isaiah points to a redemptive solution in this passage by showing the need of trusting in God's righteousness. He described God's character: "Who acts in behalf of the one who waits for Him. You meet him who rejoices in doing righteousness, who remembers You in Your ways" (vv. 4-5). There is an implied sense of relational dependence to which Isaiah is pointing. He continues this theme of relational dependence at the end of the section saying: "But now, O LORD, You are our Father, we are the clay, and You are our potter; and all of us are the work of Your hand" (v. 8). The redemptive solution to the dire situation we find ourselves in as sinners is to throw ourselves on God's mercy and to trust in Him to save us. In the New Testament, we see even more clearly God's redemption in Jesus. He bore the wrath of God and forgives us of our sin and cleanses us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). As believers in the finished work of Jesus we are forgiven of our sin and have a special relationship with God, Who at the moment we believed sent His Holy Spirit to live within us (Ephesians 1:13).

What does this means for us today? We must consider carefully in what/whom we are trusting for salvation. Isaiah is very clear, that we cannot be good enough to be saved on our own merit. Becoming a Christian means to lean your full weight on Jesus and trust His righteousness to save you. As believers we have a special relationship with God, in a way that is similar but yet unique from God's chosen people Israel. There will be untold blessings for all believers when they pass into

eternity with God the moment they die. Saint Paul quoted from the first reading and said about believers in the Lord Jesus, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). God allowed judgment to come upon the people of Israel for the purpose of bringing them back to the Lord. As we transition to the second reading, which is also from 1 Corinthians, Paul celebrates with the believers in that region the forgiveness they received through Jesus Who "died for their sins according the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3). We can celebrate that we have come to believe even without having to endure a military invasion and being carried captive into a foreign land as happened with the Jews. Although the Jewish people about whom Isaiah wrote in the reading had turned away from the Lord, one day all of Israel will repent of their sin and be saved (Romans 11:26).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is the opening of Saint Paul's Letter to the Corinthians. Paul founded this church on his second missionary journey as recorded in Acts 18. The Corinthian church was in a major cosmopolitan city in southern Greece, immersed in the surrounding godless culture of a worldly crossroads city. This was actually Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, he mentioned the first letter in 1 Corinthians 5:9 that was subsequently lost.

This study includes verses 1-2 which were omitted in the mass reading.

Second Reading:

1 Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, 2 To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 4 I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, 5 that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, 6 even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, 7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Corinthians 1:1-9)

Paul began by affirming his apostleship, meaning that he was someone who saw the resurrected Lord Jesus and was personally called by the Lord to his ministry. This happened to him while he journeyed on the road to Damascus as was recorded in the Book of Acts (Acts 9:3-5). Second, Paul provided the name of Sosthenes who was most likely his secretary. This man had suffered for the Lord when he was beaten for taking Paul in front of a Corinthian civil court (Acts 18:12-17). The mention of Sosthenes is significant because it reveals that this important Jewish leader of the synagogue in that region (Acts 18:17) came to faith in the Lord Jesus. Third, Paul affirmed the holiness of anyone who believes in the Lord Jesus. He said, "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours (v. 2). Sanctification is the concept of being set apart for the purposes of God. This word comes from the Greek "hagios" meaning "separation," and is the same Greek word that is translated "holiness."

This is a one-time, forever event, but also has an ongoing, growing element, in that as the author of Hebrews stated, "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14). Finally, Paul says that in the end, believers in the Lord will be "blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 8). This is a common theme for Paul, we also see it in 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 as well as in Philippians 1:6 and 2:15. Paul said in Colossians, "yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach–if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister" (Colossians 1:22-23). Believers are blameless in their positon before the Lord, meaning they are justified as if they had never sinned. However, the ungodly behavior that Paul noted later in 1 Corinthians was not indicative of true believers, for only true believers are blameless before the Lord. Paul said in the closing verse of the reading, "God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (v. 9). Although as we saw in the first reading, "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), continuing in the faith is a sign of a true believer.

We can celebrate that as believers we have been set apart from the world for the purpose of serving God. Most of us do not get too excited about holiness, because holiness has the connation of being no fun. But that is the deception of the Enemy who makes us think that holiness is a drag. The idea of holiness is to be set apart for special use, and which one of us doesn't want to be "special". That is a longing that everyone has. We see a world full of people trying to be special based on the world's value system, using their looks, their personality, their wit, their charm, their money, and their talents to try to stand out from the rest of the crowd. Wanting to feel special is a legitimate longing, but unless it's met in Christ, we will try to meet it in some illegitimate way, which is sinful (even if it is not immoral). So the moral of the story is to recognize that God's imparted holiness to us is what meets this deep longing to be set apart for special use.

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Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Something Paul said in the second reading provides an entry point to transition to the Gospel lesson. Paul said that the Corinthian believers were "awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:7). In the Gospel lesson from Mark Chapter 13, Jesus provides some important insight into just how that event will come about. This reading is from the portion of Scripture known as the Olivet Discourse because Jesus told it while on the Mount of Olives just across the Kidron Valley from the Jerusalem temple. The Discourse is found in the Gospels of Matthew (chapter 24), Luke (chapter 21), and Mark (chapter 13). There are slight differences between and an understanding of these help to guide the overall interpretation. Although today's reading only covers the last portion of this message, in the overall message the Lord predicts the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. He also provides a glimpse into the distant future when God will pour out His judgments upon the world just before He returns to usher in His Millennial reign on earth.

In order to understand today's reading from the end of the Olivet Discourse it is important to recognize the context and meaning from the previous section and the Discourse overall. The Discourse opens with Jesus' prediction of the destructions of the temple. Although this prophecy was partially fulfilled with the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in AD 70, the final fulfillment will be in the future when the Old Testament prophecies regarding the "Day of the Lord" will be poured out upon the unbelieving world. A worldly figure known as the "Antichrist" will arise and wreak havoc upon the Jewish people worshiping in a restored temple in Jerusalem.

In the end times, a period which began when the Lord returned to heaven (Acts 1:11), some events run in parallel throughout our current age up until the return of the Lord; while others run sequentially, as the end times tribulation proceeds according to prophecies in the Bible. Some of the parallel events are as follows. Quotations are provided from Mark's version of the Discourse when appropriate.

- The persecution of believers (Mark 13 4:9).
- An overall decline of morality and godly living (2 Timothy 3:13). Both of these conditions will grow worse and the persecution of believers will intensify until the close of this age and the return of the Lord Jesus.
- An increase in natural and manmade disasters (Mark 13:6-10). In Mark 13, beginning in verse 6, Jesus provided an overall description of the age preceding His return. This period was to marked by "wars and rumors of wars" (v. 6), earthquakes and famines (v. 8), world wars (v. 8)

and with the emergence of many false Messiahs (christs, v. 6). Jesus said that the Gospel must first go out to the entire world (v. 10), which we see will be fulfilled by an angel in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 14:6), in spite of the best efforts of Christian missionaries to achieve this goal.

- The coming of many antichrists (Mark 13:22). Many antichrists have arisen in our age including figures like David Koresh, Joseph Smith (Mormons), and Charles Taze Russell (JW's). An interesting one is the case of a man named Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson. This rabbi from New York was a very influential Jewish leader in the world. When he died in 1994 his followers expected him to rise from the dead in you guessed it, three days. As of this writing, he is still in the grave.

Some of the events are sequential, here are some of them.

- Jesus' prediction in Mark 13:1-3 of the destruction of the temple, which was fulfilled in AD 70. In examining the parallel accounts in Matthew and especially Luke it is apparent that this event foreshadowed the ultimate destructive event heralded by the Antichrist at some future time.
- The coming of the ultimate Antichrist spoken of by the Prophet Daniel and in the Book of Revelation. Saint John said in his day that many antichrists had already come (1 John 2:18), but the Bible predicts the coming of one known as the Man of Sin (2 Thessalonians 2:3). This is the one that will bring about the "abomination of desolation" described by Jesus in verse 14. This will mark the establishment of a global ruler known as the Antichrist (1 John 2:18, Daniel 7:8 "the little horn," Revelation 6:2 –the rider on the white horse), and the false holy spirit figure known as the false prophet (Revelation 13:11-15).
- Persecution of believers on a tremendous scale unknown throughout history (Mark 13: 9-13).
- There will be signs in the sky (Mark 13:24-25).
- The unveiling of God's judgments described in the Book of Revelation including the seven seals, trumpets, and bowls (Revelation 6, 8, 11, 15, 16). These are judgments of God as declared in Revelation: "You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve. … Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments" (Revelation 16:5-7).
- The return of the Lord Jesus at some unknown time, I call it the return, resurrection and rapture (R-R-R). This event is a resurrection of dead believers throughout the ages, both Christians (1 Thess 4:13-18) and Jews (Ezekiel 37:12), along with a "catching up" or rapture of living believers to meet Jesus in the air. This will commence first with the believers that have already died, then those believers alive during that time. This is clearly revealed by Saint Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. "*"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise*

first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).Ezekiel spoke of a the same event but from a Jewish perspective. "*Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel*" (Ezekiel 37:12).

- Once the church is removed from the world because "God has not appointed us to wrath" (1 Thessalonians 5:9), the cascading series of events known as the Great Tribulation period will commence. The time that follows is known throughout the Scriptures as the "Day of the Lord."
- Supernatural protection of the Nation of Israel in a special place prepared by God (Revelation 12:6).
- The "abomination of desolation" (Mark 13:14). This is when the Antichrist figure will establish himself as God and set up his own image in the temple to be worshiped. Paul said this about the Antichrist: "who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God" (2Thessalonians 2:4). The Jews were familiar with something like this happening before when Antiochus IV Epiphanes sacked the temple and rededicated it to the god Zeus in 167 BC, and sacrificed a pig in the temple to his god. This "abomination of desolation" was a type of the one to come, a prefiguring of the time that the Antichrist would establish himself as god in the temple to be worshiped by everyone in the world, not just Jerusalem as happened in the earlier time.
- The destruction of the Antichrist's religious and civil empire known as "Mystery Babylon" (Revelation 18:2).
- Marriage Supper of the Lamb with all believers in heaven (Revelation 19:7)
- Return of the Lord Jesus to earth with his victorious church (Revelation 19:11-19).
- Antichrist and False Prophet thrown into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 19:20)
- Satan bound for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:3) then released for a final battle (Revelation 20:7)
- Satan thrown into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:10).

With context in mind read today's reading which focuses upon the theme of being prepared for the return of the Lord Jesus.

Gospel Reading:

33 Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time will come. 34 It is like a man away on a journey, who upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, assigning to each one his task, also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert. 35 Therefore, be on the alert–for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning– 36 in case he should come suddenly and

find you asleep. 37 What I say to you I say to all, 'Be on the alert!'" (Mark 13:33 -37)

Jesus told His disciples, and by application all believers, to be prepared for His return. He did so by telling them (and us) a parable of a master that went on journey while leaving his servants in charge. An appointed doorkeeper was to keep careful watch of the door, even during the midnight hours, in order to watch for the return of His master. The meaning of the parable is that Jesus is the Master that went away by ascending into heaven, a foretaste of the resurrection that will happen at the R-R-R event. Jesus the Master appointed pastors to shepherd His servants (believers). Paul said, "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers" (Ephesians 4:11). Jesus commanded His doorkeepers to be alert, meaning that our pastors are to be alert for His return and to teach others to do the same. As the reading closes Jesus repeated the principle application, "Be on the alert!" (v. 37b).

What does all of this mean for us today? First, Jesus cautioned His disciples to be aware of their future destiny so that they were living rightly today. By using the parable of the fig tree earlier in the Discourse (Mark 13:28), something with which the people in the Mediterranean region were very familiar, they could see the signs of the times and live in a watchful and purposeful way. In the same way that Jesus cautioned His disciples to beware of by watching for the signs, we can know that Jesus' return is imminent by watching for the signs ourselves. This means that we should not delay in accomplishing the work that God has placed in our hearts to accomplish. 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).

Because God's prophets so accurately predicted events that have already occurred, including Jesus' (the greatest prophet of all) prediction of the destruction of the temple, we can trust that the events will play out exactly as God as described in the Scriptures. Because God has so accurately predicted the future, we can trust Him when He tells us how to enter into an eternal relationship with Him through faith in His Son, the risen the Lord Jesus Christ. We can rest in the fact that everything is going to turn out fine for anyone who trusts in the Lord Jesus alone for salvation. Those with faith in the Lord can trust that even if they find themselves thrown into tribulation they will forever be with the Lord in peace.

Finally, although the Scripture provides some phenomenal insights into how the end times will play out, we must be careful not overestimate or underestimate the significance of our current worldly events. Instead, we are to go about the Lord's business while being watchful for His return, for nobody knows that time when that will happen. Although we can know the season of Jesus' return,

including the happening of the events we described in the introduction to the Gospel reading, nobody knows exactly how it will all play out. Until then we are called to work as God's good and faithful servants (Matthew 25:23) until the day He returns. Although God tells us that we will suffer tribulation, and those alive right before the Lord return will suffer even more, we can rest upon God's promises for our eternal life and peace with Him. Peace with God is something that was given to us the moment we believed (Philippians 4:7).

Reflection Questions

1. How does knowing how the Grand Story ends influence how you live today? What values do you have as a result of knowing that God wins in the end? What values do you want God to develop in you based on this knowledge of the end times?

2. The first two readings dealt with humankind's lack of righteousness (Isaiah) and the Corinthian's being called saints. Think about this contrast that is spoken about throughout the Bible. The worse the bad news is, the better the good news is. Explain why the coming of Christ to die on the cross for our sins is called "the good news." How has this become good news for your life?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 12-02-2018

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with teaching from the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah then move to one of the Apostle Paul's letters to a young church in the earliest years of Christianity. Finally, we look at a prophetic portion of the Gospel of Luke. These are not easy passages to understand, but we'll take a careful but brief look at each one.

Introduction to the First Reading:

It's helpful to remember that Jeremiah lived during the time of Judah's spiritual downfall and the beginning of her captivity about 500 B.C. Assyria had been the dominant nation of the time, but was tottering on the brink of ruin, while Babylon and Egypt were struggling to take over world control. Jeremiah warned of Babylon's victory, but Judah failed to repent and ignored his warnings. As a result, Judah suffered destruction, but the prophet announced that she would one day be restored and come into worldwide blessing.

Jeremiah's prophecy reveals God in two aspects like the two sides of a single coin. The book demonstrates His demands and judgment, but it also shows the tenderness of His love. He had chosen this particular prophet to give His message, perhaps, because of Jeremiah's sensibilities and tenderness. One writer has suggested that in that way Jeremiah was "the true forerunner of our Lord."

The purpose of this Old Testament book is twofold: to reveal God's attitude toward sin (thus, the punishment of Israel who had sinned against Him) and to reveal the coming restoration of Israel under their coming king.

First Reading:

> *Jeremiah 33:14-16 NAS95 14 'Behold, days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will fulfill the good word which I have spoken concerning the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 15 'In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch of David to spring forth; and He shall execute justice and righteousness on the earth. 16 'In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell in safety; and this is the name by which she will be called: the LORD is our righteousness.'*

Jeremiah 33 is the final chapter in a section, beginning with chapter 30, that has to do with the restoration of Israel. The opening words in this passage are obviously prophetic; that is, they are referring to some events yet in the future. But there is no clear indication of when these events will occur—relatively soon or at some distant point in the future. There are a few inferences, however, that give us some understanding of God's plan for His people. It's evident, for example, that the writer is revealing God's program for "the house of Israel and the house of Judah." These terms identify the two segments of the nation of Israel that had been divided after the reign and death of King Solomon. God's "good word" about His chosen people will be fulfilled. What He has planned and now intimates will be completed in His chosen time.

At some future point in time ("in those days and at that time") a "Branch of David" will appear. This term takes us back to chapter 22, verses 2 and 4 where the writer makes reference to the "king of Judah, who sits on David's throne" and "kings will enter the gates of this house, sitting in David's place on his throne." Again, we are made to think of God's covenant spoken of in 2 Samuel 7:8-17 where God promised that David and his heirs would rule over Israel. God said, "Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16).

The promises of verses 15 and 16 of today's reading should have been a great encouragement to Israel, who was to suffer certain captivity and removal from her land. In the future, the promised king is to execute justice and righteousness on the earth." As a result, "In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell in safety." That will be a time unlike anything in Israel's previous history. She has always been attacked by godless nations, and, even in our day, persecution continues for today's Jewish people. Praise God, some day that will end!

The final statement of our reading suggests an unusual name for God's people. Jeremiah wrote, "And this is the name by which she will be called: the LORD is our righteousness.'" Perhaps the intention is to remind Jeremiah's audience that righteousness is not the result of anything one can do—offer sacrifices, observe the sacraments, serve others, etc.—but righteousness is found only in Jesus Christ. As the Christian identifies with Jesus and His finished work on the cross, it is the righteousness of Jesus that is conferred upon the believer. "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). "Not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith (Philippians 3:9).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Some scholars think that 1 Thessalonians may have been the earliest book written in the New Testament. The church in the city of Thessalonica (in modern day Greece) was launched on the second of the Apostle Paul's missionary journeys. He was there for about three weeks, teaching about the suffering and resurrection of Jesus, whom he identified as the Messiah (Christ). Some responded well to Paul, but others rejected his message (because of jealousy, Acts 17:5) and forced him to leave town.

Paul wrote this letter to encourage the Thessalonian Christians and to give them further teaching, especially about the return of Christ, which is a common topic in the book, referred to in all five chapters.

In many of his letters to the young churches in the first century Paul offers significant prayers on the readers' behalf, also asking them to pray for him. Today's reading begins with a part of one of those prayers (3:11-13) and concludes with a challenge to the people (4:1-2).

Second Reading:

> *1 Thessalonians 3:12 – 4:2 NAS95 12 and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you; 13 so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints. 1 Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more. 2 For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.*

Paul's great love and concern for his learners is evident in his frequent mention of wanting to visit with them and his continual prayers for them. Before his prayer, beginning in verse 11, Paul tells them that he prays "earnestly . . . night and day" that he might see them face-to-face. Why? Not only because he loves them, but he also wants to continue his ministry to them, completing "what is lacking in your faith," that is, giving them a full understanding of the truth they have adopted.

In his prayer, Paul makes four requests: 1) that God might clear the way so that he could see the Thessalonians again; 2) that he might be able to supply what was incomplete in their fledgling faith; 3) that their love for one another might increase; and 4) that they would be spiritually strengthened and be found blameless and holy.

Regarding their love, we should note that it begins with one another and then includes "all people." Jesus said that his disciples were to be known by their love for one another (John 13:35). It's truly unfortunate that Christians and churches are sometimes criticized by outsiders because of the divisions and animosity that seem to characterize some groups of professing believers. As the people of the church learn to love one another more fully, their testimony to the world will be enhanced. But, love is not to be limited to within the church family. As God "so loved the world" (John 3:16), so should His people love those who need the Savior. Paul uses himself as an example of love; he says he abounds in love for them. And, of course, the greatest example is Jesus himself, who gave his life

for those He loved, the perfect fulfillment of John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."

Somehow Paul relates the fulfilling of the instruction to love with a proper standing before God as "blameless in holiness." It is the clear teaching of Scripture that no one can stand in the presence of God on his own behalf. A holy and perfect God cannot be approached by anyone tainted by sin—and we all are (Romans 3:23). Paul refers to the "coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints," an event to occur when Jesus returns to establish His promised kingdom on earth. The saints who return with Him will have been saved by His grace and clothed in His righteousness (Revelation 19:8). At that point they will be blameless and holy. Perhaps Paul is suggesting that when the Christian demonstrates God-like love toward others, he is giving evidence of his genuine conversion, a born-again experience that, by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, presents him holy and blameless before God.

Paul then moves in chapter 4 to admonish the brethren. He does so "in the Lord Jesus," that is on the authority of Jesus. Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit in the writing of the epistles (see 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:21), so his exhortation can rightly be said to be the Word of God. He encourages them "to walk and please God" as they had been instructed by him (v. 1). He commends them for doing so, "just as you actually do." It's easy to accept someone's admonition and instruction, when he also commends you for how you are responding. Of course, while they had done well, they could still do better, so he challenges them "that you excel still more." Christians should always seek to excel—not to be better than others, but to improve for the glory of God.

Paul's final statement in this passage is a reminder that he is not speaking for himself or on his own authority. He is speaking "by the authority of the Lord Jesus." The Christian should never read God's Word without the full realization that, whoever the human author, these are the words and instructions that God has given, and they must be obeyed out of love and gratefulness for His having providing the way for us to have an intimate relationship with Him by faith.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The New Testament begins with four Gospels, stories of the good news of Jesus' incarnation, life, ministry, death, resurrection, and return to heaven. Why four Gospels? you might ask. While they all generally cover the same story, they offer a variety of events, stories, and sayings of Jesus. They give them from different perspectives, and together we get a more complete picture of the truth. Luke acknowledges in his opening paragraph that there were many stories about Jesus, but he had a particular story to tell. While the others may present Jesus as king and Messiah (Matthew), or a servant to man (Mark), or as the Son of God (John), Luke emphasizes Jesus as Savior, a divine man. He stresses the humanity of Jesus Christ and his perfection as a human.

Luke's audience probably consisted mostly of Gentile Christians, but he wrote to show his readers that the gospel is for both Jews and Gentles. He affirmed that what those early Christians had been taught was indeed true and trustworthy. Like Matthew, Luke records significant teachings of Jesus

regarding end times. He shows that Jesus did not teach that His return would be immediate; rather there was to be an indeterminate time between His resurrection and the second coming. But Jesus is to return in bodily form. The Apostle Paul writes later to clarify certain misunderstandings about end times, also. (See 1 & 2 Thessalonians.)

Luke's account is more chronological than the other Gospels. Today's reading is taken from Christ's teaching as He approaches Jerusalem for the climactic final days of his earthly life. In this passage, which could be titled "The Signs of the Times," He speaks of the coming of the Son of Man (the title He frequently uses to speak of himself).

Gospel Reading:

Note: Verses 29 – 33 which were omitted from the reading have been included below.

> *Luke 21:25-36 NAS95 25 "There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, 26 men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 27 "Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN A CLOUD with power and great glory. 28 "But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."*
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> *29 Then He told them a parable: "Behold the fig tree and all the trees; 30 as soon as they put forth leaves, you see it and know for yourselves that summer is now near. 31 "So you also, when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near. 32 "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all things take place. 33 "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.*
>
> *34 "Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day will not come on you suddenly like a trap; 35 for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. 36 "But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."*

Immediately preceding the return of Christ, there will be signs and wonders in the heavens. In a parallel passage (Matthew 24:29), quoting from the Old Testament prophets, it is said that "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken." As might be expected, the text tells us that there will be dismay among the nations on the earth and men will faint from fear. That fear is the result not only of the fearsome celestial events but from the expectation of things that are yet to come. It is not difficult to image the rampant terror on the earth when "the powers of the heavens will be shaken."

It is then that the Lord Jesus will return to earth. "The Son of Man coming in a cloud" is a quotation from Daniel 7:13 in which the prophet also writes of the glory and dominion that is to be given Messiah at that time. The careful Bible student may recall that 40 days after His resurrection Jesus

ascended to heaven "and a cloud received him" (Acts 1:9). Luke is also the writer of the Book of Acts, and he went on to record the words of the angels at the ascension. They said, "This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

Jesus warns His hearers that they must be prepared for the day of His return, even though that date has not been revealed. When the signs begin to appear, it's a warning to the faithful to look beyond the frightful circumstances and anticipate their final redemption. Redemption is a significant term regarding the believer in Christ. He has been lost in his sin and, as a result, separated from God. But in God's grace and out of His unending love, He has provided a way for the sinner to be redeemed—to be bought with a price and restored to God. That price, of course, is the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross where He paid the infinite penalty of sin.

Jesus broke into the narrative to tell a story about trees. When trees sprout leaves in the spring, you can begin to anticipate the fruit they will produce in the fall. Parables are stories that use the common elements of life to illustrate spiritual truth in language anyone can understand. Jesus makes the application. As buds on trees anticipate a harvest, so the signs of the times anticipate the culmination of God's plan in the return of Jesus and the establishment of His eternal kingdom on earth. The last statement in the paragraph is the wonderful affirmation that God's Word is eternally true. But the sentence preceding that has been difficult for Christians to understand. What did Jesus mean when He said, "This generation will not pass until all things take place"? Obviously, it cannot mean the generation to which Jesus was speaking. They're gone, and the predicted events have not yet occurred. It may be best to understand that Jesus was likely referring to the generation that would be alive when the predicted signs actually occur.

The passage concludes with additional warnings to the believers who will be alive when the signs of the end times appear. They are to be prepared so the events don't fall on them like an unexpected "trap." These events, Jesus says, will come upon every living person at that time; none can escape. He is specific in his warnings. They must "be on guard," and he names the dangers to avoid: "dissipation" (harmful self-indulgence) and its frequent companion "drunkenness." A third is more subtle, "the worries of life." Elsewhere Jesus had taught that His followers need not be concerned about such things: clothing, food, and so forth. God is faithful to provide for His own when their trust is in Him (Matthew 6:25-34). In those last days, Christ-followers must be giving their attention to spiritual and eternal matters rather than mere physical and temporal concerns.

The final admonition for those living in the end times is to be "on the alert at all times." That includes praying for the strength that only God can give in perilous times. Only He can enable His children to escape all the terrible events of those last days. In doing so, they will one day stand before "the Son of Man," to worship Him and to receive the crown of life that He has promised (James 1:12).

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

Reflection Questions

1. In what ways are you trusting in your own efforts to please God or in the sacrifice of Jesus and His resurrection for your righteousness?
2. Describe how your life reflects the love of God in the way you act toward other Christians and to the people of the world?
3. In what ways are you heeding the warnings of Jesus so that you are "on guard" and "on the alert," as you anticipate the return of Jesus? List two ways in which you are doing this.

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 12-03-2017



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the first reading from Isaiah 63 in which we include a great deal of the surrounding context and learn about God's frustration with the

Jewish people during this era. Then we move to the second reading which is the opening verses of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. We conclude with a lengthy analysis from Mark's Gospel on the section known as the Olivet Discourse.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is in Isaiah 63-64. Israel was experiencing the consequences of turning away from God. Isaiah, who was God's spokesperson, cried out to God on behalf of the people. The people were suffering as a result of keeping God out of their lives. But this was a necessary part of the training process, for how else would they know that surrendering to God was actually for their good unless they experienced the harsh reality of living apart from God? We will examine the portion of the reading in chapter 63 first, then continue with the rest.

The bold text is what will be read in the mass, the normal text is the biblical verses that provide the context.

First Reading:

16 For You are our Father, though Abraham does not know us And Israel does not recognize us. ***You, O LORD, are our Father, Our Redeemer from of old is Your name. 17 Why, O LORD, do You cause us to stray from Your ways And harden our heart from fearing You? Return for the sake of Your servants, the tribes of Your heritage. 18 Your holy people possessed Your sanctuary for a little while, Our adversaries have trodden it down.*** *19 We have become like those over whom You have never ruled, Like those who were not called by Your name. (Isaiah 63:16-19)*

As a prophet, Isaiah was in a tough position. He desired to see God move in the hearts of the people, but he knew that the Israelites were unwilling. God is a "gentleman" and does not barge in where He is not wanted. And so the people's hearts grew harder and harder, to the point where God's protective presence was no longer felt in Israel. Isaiah's complaint was that they had become just like the surrounding nations that did not have a covenantal relationship with God. He said, "We have become like those over whom You have never ruled, Like those who were not called by Your name" (v. 19).

The reading continues below beginning in chapter 64.

1 Oh, that You would rend the heavens and come down, That the mountains might quake at Your presence– 2 As fire kindles the brushwood, as fire causes water to boil–To make Your name known to Your adversaries, That the nations may tremble at Your presence! 3 When You did awesome things which we did not expect, You came down, the mountains quaked at

Your presence. 4 For from days of old they have not heard or perceived by ear, Nor has the eye seen a God besides You, Who acts in behalf of the one who waits for Him. 5 You meet him who rejoices in doing righteousness, Who remembers You in Your ways. Behold, You were angry, for we sinned, We continued in them a long time; And shall we be saved? 6 For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. 7 There is no one who calls on Your name, Who arouses himself to take hold of You; For You have hidden Your face from us And have delivered us into the power of our iniquities. 8 But now, O LORD, You are our Father, We are the clay, and You our potter; And all of us are the work of Your hand. *(Isaiah 63:16 – 64:8)*

Isaiah's response to their predicament was to call God to hurl down His judgment upon the nations that were attacking them (vv. 1-3). He looked back and remembered God's power when He did "awesome things [they] did not expect" (v. 3) and finally admitted their great sin. Isaiah said, "For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away" (v. 6). The connotation of the "filthy garments" here is that of a woman's menstrual rags. This is a strong word picture of how God views our "good deeds" done in our own power. This theme is echoed in the words of King David who said in Psalm 14, "They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, not even one" (Psalm 14:3). Seven hundred years later Saint Paul quoted these verses to explain how every person stands condemned before God because of the stain of sin. He said, "for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). He further explained that as result of our sin the penalty is death (Romans 6:23). This passage teaches that we cannot save ourselves. There is no such thing as a cosmic scale that weighs our good deeds versus our bad deeds. All of our deeds, even the so-called "good deeds" are as filthy garments, good only for the trash heap. If this is the case, we must analyze what we are trusting in for salvation. If we are trusting in ourselves, we are going to be sorely lacking.

Isaiah points to a redemptive solution in this passage by showing the need of trusting in God's righteousness. He described God's character: "Who acts in behalf of the one who waits for Him. You meet him who rejoices in doing righteousness, who remembers You in Your ways" (vv. 4-5). There is an implied sense of relational dependence to which Isaiah is pointing. He continues this theme of relational dependence at the end of the section saying: "But now, O LORD, You are our Father, we are the clay, and You are our potter; and all of us are the work of Your hand" (v. 8). The redemptive solution to the dire situation we find ourselves in as sinners is to throw ourselves on God's mercy and to trust in Him to save us. In the New Testament, we see even more clearly God's redemption in Jesus. He bore the wrath of God and forgives us of our sin and cleanses us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). As believers in the finished work of Jesus we are forgiven of our sin and have a special relationship with God, Who at the moment we believed sent His Holy Spirit to live within us (Ephesians 1:13).

What does this means for us today? We must consider carefully in what/whom we are trusting for salvation. Isaiah is very clear, that we cannot be good enough to be saved on our own merit.

Becoming a Christian means to lean your full weight on Jesus and trust His righteousness to save you. As believers we have a special relationship with God, in a way that is similar but yet unique from God's chosen people Israel. There will be untold blessings for all believers when they pass into eternity with God the moment they die. Saint Paul quoted from the first reading and said about believers in the Lord Jesus, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). God allowed judgment to come upon the people of Israel for the purpose of bringing them back to the Lord. As we transition to the second reading, which is also from 1 Corinthians, Paul celebrates with the believers in that region the forgiveness they received through Jesus Who "died for their sins according the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3). We can celebrate that we have come to believe even without having to endure a military invasion and being carried captive into a foreign land as happened with the Jews. Although the Jewish people about whom Isaiah wrote in the reading had turned away from the Lord, one day all of Israel will repent of their sin and be saved (Romans 11:26).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is the opening of Saint Paul's Letter to the Corinthians. Paul founded this church on his second missionary journey as recorded in Acts 18. The Corinthian church was in a major cosmopolitan city in southern Greece, immersed in the surrounding godless culture of a worldly crossroads city. This was actually Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, he mentioned the first letter in 1 Corinthians 5:9 that was subsequently lost.

This study includes verses 1-2 which were omitted in the mass reading.

Second Reading:

1 Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, 2 To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 4 I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, 5 that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, 6 even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, 7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Corinthians 1:1-9)

Paul began by affirming his apostleship, meaning that he was someone who saw the resurrected Lord Jesus and was personally called by the Lord to his ministry. This happened to him while he journeyed on the road to Damascus as was recorded in the Book of Acts (Acts 9:3-5). Second, Paul provided the name of Sosthenes who was most likely his secretary. This man had suffered for the Lord when he was beaten for taking Paul in front of a Corinthian civil court (Acts 18:12-17). The mention of Sosthenes is significant because it reveals that this important Jewish leader of the

synagogue in that region (Acts 18:17) came to faith in the Lord Jesus. Third, Paul affirmed the holiness of anyone who believes in the Lord Jesus. He said, "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours (v. 2). Sanctification is the concept of being set apart for the purposes of God. This word comes from the Greek "hagios" meaning "separation," and is the same Greek word that is translated "holiness."

This is a one-time, forever event, but also has an ongoing, growing element, in that as the author of Hebrews stated, "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14). Finally, Paul says that in the end, believers in the Lord will be "blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 8). This is a common theme for Paul, we also see it in 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 as well as in Philippians 1:6 and 2:15. Paul said in Colossians, "yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach–if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister" (Colossians 1:22-23). Believers are blameless in their positon before the Lord, meaning they are justified as if they had never sinned. However, the ungodly behavior that Paul noted later in 1 Corinthians was not indicative of true believers, for only true believers are blameless before the Lord. Paul said in the closing verse of the reading, "God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (v. 9). Although as we saw in the first reading, "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), continuing in the faith is a sign of a true believer.

We can celebrate that as believers we have been set apart from the world for the purpose of serving God. Most of us do not get too excited about holiness, because holiness has the connation of being no fun. But that is the deception of the Enemy who makes us think that holiness is a drag. The idea of holiness is to be set apart for special use, and which one of us doesn't want to be "special". That is a longing that everyone has. We see a world full of people trying to be special based on the world's value system, using their looks, their personality, their wit, their charm, their money, and their talents to try to stand out from the rest of the crowd. Wanting to feel special is a legitimate longing, but unless it's met in Christ, we will try to meet it in some illegitimate way, which is sinful (even if it is not immoral). So the moral of the story is to recognize that God's imparted holiness to us is what meets this deep longing to be set apart for special use.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Something Paul said in the second reading provides an entry point to transition to the Gospel lesson. Paul said that the Corinthian believers were "awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:7). In the Gospel lesson from Mark Chapter 13, Jesus provides some important insight into just how that event will come about. This reading is from the portion of Scripture known as the Olivet Discourse because Jesus told it while on the Mount of Olives just across the Kidron Valley from the Jerusalem temple. The Discourse is found in the Gospels of Matthew (chapter 24), Luke (chapter 21), and Mark (chapter 13). There are slight differences

between and an understanding of these help to guide the overall interpretation. Although today's reading only covers the last portion of this message, in the overall message the Lord predicts the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. He also provides a glimpse into the distant future when God will pour out His judgments upon the world just before He returns to usher in His Millennial reign on earth.

In order to understand today's reading from the end of the Olivet Discourse it is important to recognize the context and meaning from the previous section and the Discourse overall. The Discourse opens with Jesus' prediction of the destructions of the temple. Although this prophecy was partially fulfilled with the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in AD 70, the final fulfillment will be in the future when the Old Testament prophecies regarding the "Day of the Lord" will be poured out upon the unbelieving world. A worldly figure known as the "Antichrist" will arise and wreak havoc upon the Jewish people worshiping in a restored temple in Jerusalem.

In the end times, a period which began when the Lord returned to heaven (Acts 1:11), some events run in parallel throughout our current age up until the return of the Lord; while others run sequentially, as the end times tribulation proceeds according to prophecies in the Bible. Some of the parallel events are as follows. Quotations are provided from Mark's version of the Discourse when appropriate.

- The persecution of believers (Mark 13 4:9).
- An overall decline of morality and godly living (2 Timothy 3:13). Both of these conditions will grow worse and the persecution of believers will intensify until the close of this age and the return of the Lord Jesus.
- An increase in natural and manmade disasters (Mark 13:6-10). In Mark 13, beginning in verse 6, Jesus provided an overall description of the age preceding His return. This period was to marked by "wars and rumors of wars" (v. 6), earthquakes and famines (v. 8), world wars (v. 8) and with the emergence of many false Messiahs (christs, v. 6). Jesus said that the Gospel must first go out to the entire world (v. 10), which we see will be fulfilled by an angel in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 14:6), in spite of the best efforts of Christian missionaries to achieve this goal.
- The coming of many antichrists (Mark 13:22). Many antichrists have arisen in our age including figures like David Koresh, Joseph Smith (Mormons), and Charles Taze Russell (JW's). An interesting one is the case of a man named Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson. This rabbi from New York was a very influential Jewish leader in the world. When he died in 1994 his followers expected him to rise from the dead in you guessed it, three days. As of this writing, he is still in the grave.

Some of the events are sequential, here are some of them.

- Jesus' prediction in Mark 13:1-3 of the destruction of the temple, which was fulfilled in AD 70. In examining the parallel accounts in Matthew and especially Luke it is apparent that this event foreshadowed the ultimate destructive event heralded by the Antichrist at some future

time.

- The coming of the ultimate Antichrist spoken of by the Prophet Daniel and in the Book of Revelation. Saint John said in his day that many antichrists had already come (1 John 2:18), but the Bible predicts the coming of one known as the Man of Sin (2 Thessalonians 2:3). This is the one that will bring about the "abomination of desolation" described by Jesus in verse 14. This will mark the establishment of a global ruler known as the Antichrist (1 John 2:18, Daniel 7:8 "the little horn," Revelation 6:2 –the rider on the white horse), and the false holy spirit figure known as the false prophet (Revelation 13:11-15).
- Persecution of believers on a tremendous scale unknown throughout history (Mark 13: 9-13).
- There will be signs in the sky (Mark 13:24-25).
- The unveiling of God's judgments described in the Book of Revelation including the seven seals, trumpets, and bowls (Revelation 6, 8, 11, 15, 16). These are judgments of God as declared in Revelation: "You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve. … Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments" (Revelation 16:5-7).
- The return of the Lord Jesus at some unknown time, I call it the return, resurrection and rapture (R-R-R). This event is a resurrection of dead believers throughout the ages, both Christians (1 Thess 4:13-18) and Jews (Ezekiel 37:12), along with a "catching up" or rapture of living believers to meet Jesus in the air. This will commence first with the believers that have already died, then those believers alive during that time. This is clearly revealed by Saint Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. "*"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord"* (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). Ezekiel spoke of a the same event but from a Jewish perspective. "*Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel*" (Ezekiel 37:12).
- Once the church is removed from the world because "God has not appointed us to wrath" (1 Thessalonians 5:9), the cascading series of events known as the Great Tribulation period will commence. The time that follows is known throughout the Scriptures as the "Day of the Lord."
- Supernatural protection of the Nation of Israel in a special place prepared by God (Revelation 12:6).
- The "abomination of desolation" (Mark 13:14). This is when the Antichrist figure will establish himself as God and set up his own image in the temple to be worshiped. Paul said this about the Antichrist: "who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God" (2Thessalonians 2:4). The Jews were familiar with something like this happening before when Antiochus IV Epiphanes sacked the temple and rededicated it to the god Zeus in 167 BC, and sacrificed a pig in the temple to his god. This "abomination of desolation" was a type of the one to come, a prefiguring of the time that the Antichrist would establish himself as god in the temple to be worshiped by everyone in the world, not just Jerusalem as happened in the earlier

time.
- The destruction of the Antichrist's religious and civil empire known as "Mystery Babylon" (Revelation 18:2).
- Marriage Supper of the Lamb with all believers in heaven (Revelation 19:7)
- Return of the Lord Jesus to earth with his victorious church (Revelation 19:11-19).
- Antichrist and False Prophet thrown into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 19:20)
- Satan bound for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:3) then released for a final battle (Revelation 20:7)
- Satan thrown into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:10).

With context in mind read today's reading which focuses upon the theme of being prepared for the return of the Lord Jesus.

Gospel Reading:

33 Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time will come. 34 It is like a man away on a journey, who upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, assigning to each one his task, also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert. 35 Therefore, be on the alert–for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning– 36 in case he should come suddenly and find you asleep. 37 What I say to you I say to all, 'Be on the alert!'" (Mark 13:33 -37)

Jesus told His disciples, and by application all believers, to be prepared for His return. He did so by telling them (and us) a parable of a master that went on journey while leaving his servants in charge. An appointed doorkeeper was to keep careful watch of the door, even during the midnight hours, in order to watch for the return of His master. The meaning of the parable is that Jesus is the Master that went away by ascending into heaven, a foretaste of the resurrection that will happen at the R-R-R event. Jesus the Master appointed pastors to shepherd His servants (believers). Paul said, "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers" (Ephesians 4:11). Jesus commanded His doorkeepers to be alert, meaning that our pastors are to be alert for His return and to teach others to do the same. As the reading closes Jesus repeated the principle application, "Be on the alert!" (v. 37b).

What does all of this mean for us today? First, Jesus cautioned His disciples to be aware of their future destiny so that they were living rightly today. By using the parable of the fig tree earlier in the Discourse (Mark 13:28), something with which the people in the Mediterranean region were very familiar, they could see the signs of the times and live in a watchful and purposeful way. In the same way that Jesus cautioned His disciples to beware of by watching for the signs, we can know that Jesus' return is imminent by watching for the signs ourselves. This means that we should not delay in accomplishing the work that God has placed in our hearts to accomplish. 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).

Because God's prophets so accurately predicted events that have already occurred, including Jesus'

(the greatest prophet of all) prediction of the destruction of the temple, we can trust that the events will play out exactly as God as described in the Scriptures. Because God has so accurately predicted the future, we can trust Him when He tells us how to enter into an eternal relationship with Him through faith in His Son, the risen the Lord Jesus Christ. We can rest in the fact that everything is going to turn out fine for anyone who trusts in the Lord Jesus alone for salvation. Those with faith in the Lord can trust that even if they find themselves thrown into tribulation they will forever be with the Lord in peace.

Finally, although the Scripture provides some phenomenal insights into how the end times will play out, we must be careful not overestimate or underestimate the significance of our current worldly events. Instead, we are to go about the Lord's business while being watchful for His return, for nobody knows that time when that will happen. Although we can know the season of Jesus' return, including the happening of the events we described in the introduction to the Gospel reading, nobody knows exactly how it will all play out. Until then we are called to work as God's good and faithful servants (Matthew 25:23) until the day He returns. Although God tells us that we will suffer tribulation, and those alive right before the Lord return will suffer even more, we can rest upon God's promises for our eternal life and peace with Him. Peace with God is something that was given to us the moment we believed (Philippians 4:7).

Reflection Questions

1. How does knowing how the Grand Story ends influence how you live today? What values do you have as a result of knowing that God wins in the end? What values do you want God to develop in you based on this knowledge of the end times?

2. The first two readings dealt with humankind's lack of righteousness (Isaiah) and the Corinthian's being called saints. Think about this contrast that is spoken about throughout the Bible. The worse the bad news is, the better the good news is. Explain why the coming of Christ to die on the cross for our sins is called "the good news." How has this become good news for your life?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday 11-27-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we will learn about the importance of responding to God's revelation of what will happen in the future. Each Scripture passage deals with a dimension of what will take place in the future. Knowing the future gives clarity to the present and helps us to interpret the events of the past from God's perspective. This is true for us who know and study the Bible. God has given us His precious Word so that we can be informed about ultimate reality, thus making wise decisions with the one life that each one of us gets.

On June 25, 1876, the Indian scout named Goes-Ahead warned General George Custer not to attack the Indian encampment at Little Bighorn, South Dakota. Goes-Ahead was so certain about the negative outcome that he removed his US Army uniform and changed into traditional Native American Indian clothing, which was supposed to ease the entry of his soul to the afterlife. Custer considered these actions as "defeatist" and was so angry at this and the other scout's behavior that the General dismissed them on the spot, an action which saved the Indian's lives. Custer continued with the attack that in retrospect had very predictable results. Not a single Army soldier in Custer's brigade survived the attack and as a result, little was known about what actually happened during the battle. It wasn't until General Terry arrived two days later on June 27 that anyone even knew that the brigade had perished. "Custer's Last Stand," as it came to be known, was a disaster for Custer and his men because he was ill-prepared for the battle. The well-skilled and qualified General was alert, yet he ultimately wasn't equipped with the resources necessary to win the battle. Even though he was forewarned, he did not take the warning seriously, and thus, suffered irrevocable

damages.

What can we learn about General Custer's Last Stand? Although this military leader was forewarned, he overestimated his capabilities and underestimated the enemy's force. Likewise, we often overestimate our own abilities, and underestimate the power of the enemy. We often think that we can handle life on our own. What we don't know is that the enemy of our soul is a "roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). This puts us in a precarious place, for we were originally designed by God to rule and reign with Him (Genesis 1:26-27), but we are hounded by an enemy. The natural state of humankind, now, is one of being under God's wrath (Romans 1:18); not being able to give God our full allegiance, devotion, and worship. He gives us every chance to repent of our disloyalty and find our protection from impending judgment by His gift of Christ Jesus. In His kindness, God warns His precious creation, humans, about the return of the Lord and the coming tribulation for those who haven't trusted in Christ through faith. Yet many still persist in their sin and unbelief. The Bible is full of admonition for people to believe while they still have the chance. The Prophet Isaiah said, "Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near." In the Old Testament Book of Genesis, God instructed Noah to build an ark to save his family from the coming global flood (Genesis 6:13). Although the people didn't have the Bible, Noah, who was called a "preacher of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5), warned the people about their coming destruction. In spite of the fact that they were cautioned for 120 years (Genesis 6:3) the entire world perished except for Noah and his family (7:21-22). Though only Noah's family believed, it's certain that anyone who have sought refuge in the ark would have been allowed to enter and be saved.

The Holy Scriptures play a very important role in warning the people in our era about the need to repent and trust in the finished work of Jesus for forgiveness of their sin and deliverance from the tribulation that is prophesied to come upon the earth. People in the western world today have even less of an excuse to say that they haven't been warned since the Bible is readily available to them. In past eras this wasn't always the case. Not everyone has had access to the Bible in order to receive proper instruction about how to become a believer in God and His plan of salvation. Many years after Noah's flood in the Old Testament, there was an era when the Bible became lost to the Jewish people and was rediscovered during the reign of godly King Josiah. This discovery led to a vigorous revival among the Jews. If you desire to read more, this history is found in Second Kings Chapter 22. The moral of the story from Custer's Last Stand and the teachings of the Bible is to "repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2).

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the book of Isaiah, a prophet who spoke to the people of Judah, in a time when they were threatened by a formidable enemy. They were the southern tribes of Israel, small compared to their brothers who had already fallen into captivity to the powerful Assyrians. Isaiah spoke several themes to his countrymen in the time of their suffering: 1) Take heart, for God is sending the Messiah (one who will deliver them from their oppression); 2) Repent from trusting in self and trust in God's salvation; and 3) God's has an important future in store for those who align

themselves with His purposes and value system. A prominent theme in the Bible is prophecy concerning the eventual restoration and spiritual awakening of the Jewish people. In the first reading, we see the Prophet Isaiah making a prediction about the future restoration of the Nation of Israel. The reading is from Isaiah Chapter 2. Read about God's plan for Israel and the prominent place that Jerusalem will play in the future. As you read, underline the word "will" each time it appears in the text.

First Reading:

1 The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. 2 Now it will come about that in the last days, The mountain of the house of the LORD will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it. 3 And many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways, And that we may walk in His paths." For the law will go forth from Zion, And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. 4 And He will judge between the nations, And will render decisions for many peoples; And they will hammer their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they learn war. 5 Come, house of Jacob, and let us walk in the light of the LORD. (Isaiah 2:1-5)

In the introduction today, we saw that the prophetic message of the Bible was to listen to God's warnings and to be prepared in order to avoid future judgment. In this part of Isaiah's message, the point is not necessarily a warning, but rather a disclosure to all the people in the world what God will do regarding His People Israel. Isaiah said that in the "last days" God will establish Jerusalem as the true religious capital of the world (v.2). Jerusalem will be where God will live and judge the nations, and the location of His teaching that will go throughout the world (vv. 3-4). God will bring worldwide peace and weapons will be eliminated and converted into devices for peaceful use (v.4). The entire nation of Israel will then walk in the light of the Lord (v.5). It is interesting to note that people of all nations will look to the God of the Jews to teach them His ways. The fulfillment of this prophecy is already underway, as people of all nations and languages have heard the message of salvation and have responded by following Jesus, the Messiah. Isaiah's message can bring us hope that God's plan for His people will ultimately prevail and bring worldwide peace. As in-grafted believers in Israel (Romans 11:17) this should provide us with comfort that God can and will work in our lives as well.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The letter to the Roman Christians, written by Saint Paul, provides an astounding amount of information about God's version of reality. Throughout the book, Paul delivers the bad news (all have sinned, Romans 3:23) and that the wages of this sin is death (Romans 6:23). But he does not leave us in a state of hopelessness, for we find out that there is "no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). The good news is that Christ has paid the price for our freedom with His blood shed on the cross. We can now be set free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2). In this part of

the letter, Paul has laid out the plan of salvation and is now warning us of the importance of what we do with this information. In the previous verses, he told the Roman believers to owe no one anything, except the outstanding debt to love. Love does not take advantage of others, therefore, love is the ultimate motivator and moral behind the law of God. Love is to be the pervasive character trait of Jesus' people.

Second Reading:

11 And this do, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. 12 The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts. (Romans 13:11-14)

Paul's underlying assumption is that people are changed when they follow God's plan of salvation. When our hearts are awakened by God's love, we no longer walk like the people living in darkness, without the love of God in their lives. We don't love in order to attain salvation, we love as a result of God's salvific work in our hearts. After the point of surrendering to God, we have a role to play to walk by faith in this new life He has given us. We "lay aside the deeds of darkness" recognizing the destructive nature of this past way of life.

Paul told the Roman Christians to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" but then went on to tell them to take off other things. In verse 13 Paul said to "put on the armor of light" and take off drunkenness, sexual promiscuity, sensuality, strife, and envy (v.13) and lust (v.14). Paul said in Colossians 3, "But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, [and] abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its [evil] practices" (vv.8-9). God offers us empowerment to be able to take things off through the putting on of the mind of Jesus Christ. There isn't a magical formula about how we can put on the mind of Jesus Christ, but some ways are through the study of His Word, prayer, and fellowship with other believers. By studying God's Word, seeking the Lord in prayer and fellowshipping with other believers, we start to recognize the patterns of darkness and begin to make no provision for the flesh (the old way of life apart from Christ) so that we can walk in newness of life. It is a battle, and unless we surrender daily to God's Spirit who gives us the power to resist the Enemy, we will have as much success as Custer in his last stand.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

In the Gospel reading today, we turn to Matthew and the subject of eschatology, the study of the final events in the history of the world. This section of Scripture is known as the Olivet Discourse because Jesus gave it on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem across the Kidron Valley from the Temple. Jesus startled his disciples by saying that there would be a day when none of the huge temple stones

would be left on top of each other. This was mind-boggling to his disciples and they naturally asked when this would happen. Jesus answered their question with the teaching of His return to earth and the end times. He gave them information so that they would be forewarned and could prepare accordingly. Thanks to their faithful retelling of this information, we too, are forewarned and can live in light of what we know will take place in the future.

Gospel Reading:

36 But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. 37 For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. 38 For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, 39 and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. 40 Then there shall be two men in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. 41 Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. 42 Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. 43 But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. 44 For this reason you be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will. (Matthew 24:36-44)

While no one knows the exact time of Christ's return, there will be many signs to help His followers understand what is about to take place. Amazingly enough, many people will miss these signs, for they will be all caught up in assuming that the world will continue as normal. For they will be eating and drinking and planning for the future (marrying) with no concern for the impending judgment. Although the warnings have been replete, the receptivity to these warnings fall on deaf ears, as in the days of Noah. As a result, Jesus' coming will be a surprise to many, just as a thief in the night comes as a surprise to those who live in false security. Jesus' return will shock people who are with others who are snatched away in the middle of their daily activities. First Thessalonians 4:17 describes this event, "Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord." Jesus' followers will be safe with Him, but those who are not under Jesus' saving protection will be left to face God's wrath on their own merit. Human works, even the best of efforts, are not enough to create a safe position in light of this impending judgment. Only the merit of Christ and being found in Him will protect us from being swept away in judgment.

What does the teaching in the Olivet Discourse mean to us today? First, we must believe in the finished work of Jesus Christ in order to escape God's coming judgment. Even though we have been warned we must also be prepared by seeking God while it's still possible. Second, God calls us to instruct others so that they also find salvation through the only means possible, faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). If we accept God's offer of eternal life through faith in Christ Jesus we can have comfort that God will spare us from the tribulation period coming upon the earth (Luke 21:36, 1 Thessalonians 5:9). In addition, we become people of eternity, living for another world and we find

that this world is not our home. This changes our daily life because it redefines our value system and priorities. Finally, we must allow God to place us into situations that require us to trust more in God. Saint Paul said, "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Philippians 1:29).

Reflection Questions

1. Review the following insights from the Bible passages for this week:

a. The passage from Isaiah predicted that people of all nations would seek the God of the Bible, wanting to learn His ways and walk in His paths. Are you evidence of this prophecy? Are there others in your life that God may be asking you to influence towards this Him?

b. The second reading encouraged the people of God to be motivated by love, walking as children of the light who reject patterns of darkness. Are there deeds of the darkness that you need to put away and reject? Are there aspects to putting on the armor of light (like Bible study, prayer, fellowship) that you can give yourself to more fervently so that you have the mind of Christ?

c. The third reading typified the followers of Jesus as those who are prepared for His return. As you look at your life, what evidence do you see of your preparedness for His return? How does preparedness get translated into your daily perspective and choices?

Which parts of these messages would help give you resolve and encouragement to live with an eternal perspective for the hard decisions in your life?

2. Whether Christ returns in our lifetime or not, why would it be wise to surrender your life to Him and His will on a daily basis? What have you learned about the future and God's heart for you that helps you to live for Christ, as opposed to just seeking Christ for "fire insurance?"

For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings

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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