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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 22: 02/22/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass Notes. This week, we will examine the creation of man in the Book of Genesis and then the fall of humankind into sin through the temptation of the devil that brought about God's curse upon the earth. Then, in the second reading, we will examine God's plan of redemption that He brought about by sending Jesus to die for our sins. Finally, we will study in the Gospel lesson how Jesus successfully resisted the devil's temptation. Our lesson this week followed a lengthy study last week on worry. If you haven't read that, we suggest you find time to review it on the website.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Genesis and covers the sections of creation and the fall of humanity. This text, together with the second reading from Romans, constitutes the great bookends of human history. On one hand, Genesis records the creation of the universe, including the earth, the animal kingdom, and humankind. This is closely followed by the ugly record of the day when man

sinned against God, which invoked His curse upon the world. On the other hand, the Book of Romans that we will see in the second reading records in detail God's plan of redemption through Jesus Christ. This is a critically important study this week because we will cover a summary of all of human history, which can be summed up in just four short words: creation, fall, redemption, and glory.

As we move to the first reading, let me point out some helpful context since the reading skipped the ending of Chapter 2 in Genesis. The context of the reading from Genesis is that it occurred just after God created Adam and before He made Eve, the first woman, though she wasn't officially named until Chapter 3 (Genesis 3:20). Chapter 1 recorded the creation of the entire universe, including man. Chapter 2 expands on the creation account by filling in additional details. In the opening of Chapter 2, God had finished his creation of the universe and had placed Adam on earth in the Garden of Eden with the commandment to cultivate it (Genesis 2:15). He provided clear direction to Adam by saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely, but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die" (2:16b – 17). Subsequently, God formed the entirety of the animal kingdom and appointed Adam with the task of naming every animal and bird (v. 19). The creation story continues:

> *20 The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. 21 So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. 22 The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. 23 The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." 24 For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. (Genesis 2:20-25).*

At this point in history, man was in the perfect company of God, had the perfect wife, Eve, tilled a perfect garden with unlimited food, and walked around all day perfectly naked. What more could anyone ask for? However, it was just too good to last. Think back to the single commandment that God gave to Adam. He said not to eat of the "tree of knowledge of good and evil" (v. 17). It is easy to look back on Adam and wonder why, if he had so much, he had to concentrate upon the one thing that he couldn't have. But don't we do the very same thing? If we know that the speed limit is 55, why do we feel the need to drive 60 or 70? Just the fact that we have a law almost compels us to break it. Our consideration of whether to break a law is generally tied to the penalty for failing to obey it. A speed limit law is one thing, but God told Adam that if he broke this one certain law, the penalty would be death (v. 17). Adam had no frame of reference for the devastating effects of death

upon his life here on earth.

Now, with this context in mind, let's jump back to verse seven where the first reading begins. As you read, notice the mention of another special tree growing in the Garden.

First Reading:

> *2:7 Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. 8 The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed. 9 Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*
> *3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?" 2 The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; 3 but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.'" 4 The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! 5 For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6 When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. (Genesis 2:7-9, 3:1-7)*

With the job of creation completed, God placed man in the Garden of Eden with trees that were already fully grown (3:6). Adam's wife was then confronted by a talking serpent, which probably wasn't too unusual to her because of her complete lack of history – everything would have been new to her. The first thing the talking serpent told her was to question the word of God. "Indeed, **has** God said," spoke the serpent to the woman (3:1). The woman restated the warning from God, but added a prohibition about touching the tree, something which wasn't recorded in the warning given to Adam. The text doesn't say whether Adam told his wife not to touch the tree as a protective measure, or whether Eve added to God's prohibition not to eat from the tree. Regardless, had she not touched the tree, this whole affair wouldn't have played out the way it did, at least not at this stage of history. [It's almost a foregone conclusion that the Fall was going to happen; it was just a matter of time.]

Next, the serpent tempted the woman a second time by casting doubt on the word of God. He said, "You surely will not die! 5 For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (v. 6). There is a nugget of truth in what the serpent said, as is usually the case, since he was a master deceiver and he evidently understood that the woman wouldn't believe an outright lie. What we mean by saying that there was some truth in the statement about not dying is that after both Adam and Eve sinned, they did not die physically (3:7), but they certainly did die spiritually. God defines death as separation from Him, which occurred through their disobedience (Ephesians 4:17-18). God just delayed Adam's physical death for some 930 years. "So all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years, and he died" (Genesis 5:5). We are not told when Eve died. The second element of truth in the serpent's subterfuge was that their eyes *were* opened, as was told clearly in the text (3:7a).

The sin that Eve committed was great, but she at least had the excuse that she was deceived by the serpent. Adam, however, could not plead that the devil made him do it. No, the text said, "she also gave to her husband with her, and he ate" (v. 6e). Adam sinned without having the excuse that he was deceived; he sinned with his eyes wide open and willfully disobeyed God's law regarding not eating from the tree. God held Adam responsible for his sin and the subsequent curse that He poured out onto His perfect creation, something that must have grieved our Lord to no end. Adam was created first and appointed as the leader in the stewardship of God's creation, including the woman. Eve was created as the helper (2:18). If we look forward in Chapter 3, we will see that God questioned Adam first about what happened in the Garden. "Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?'" (3:9). In the New Testament, God verified that He held Adam responsible for the sin, even though Eve sinned first. We will read about this when we study the second reading from Romans Chapter 5.

The other special tree in the garden was the "tree of life" (v. 9b). It's important to note that although Adam did eat from the "tree of knowledge of good and evil," he didn't eat from the tree of life. Had he done so, he would have remained in his fallen state in the cursed creation forever. God said later in Chapter 3, "Then the LORD God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever'" (3:22). Instead, what happened was that Adam ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil and as a result, his eyes were opened (v. 7), just as the devil had said they would be (v. 4), such that he knew both good and evil. He knew about goodness before he sinned, and after his sin, he discovered evil.

The fall of humanity that we read about in the first reading had a gigantic impact on the world, on creation itself, on humankind, and on the animal world. Just ask anyone who has raised a two-year-old. Although I haven't had that privilege, I do have a story about how the fall has affected even the

animal kingdom. My family used to have a golden retriever named Rusty. I remember our beloved dog very well, as we both used to like going for runs together. Whenever I went jogging around the country roads in the neighborhood, Rusty used to like to come along with me. He used to run ahead of me, then frequently cross into the woods to follow any animal scent he could find there. Rusty just loved running around the woods in the neighborhood. I remember that when Rusty was young, he would follow me outside, thinking that I was going to take him running. Rusty would then take off down the road, and I would call him back. There was an awkward moment when I would call to him while he decided whether to obey. He turned his body away from me but looked back towards me while he made up his mind. Frequently, he would think about it for maybe half a minute while I continued calling, then he would take off running down the road from me. What a little stinker. He knew that he was being bad, but he ran away anyway. This sin wasn't something that we taught him; it was instinctive. The corruption of this world frustrates us at every level of life.

The fall of humanity resulted in God's pronouncement of a curse upon His creation. This curse affected men's relationship with women (Genesis 3:15), men and women's relationship with their work (Genesis 3:19), and the ground itself (Genesis 3:17-18). God predicted the ultimate physical death for Adam. "By the sweat of your face, you will eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; For you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

We need to let the depth of the bad news provide a backdrop to the message of hope delivered in the second reading. God sent the Second Adam to redeem mankind from their sin, a gift freely given to those who believe that God has provided His righteousness through faith. This reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans. The context of the reading is that Paul had just explained the crucial concept of justification by faith. "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). The word "therefore" is present to provide a linkage to what Paul discussed in the previous chapter. Here, Paul explained how Father Abraham's faith was the reason that he was found righteous before the Lord, not his good works. Paul said, "For what does the Scripture say? ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Romans 4:3, the capital letters in this NASB version indicate a quotation from the Old Testament). Abraham's good works were laudable, but they didn't merit his salvation from the curse of Adam's sin. Paul said, "For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God" (4:2).

As you read the second reading from Romans 5, you will recognize the story we read about in the

Garden of Eden.

Second Reading:

> *12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned– 13 for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. 14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. 15 But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. 16 The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. 17 For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. 18 So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. 19 For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:12-19)*

Paul said a mouthful in this text, enough that entire books could be written on just one of these verses alone. Here are some key points from the reading.

- Salvation, meaning forgiveness of the penalty of sin, is provided as a free gift (v. 15) only through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

- God held Adam ("one man"), not Eve, accountable for the Fall of Mankind (v. 12). All people from Adam onwards are sinners (v. 14), except for Jesus (v. 18).

- Though everyone, even before the Jewish Law, was a sinner, those before the Law couldn't be held accountable for the Law which hadn't yet been given (v. 13). Nevertheless, humans are accountable to God for the laws that are written on their hearts. Paul said, "For when Gentiles

> who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law is written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them" (Romans 2:14-15).

- The sinful state of Adam was imparted to all of humankind from that moment forward. "For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners" (v. 19a).

- Death didn't exist before the Fall and came into the world only after sin (v. 12b). This negates the possibility of theistic evolution to explain God's creative process, as any form of evolution requires a cycle of death. Theistic evolution requires a million birth-and-death cycles and is also based on the idea that favorable mutations occurred within the gene pool. How many favorable mutations do we see today?

- Jesus' sacrificial death resulted in the imputed righteousness of believers, the "gift of righteousness" (v. 16, 18).

These foundational insights give us hope in our day-to-day lives if we have turned to Jesus as our righteousness. We no longer have to pay the penalty for our own sins, but we are declared righteous by God if we will live under His provision of grace. The idea of grace is unmerited favor, which means we have been given a gift. A gift that has been given needs to be received if it is to be useful to the recipient. Have you opened the gift of God's grace in your life by trusting in Jesus Christ as your only source of salvation?

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson from today is from Matthew Chapter 4. As we read in the first reading, Adam and Eve were tempted by the devil and succumbed to his temptation, resulting in the Fall of Humanity. In the Gospel reading, we will see how Jesus was also tempted by the devil and how he persisted in his obedience to God the Father. As you read, pay special attention to how Jesus dealt with the devil's temptation and how this contrasted with how Eve interacted with him.

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Gospel Reading:

> *1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. 3 And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." 4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'" 5 Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU'; and 'ON their HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.'" 7 Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.'" 8 Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; 9 and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'" 11 Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him. (Matthew 4:1-11)*

We saw that Jesus resisted the devil's temptation by quoting the word of God. Notice in the NASB version how easily it is to spot the quotations from the Old Testament since they are shown in all capital letters. Three times the devil tempted Jesus, and three times Jesus resisted, quoting the word of His Father.

The temptation for Jesus was to secure His rightful place of rulership without going through the cross. In some ways, all of our temptations have this sense of" shortcutting" the process in order to attain the glory without the upfront cost. What the devil doesn't tell people is the price tag, which will be paid in full by the person who purchases his shortcut. Jesus saw through his scheme and was not pushed around by the devil's slick talk or even deceived by the twisting of Scripture. By standing in the midst of temptation, Jesus becomes our strong advocate in our own times of temptation. Hebrews 2:18 says, "For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted." He wants us to call on Him and ask for His help. Let's take Him at His word.

How should we go about resisting temptation? Saint Paul provided us with some guidance, and along with what we learned from the readings, it should be obvious that we, too, need to rely upon the word of God to deliver us from temptation. Paul said, "No temptation has overtaken you but

such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it" (1Corinthians 10:13). In times of temptation, instead of looking for a loophole, look for the way of escape!

Reflection Questions

This week brought us many powerful concepts to consider in our daily lives. Here are some questions to prompt further reflection:

1. Compare the two temptation accounts again and list the ways that Jesus dealt differently from Adam and Eve. What do you learn from His example?

2. The bookends of history are encompassed in this week's reading, starting with the bad news (sin's price tag is death) and moving to the good news (Jesus' payment for our sin). If you were to analyze where you are at today in your relationship with God, where would you place yourself on the continuum of living in your sin versus living in God's grace?

Living in my sin
Living in God's grace

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 02-18-2024

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the first reading from the Book of Genesis in which we study the covenant that God made with Noah when he landed in the ark after the Great Flood. Then we move to the second reading from the Book of First Peter where we learn of the fate of those that were swept away in the Flood as well as the means by which God provides believers with safety through His ark of salvation in Jesus. Finally, we conclude with the Gospel lesson from Mark in which we see Jesus' temptation in the wilderness and the beginning of His earthly reign that brought the kingdom of heaven down to earth.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Genesis and provides the backdrop to the origin of the rainbows. The context of this passage is just after Noah and his family, eight people in total, landed in the ark at the conclusion of the Great Flood. This followed a 120 year period during which Noah both built the ark and at the same time ministered to the people that ended up perishing on the earth. After the Flood, God blessed Noah telling him to "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Genesis 9:1). At this point, God changed the human diet to allow the eating of animals and established capital punishment (Genesis 9:3-6). It was no wonder that God placed fear of humans in the minds of the animals (v. 2). Today's reading outlines what is known as the "Noahic Covenant."

First Reading:

> *8 Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying, 9 "Now behold, I Myself do establish My covenant with you, and with your descendants after you; 10 and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you; of all that comes out of the ark, even every beast of the earth. 11 "I establish My covenant with you; and all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth." 12 God said, "This is the sign of the covenant which I am making between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all successive generations; 13 I set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth. 14 "It shall come about, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow will be seen in the cloud, 15 and I will remember My covenant, which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and never again shall the water become a flood to destroy all flesh. (Genesis 9:8-15 NAS95)*

The unconditional promise that God made to Noah was that the earth would never again be destroyed by a global flood (v. 11). This "Noahic Covenant" is unconditional because it is not predicated upon Noah, his family, or anyone born afterwards to perform some duty. God's promise was confirmed by His giving of the sign of the rainbow, something that evidently did not exist before the Great Flood. In our day when we see the rainbow we can remember God's grace and faithfulness. God was faithful in accomplishing His promise to Noah in rescuing those that trusted in His ark. God showed His tremendous grace because He didn't altogether destroy the earth because "Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (Genesis 6:8). God provided the "ark of salvation" to all of those who believed. Had anyone else other than those eight people acted in faith and stepped onto the ark, they too would have been saved from the flood of God's wrath that was poured out upon the earth. In the same way, Jesus is the "ark of salvation" for all those who believe, which is what we will discuss in the next reading. In the case of Noah's family, it was both the physical ark and their belief in it that saved them. They had to believe a global flood was coming, build the ark, and enter into it before the flood began. It is interesting to note that Noah's ark is a type of Christ that prefigured the coming of Jesus (the antitype). A "type" is a theological term for people, statements, or events prefiguring or superseded by antitypes. The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus is the only "ark of salvation." When we trust in Jesus, we ourselves enter the ark by faith and by God's grace (Ephesians 2:8-9). Like the ark that only had one door, Jesus is the only door to heaven (John 10:9).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from the Book of First Peter. The reading follows Saint Peter's teaching on the characteristics desirable in a Christian including being "harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly,

kindhearted, and humble in spirit" (1 Peter 3:8). This was in order to bring others to faith in Jesus even during times of spiritual persecution, and calling believers to provide a defense to the antagonists of the hope that we have in God (1 Peter 3:15).

Second Reading:

> *18 For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; 19 in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, 20 who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. 21 Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you–not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience–through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him. (1 Peter 3:18-22 NAS95)*

Peter explained that Jesus died **once** for our sins, which is a sacrifice that can never be repeated (v. 18, Hebrews 9:28). God used Noah as a "minister of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5) to preach to the people during his generation over the 120 years it took for him to build the ark (Genesis 6:3). Jesus' Gospel message was proclaimed through Noah during his days on earth "to the spirits now in prison" (v. 19), meaning Hell. This does not mean that Jesus went to Hell and preached to the dead spirits in order to give them a second chance. The Bible is clear that it is appointed for man once to die and then to face judgment (Heb. 9:27). Everyone that did not believe that they needed to be saved ended up in this terrible, eternal prison. Except for Noah, his wife, his three sons and their three wives, the entire population of the earth was destroyed.

The apostle Peter is saying in this passage that salvation comes through faith in God's provision of Jesus. Just like the ark was God's provision at the time of Noah, God has made the ultimate provision for our sins through Jesus' death and resurrection. He is the one and only "ark of salvation." Peter is not saying that water baptism as we think of it saves you. Rather, he is making a correlation between the ark's ability to save Noah and his family and Jesus' ability to save anyone who comes to Him in faith ("an appeal to God for a good conscience" v. 21). Peter equated baptism with faith, and he explained that the "baptism" which does save us is our faith that we have in the Lord Jesus who is above all authorities and powers (v. 22b). The text uses the term "corresponding" (Greek "antitupos") in the first word of verse 21. Water baptism is the counterpart (corresponds) to the salvation that we as believers possess through faith in Jesus Christ and God's grace alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). During the time of Saint Peter, a person who expressed faith in the Lord Jesus obediently submitted to baptism (Acts 2:38). We can be joyful that God has provided Jesus as our "ark of

salvation" in which we can enter through the means of faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). Although we are members of the church universal, the church doesn't save us, Jesus does.

We encourage you to learn more about the practice of baptism in the Bible by reading the **Going Deeper Section** as the end of this week's Mass Notes.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from Saint Mark a few verses before that which we studied last week. This passage records Jesus' forty days of temptation in the wilderness (also found in Matthew 4:2). It is important to note that Jesus' temptation was all part of an ongoing story in the book of Mark that began with Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist and followed by Jesus starting His earthly ministry. Each of these components should be seen as Jesus' credentials for verifying His claim to be the Son of God (Mark 1:1).

Gospel Reading:

> *12 Immediately the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness. 13 And He was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts, and the angels were ministering to Him. 14 Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:12-15 NAS95)*

Immediately after Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist, Jesus was compelled by God the Holy Spirit to go to the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. Although God knew that Jesus would successfully endure this trial of 40 days without food and in constant temptation by Satan, Jesus still had to complete the test in order to show to the world both His victory over temptation as well as his triumph over His human condition. Who can imagine going without food for 40 days in the desert? Saint Paul said the following about Jesus:

Philippians 2:6-8 NAS95 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by

becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Jesus voluntarily emptied Himself of the independent use of His divine attributes. Although he was fully God, He was also fully human, and as such was subject to temptations that only a human can experience. Where the first Adam failed, we find in this passage that Jesus (the last Adam 1 Cor. 15:45) resisted the deceptive lies of the Enemy. This is all part of the testimony that Mark is gathering to persuade his audience that Jesus is worthy of our worship as God's Servant to bring the good news that salvation is accessible (at hand).

Undoubtedly Jesus' temptation went far beyond anything that any of us will ever experience. However, we can have hope that in light of Jesus' example, we too can persist in our temptations. Saint Paul said, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Finally, Jesus' successful completion of the 40 days of temptation brought about the beginning of His earthly ministry and the unveiling of the "kingdom of God" (v. 15). By this time, John the Baptist had been arrested and Jesus took over his message to repent and believe in the Good News (v. 15).

What does this week's study mean for us today? God calls us to identify with Reverend Noah's message of faith and a call to action the same way He calls us to faith and action in our times. Jesus took over where Noah left off and called for people to examine their hearts by repenting of their sin and trusting in His once for all sacrifice to take their transgressions away forever. As believers, we are vastly different from the "spirits in prison" who didn't believe in Noah's message and therefore perished in the Great Flood. Every time that we see a rainbow, whether it is in the sky or in the colors of a peacock, we can remember God's grace and faithfulness in granting us salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone and not because of any of our good works. God has provided us with the power to resist temptation. We have Jesus' example that a person can resist through trusting in God's dynamic power, the Holy Spirit who lives inside of those who believe.

Reflection Questions

1. Although it's not directly stated in the Bible, I have always maintained that Noah hired workers to

build the ark during this 120-year construction project. Additionally, I think that Noah ministered to the people during this time, both in the building of the ark and in ways in which are not told in the Bible. In what ways are you a "preacher of righteousness" in the various contexts in which God has placed you (work, home, school, etc.)?

2. How does Jesus' fulfillment of all righteousness (even in resisting temptation) give you hope in the midst of your own journey? List one particular area in which you have recently been tempted. In what ways can you identify with Jesus' temptation in the wilderness? How does the application of 1 Corinthians 10:13 empower you to resist?

"No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Going Deeper: Biblical Teaching about Baptism

What does the Bible teach about baptism? Throughout the ages the church's understanding and practice of baptism has developed. The following information is not meant to disparage any particular church's teaching on the subject, but to provide the biblical foundation from which the practice evolved.

The word translated "baptism" from the original is "baptizo" which means to immerse or submerge. The practice of baptism is very Jewish in that the Jews were familiar with ceremonial cleansings in a bath known as the "mikvah." It was in such a mikvah in which Bathsheba was cleansing after her time of the month when King David spied upon her. A popular myth is that Baptism was also a means in the Old Testament of confirming the reception of a Jewish Proselyte, although this practice is found nowhere in the Bible. Nobody in the Bible was ever baptized into the Jewish community. This came about only through the prescriptions of the Law, and especially by circumcision (Exodus 12:48-49). The Jewish practices of ritual cleansing are, however, mentioned as an elementary doctrine by the author of Hebrews (Hebrews 6:2), one that is emblematic of the purity in which God requires of worshippers. We know from the Bible that a ritual cleansing of the body in a mikvah or any other type of bath, be it sprinkling, immersion, or pouring, cannot remove the **spiritual** dirt from anyone (1 Peter 3:21). The Scripture says that only God can forgive sin (Mark 2:7, Ephesians 2:8-9, and especially Luke 5:23-24).

John the Baptist initiated the practice of baptism, although his was a baptism of repentance. Saint Mark said, "John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4). This "baptism of repentance" signified the participant's testimony of their personal repentance of their sin, meaning they had a change of mind and agreed with God that they had sinned, and they desired to follow a new direction in their lives. In the case of John's baptism, we see the believer's response to their need of repentance is to immediately submit to immersion in water as a public, outward expression of the inward change they had experienced in their hearts after hearing John's preaching. Jesus took over where John the Baptist left off and continued this baptism of repentance. It wasn't until the Book of Acts that we find the disciples teaching a different kind of water baptism.

In order to understand the transition brought about in the practice of baptism in the Book of Acts, we must first understand that this Book is itself one of transitions. The first transition was that of Jesus to heaven when he left His disciples in charge of continuing His ministry. As the disciples were all gathered with Jesus, they watched Him ascend into the clouds with the promise to "come again in like manner" (Acts 1:11). The next big transition was when the disciples gathered to await the promised Holy Spirit on Pentecost. On that day they received a baptism of a different type, the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Finally, we see an interesting exchange that occurred between Paul and a group of disciples in Ephesus:

Acts 19:1-5 NAS95 1 It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples. 2 He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said to him, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." 3 And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism." 4 Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus." 5 When they heard this, they were baptized ***in the name of the Lord Jesus*** *(emphasis added).*

John's baptism was qualitatively different as it was a baptism of repentance; whereas the baptism performed in the Book of Acts and hereafter is 1) a baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus (v. 5), 2) tied to the personal reception of the Holy Spirit, and 3) still contains the element of repentance, but also includes the recognition of Christ's resurrection power in living the Christian life. These elements are all tied together, creating a complex conglomeration of multiple dimensions of saving faith: repentance, believing in Jesus Christ, and receiving of the Holy Spirit from God. We find this in the Second Chapter of Acts during Peter's address to a large group of devout Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 2:5) on the Day of Pentecost:

> *Acts 2:37-41 NAS95 37 Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" 38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 "For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." 40 And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" 41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.*

Here we see the instantaneous response of the people who repented of their sins, believed in Jesus "for the forgiveness of their sin" (v. 38b), received the Holy Spirit (v. 38c), and submitted to immersion as a public profession of their newfound belief. Baptism was for them a means of identifying with the death of Jesus by immersing themselves in the water, and then rising to a newness of life upon coming out. This ceremonial practice would have knit well with their previous Jewish religious practices. Baptism is Jewish, it was given to us by the Jew John the Baptist, practiced by the Jewish Jesus, brought into its final form by Jewish Peter, and immortalized by the Pharisaical Jew, Paul.

Another case in Acts is descriptive of the later application of these same principles:

> *Acts 8:26-40 NAS95 26 But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert road.) 27 So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. 29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot." 30 Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" 31 And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: "HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO SLAUGHTER; AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT, SO HE DOES NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH. 33 "IN HUMILIATION HIS JUDGMENT WAS TAKEN AWAY; WHO WILL RELATE HIS GENERATION? FOR HIS LIFE IS REMOVED FROM THE EARTH." 34 The eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?" 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. 36 As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch *said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" 37 And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." 38 And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but*

> *went on his way rejoicing. 40 But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea.*

In the story of Philip and the Jewish Ethiopian "eunuch" (one who voluntarily submitted to castration for the purpose of serving among a king's harem), we see the progression of events as they played out in the life of this royal official who was returning from Jerusalem where he had been worshiping.

1. The man read the Word of God,

2. He understood the Word of God and believed it (Philip was obedient to the Holy Spirit in answering the call to explain it to him),

3. He publicly expressed his faith (to Philip),

4. He was baptized as soon as it was practically possible.

In baptism a person symbolically expresses their death to their former way of life and their birth in the newness of life as a believer in the Lord Jesus. Through it, believers identify with Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection from the dead. One commentator puts it this way. "Immersion = Death. Submersion = Burial (the ratification of death). Emergence = Resurrection." Saint Paul said:

> *4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection (Romans 6:4-5 NAS95).*

Regardless of how the practice of baptism has developed in the church, and God has granted liberty to them to make this determination, the biblical teaching is straightforward as to the meaning.

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for 03-06-2022



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. Today we learn about the nature of faith and the importance of knowing God's word so that when we need it, we have it to combat temptations we encounter in our lives.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Deuteronomy, the last Book of what is called the Pentateuch, the first five Books of the Bible. Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land (see Numbers 20:12), so God gave him instructions about what the people were to do when they entered the land. As always, understanding the context is important because some forty years had passed since God had delivered the Israelites from their captivity in Egypt. Only the people who were twenty years

and younger were allowed to enter because of their sin of unbelief (Numbers 14:29). This was a time of much grieving because many memorials would likely have been held for the numerous people that had died during the era of wandering in the desert. The chapter opens with an introductory statement which sets the tone for today's reading. "Then it shall be, when you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance, and you possess it and live in it" (Deut 21:1). Finally, God had opened the way for the people to enter the Promised Land.

First Reading:

Deuteronomy 26:4-10 NAS95 4 "Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the LORD your God. 5 "You shall answer and say before the LORD your God, 'My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; but there he became a great, mighty and populous nation. 6 'And the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, and imposed hard labor on us. 7 'Then we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction and our toil and our oppression; 8 and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with great terror and with signs and wonders; 9 and He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. 10 'Now behold, I have brought the first of the produce of the ground which You, O LORD have given me.' And you shall set it down before the LORD your God, and worship before the LORD your God;

God architected the people's entry into the Promised Land at a time to correspond with the harvest, at which point the manna would cease (Joshua 5:12). God provided instructions to the priest that the first thing that was to be done was to make an offering to Him (v. 4). God affirmed the legacy of the father of the Israelite nation, "a wandering Aramean," likely referring to Jacob, who sojourned for a long period in that region (Syria) under the control of his father-in-law Laban (v. 5). During the Nation's time in Egypt, the population of Jews greatly multiplied, a trend which began way back when Jacob had first entered Egypt (v. 5e). This is affirmed in Genesis, "Now Israel lived in the land of Egypt, in Goshen, and they acquired property in it and were fruitful and became very numerous" (Genesis 47:27). The Egyptians then began to resent and distrust the people and took them as their slaves (v. 6). God, however heard their cries and began the process to move them out in the Land that he had promised to Abraham. The closing verse of the reading marks a bookend of God's instructions to make a kind of "first fruits" offering to the Lord upon entering the Land.

Today's message served as a reminder to the people who were about to enter the Land about the nature of God's fruitfulness. When the people entered the Land, they would find it very fruitful, just

as the Lord had promised them (Exodus 3:8, Numbers 14:8, etc.).

In our day it is perhaps easy for us to overlook the fact that everything comes from God when His actions are more behind the scenes compared to His bold and obvious acts in leading the people out of captivity in Egypt and eventually into the Land. As we approach Easter Sunday, we also have the opportunity presented to us from God to reflect upon the nature of God as our supreme provider. God has given us fruitful blessings beyond comparison by sending His Son to atone for our sins once and for all. Like the fruit of the harvest that waited for the Jewish people for which they had done nothing to earn, we can celebrate how God gave us Jesus as a totally free gift which we cannot earn and not deserve. We will learn move about this gift in the next reading.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Today's second reading is from one of the most important texts in the entire New Testament Bible. The context of the tenth chapter or Romans deals with the current situation of the Nation of Israel. This section of Romans is sandwiched between chapter nine dealing with Israel's past situation, and chapter 11 which deals with Israel's future. Chapter 10 opens with a message concerning the Nation, "*Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation*" (Romans 10:1). This is God's present-day message for all people, not just Israel. Many in the Nation of Israel in Paul's day misunderstood the message of faith, a condition which continues until the present time. Paul said in the second verse, "*For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge*" (Romans 10:2). In today's reading, Paul will explain the basis of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Second Reading:

Romans 10:8-13 NAS95 8 But what does it say? "THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, in your mouth and in your heart" –that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, 9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. 11 For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; 13 for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."

Here, Paul quoted from a crucial Old Testament text in Deuteronomy, which explained the conditional nature of the Mosaic Covenant. It is important to understand the biblical citation any time when all capitals appear in the text. This section in the Law first provided the list of blessing that God has promised to the Nation, but then concluded with the condition, "*if you obey the LORD your God to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this book of the law, if you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and soul*" (De 30:10). The Law then went on to say that the Law was undeniably right within their reach, "*But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it*" (De 30:14). Paul quoted from the Greek version (Septuagint) of this important text to say that God's message of the New Covenant is right here among them through his message. Whoever trusts in the Lord through belief that God raised Jesus from the dead will be saved, whether they are a Jew or a Gentile. "Whoever will call on the name of the LORD will be *saved*" (v. 13), period.

Paul wrote his message to a church which was being tossed by the false Gospel that salvation came through works and not by faith alone which produces the fruit of good works. In fact, he dedicated the entire Book of Galatians to refute the controversy brought about by the Judaizers who taught this false doctrine. Paul summarized the matter in the second chapter of that Book, "*nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified*" (Galatians 2:16).

What does Paul's message mean to the church in our time? Everything, since this same false message has continued from the time when Paul first wrote against it. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is a free gift (Ephesians 2:8-9), one that is brought about from reading the word of God. Paul made the source of our Christian faith clear just a few verses past today's reading, "*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ*" (Romans 10:17). As believers in the resurrection and the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, we can trust in our salvation as an accomplished fact of God from which will flow the fruit of our good works. Our salvation does not come from works any more than the Creator comes about from its own creation. This is a crucially important core truth about salvation that makes today's reading one of the most important texts in the entire Bible.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The context of the reading from Saint Luke is right after Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist (Luke 3:21), which marked the opening of His ministry when He was around 30 years of age (Luke 3:23).

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Gospel Reading:

Luke 4:1-13 NAS95 1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness 2 for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry. 3 And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." 4 And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE.'" 5 And he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. 6 And the devil said to Him, "I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. 7 Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours." 8 Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'" 9 And he led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here; 10 for it is written, 'HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU TO GUARD YOU,' 11 and, 'ON their HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.'" 12 And Jesus answered and said to him, "It is said, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.'" 13 When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time.

Luke recalled how Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit of God to be tempted by Satan in the desert for a period of forty days during which he fasted. These temptations were many (see verse 13, "every temptation"), however, since Jesus was hungry the first one recorded here dealt with Satan's offer of food (v. 3). Satan's question to Jesus began with the word "if," through which the master deceiver doubted Jesus' identity as the Son of God. Jesus replied to each inquiry of the devil by answering with the Word of God. "If you are the Son of God," then make the stones into bread (v. 3). Also, "If you are the Son of God," throw Yourself down from the height of the temple (v. 9).

Today's reading teaches us how we are to resist temptation, whether we understand that it comes from the devil or not. By placing God's word into our hearts through reading and memorization of it, we can "answer" each temptation with the word of the Lord in our hearts.

I remember once when I was a teenager our family went on a summer vacation trip to the Washington, DC area with its rich history. One day we visited an old well which was famous for some events during the Civil War in which people tossed coins into it expecting a blessing. As I peered into the well, I saw the large amount of money sitting just a few feet below the edge and within an easy hop into the now dry ditch. I looked around and seriously considering jumping in at a time when nobody was watching. However, a thought began to reverberate through my mind as I began

to carry out my plan. "Though shalt not steal" (Exodus 20:15). I had evidently heard this from my Catechism classes. But, I thought, this isn't stealing, these people are just throwing their money into this hole. Still, the words echoed through my heart, and I finally turned away from my folly. Looking back on this many years later I realized how knowing just a bit of God's word had protected me from carrying out something that was truly stupid!

Carrying God's word in our heart takes hard work and isn't something that comes about by accident. Instead, we have to endeavor to prepare before we face temptation such that when it comes, we will be prepared to answer it with God's word in our hearts. If we don't have the word in our reserves, we will never be able to rely upon it when the need arises. That is the heart of what Luke taught us in today's reading.

Reflection Questions

1. In the first reading we saw how God prepared the Nation of Israel before their entrance into the Promised Land by asking them to first prepare a sacrificial offering from the goodness of His provision from the fruit of the harvest. In what ways can you prepare your heart to celebrate Easter Sunday in such a way, so that then it comes you can see things differently in light of God's provision?

2. In the second reading we learned about God's teaching regarding faith. Once a person understands the Gospel message faith is indeed truly mixed with works (please refer to James 2:18 on your own). In what ways have you ever, perhaps trusted in works instead of faith for your salvation at some point in your life?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for 02-21-2021



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the first reading from the Book of Genesis in which we study the covenant that God made with Noah when he landed in the ark after the Great Flood. Then we move to the second reading from the Book of First Peter where we learn of the fate of those that were swept away in the Flood as well as the means by which God provides believers with safety through His ark of salvation in Jesus. Finally, we conclude with the Gospel lesson from Mark in which we see Jesus' temptation in the wilderness and the beginning of His earthly reign that brought the kingdom of heaven down to earth.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Genesis and provides the backdrop to the origin of the rainbows. The context of this passage is just after Noah and his family, eight people in total, landed in the ark at the conclusion of the Great Flood. This followed a 120 year period during which Noah both built the ark and at the same time ministered to the people that ended up perishing on the earth. After the Flood, God blessed Noah telling him to "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Genesis 9:1). At this point, God changed the human diet to allow the eating of animals and established capital punishment (Genesis 9:3-6). It was no wonder that God placed fear of humans in the minds of the animals (v. 2). Today's reading outlines what is known as the "Noahic Covenant."

First Reading:

8 Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying, 9 "Now behold, I Myself do establish My covenant with you, and with your descendants after you; 10 and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you; of all that comes out of the ark, even every beast of the earth. 11 "I establish My covenant with you; and all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth." 12 God said, "This is the sign of the covenant which I am making between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all successive generations; 13 I set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth. 14 "It shall come about, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow will be seen in the cloud, 15 and I will remember My covenant, which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and never again shall the water become a flood to destroy all flesh. (Genesis 9:8-15 NAS95)

The unconditional promise that God made to Noah was that the earth would never again be destroyed by a global flood (v. 11). This "Noahic Covenant" is unconditional because it is not predicated upon Noah, his family, or anyone born afterwards to perform some duty. God's promise was confirmed by His giving of the sign of the rainbow, something that evidently did not exist before the Great Flood. In our day when we see the rainbow we can remember God's grace and faithfulness. God was faithful in accomplishing His promise to Noah in rescuing those that trusted in His ark. God showed His tremendous grace because He didn't altogether destroy the earth because "Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (Genesis 6:8). God provided the "ark of salvation" to all of those who believed. Had anyone else other than those eight people acted in faith and stepped onto the ark, they too would have been saved from the flood of God's wrath that was poured out upon the earth. In the same way, Jesus is the "ark of salvation" for all those who believe, which is what we will discuss in the next reading. In the case of Noah's family, it was both the physical ark and their belief in it that saved them. They had to believe a global flood was coming, build the ark, and enter into it before the flood began. It is interesting to note that Noah's ark is a type of Christ that prefigured the coming of Jesus (the antitype). A "type" is a theological term for people, statements, or events prefiguring or superseded by antitypes. The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus is the only "ark of salvation." When we trust in Jesus we ourselves enter the ark by faith and by God's grace (Ephesians 2:8-9). Like the ark that only had one door, Jesus is the only door to heaven (John 10:9).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from the Book of First Peter. The reading follows Saint Peter's teaching on the characteristics desirable in a Christian including being "harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit" (1 Peter 3:8). This was in order to bring others to faith in Jesus even during times of spiritual persecution, and calling believers to provide a defense to the antagonists of the hope that we have in God (1 Peter 3:15).

Second Reading:

18 For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; 19 in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, 20 who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. 21 Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you–not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience–through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him. (1 Peter 3:18-22 NAS95)

Peter explained that Jesus died **once** for our sins, which is a sacrifice that can never be repeated (v. 18, Hebrews 9:28). God used Noah as a "minister of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5) to preach to the people during his generation over the 120 years it took for him to build the ark (Genesis 6:3). Jesus' Gospel message was proclaimed through Noah during his days on earth "to the spirits now in prison" (v. 19), meaning Hell. This does not mean that Jesus went to Hell and preached to the dead spirits in order to give them a second chance. The Bible is clear that it is appointed for man once to die and then to face judgment (Heb. 9:27). Everyone that did not believe that they needed to be saved ended up in this terrible, eternal prison. Except for Noah, his wife, his three sons and their three wives, the entire population of earth was destroyed.

The apostle Peter is saying in this passage that salvation comes through faith in God's provision of Jesus. Just like the ark was God's provision in the time of Noah, God has made the ultimate provision for our sins through Jesus' death and resurrection. He is the one and only "ark of salvation." Peter is not saying that water baptism as we think of it saves you. Rather, he is making a correlation between the ark's ability to save Noah and his family and Jesus' ability to save anyone who comes to Him in faith ("an appeal to God for a good conscience" v. 21). Peter equated baptism with faith, and he explained that the "baptism" which does save us is our faith that we have in the Lord Jesus who is above all authorities and powers (v. 22b). The text uses the term "corresponding" (Greek "antitupos") in the first word of verse 21. Water baptism is the counterpart (corresponds) to the salvation that we as believers possess through faith in Jesus Christ and God's grace alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). During the time of Saint Peter, a person who expressed faith in the Lord Jesus obediently submitted to baptism (Acts 2:38). We can be joyful that God has provided Jesus as our "ark of salvation" in which we can enter through the means of faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). Although we are members of the church universal, the church doesn't save us, Jesus does.

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We encourage you to learn more about the practice of baptism in the Bible by reading the **Going Deeper Section** as the end of this week's Mass Notes.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from Saint Mark a few verses before that which we studied last week. This passage records Jesus' forty days of temptation in the wilderness (also found in Matthew 4:2). It is important to note that Jesus' temptation was all part of an ongoing story in the book of Mark that began with Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist and followed by Jesus starting His earthly ministry. Each of these components should be seen as Jesus' credentials for verifying His claim to be the Son of God (Mark 1:1).

Gospel Reading:

12 Immediately the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness. 13 And He was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts, and the angels were ministering to Him. 14 Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:12-15 NAS95)

Immediately after Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist, Jesus was compelled by God the Holy Spirit to go to the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. Although God knew that Jesus would successfully endure this trial of 40 days without food and in constant temptation by Satan, Jesus still had to complete the test in order to show to the world both His victory over temptation as well as his triumph over His human condition. Who can imagine going without food for 40 days in the desert? Saint Paul said the following about Jesus:

Philippians 2:6-8 NAS95 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Jesus voluntarily emptied Himself of the independent use of His divine attributes. Although he was fully God, He was also fully human, and as such was subject to temptations that only a human can experience. Where the first Adam failed, we find in this passage that Jesus (the last Adam 1 Cor. 15:45) resisted the deceptive lies of the Enemy. This is all part of the testimony that Mark is gathering to persuade his audience that Jesus is worthy of our worship as God's Servant to bring the good news that salvation is accessible (at hand).

Undoubtedly Jesus' temptation went far beyond anything that any of us will ever experience. However, we can have hope that in light of Jesus' example, we too can persist in our temptations. Saint Paul said, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Finally, Jesus' successful completion of the 40 days of temptation brought about the beginning of His earthly ministry and the unveiling of the "kingdom of God" (v. 15). By this time, John the Baptist had been arrested and Jesus took over his message to repent and believe in the Good News (v. 15).

What does this week's study mean for us today? God calls us to identify with Reverend Noah's message of faith and a call to action the same way He calls us to faith and action in our times. Jesus took over where Noah left off and called for people to examine their hearts by repenting of their sin and trusting in His once for all sacrifice to take their transgressions away forever. As believers, we are vastly different from the "spirits in prison" who didn't believe in Noah's message and therefore perished in the Great Flood. Every time that we see a rainbow, whether it is in the sky or in the colors of a peacock, we can remember God's grace and faithfulness in granting us salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone and not because of any of our good works. God has provided us with the power to resist temptation. We have Jesus' example that a person can resist through trusting in God's dynamic power, the Holy Spirit who lives inside of those who believe.

Reflection Questions

1. Although it's not directly stated in the Bible, I have always maintained that Noah hired workers to build the ark during this 120 year construction project. Additionally, I think that Noah ministered to the people during this time, both in the building of the ark and in ways in which are not told in the Bible. In what ways are you a "preacher of righteousness" in the various contexts in which God has

placed you (work, home, school, etc.)?

2. How does Jesus' fulfillment of all righteousness (even in resisting temptation) give you hope in the midst of your own journey? List one particular area in which you have recently been tempted. In what ways can you identify with Jesus' temptation in the wilderness? How does the application of 1 Corinthians 10:13 empower you to resist?

"No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Going Deeper: Biblical Teaching about Baptism

What does the Bible teach about baptism? Throughout the ages the church's understanding and practice of baptism has developed. The following information is not meant to disparage any particular church's teaching on the subject, but to provide the biblical foundation from which the practice evolved.

The word translated "baptism" from the original is "baptizo" which means to immerse or submerge. The practice of baptism is very Jewish in that the Jews were familiar with ceremonial cleansings in a bath known as the "mikvah." It was in such a mikvah in which Bathsheba was cleansing after her time of the month when King David spied upon her. A popular myth is that Baptism was also a means in the Old Testament of confirming the reception of a Jewish Proselyte, although this practice is found nowhere in the Bible. Nobody in the Bible was ever baptized into the Jewish community. This came about only through the prescriptions of the Law, and especially by circumcision (Exodus 12:48-49). The Jewish practices of ritual cleansing are, however, mentioned as an elementary doctrine by the author of Hebrews (Hebrews 6:2), one that is emblematic of the purity in which God requires of worshippers. We know from the Bible that a ritual cleansing of the body in a mikvah or any other type of bath, be it sprinkling, immersion, or pouring, cannot remove the **spiritual** dirt from anyone (1 Peter 3:21). The Scripture says that only God can forgive sin (Mark 2:7, Ephesians 2:8-9, and especially Luke 5:23-24).

John the Baptist initiated the practice of baptism, although his was a baptism of repentance. Saint

Mark said, "John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4). This "baptism of repentance" signified the participant's testimony of their personal repentance of their sin, meaning they had a change of mind and agreed with God that they had sinned and they desired to follow a new direction in their lives. In the case of John's baptism, we see the believer's response to their need of repentance is to immediately submit to immersion in water as a public, outward expression of the inward change they had experienced in their hearts after hearing John's preaching. Jesus took over where John the Baptist left off and continued this baptism of repentance. It wasn't until the Book of Acts that we find the disciples teaching a different kind of water baptism.

In order to understand the transition brought about in the practice of baptism in the Book of Acts, we must first understand that this Book is itself one of transitions. The first transition was that of Jesus to heaven when he left His disciples in charge of continuing His ministry. As the disciples were all gathered with Jesus they watched Him ascend into the clouds with the promise to "come again in like manner" (Acts 1:11). The next big transition was when the disciples gathered to await the promised Holy Spirit on Pentecost. On that day they received a baptism of a different type, the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Finally, we see an interesting exchange that occurred between Paul and a group of disciples in Ephesus:

Acts 19:1-5 NAS95 1 It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples. 2 He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said to him, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." 3 And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism." 4 Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus." 5 When they heard this, they were baptized ***in the name of the Lord Jesus*** *(emphasis added).*

John's baptism was qualitatively different as it was a baptism of repentance; whereas the baptism performed in the Book of Acts and hereafter is 1) a baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus (v. 5), 2) tied to the personal reception of the Holy Spirit, and 3) still contains the element of repentance, but also includes the recognition of Christ's resurrection power in living the Christian life. These elements are all tied together, creating a complex conglomeration of multiple dimensions of saving faith: repentance, believing in Jesus Christ, and receiving of the Holy Spirit from God. We find this in the Second Chapter of Acts during Peter's address to a large group of devout Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 2:5) on the Day of Pentecost:

Acts 2:37-41 NAS95 37 Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" 38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 "For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." 40 And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" 41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

Here we see the instantaneous response of the people who repented of their sin, believed in Jesus "for the forgiveness of their sin" (v. 38b), received the Holy Spirit (v. 38c), and submitted to immersion as a public profession of their newfound belief. Baptism was for them a means of identifying with the death of Jesus by immersing themselves in the water, and then rising to a newness of life upon coming out. This ceremonial practice would have knit well with their previous Jewish religious practices. Baptism is Jewish, it was given to us by the Jew John the Baptist, practiced by Jewish Jesus, brought into its final form by Jewish Peter, and immortalized by the Pharisaical Jew, Paul.

Another case in Acts is descriptive of the later application of these same proscriptive principles:

*Acts 8:26-40 NAS95 26 But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert road.) 27 So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. 29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot." 30 Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" 31 And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: "HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO SLAUGHTER; AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT, SO HE DOES NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH. 33 "IN HUMILIATION HIS JUDGMENT WAS TAKEN AWAY; WHO WILL RELATE HIS GENERATION? FOR HIS LIFE IS REMOVED FROM THE EARTH." 34 The eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?" 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. 36 As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch *said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" 37 And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." 38 And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the*

water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing. 40 But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea.

In the story of Philip and the Jewish Ethiopian "eunuch" (one who voluntarily submitted to castration for the purpose of serving among a king's harem), we see the progression of events as they played out in the life of this royal official who was returning from Jerusalem where he had been worshiping.

1. The man read the Word of God,
2. He understood the Word of God and believed it (Philip was obedient to the Holy Spirit in answering the call to explain it to him),
3. He publicly expressed his faith (to Philip),
4. He was baptized as soon as it was practically possible.

In baptism a person symbolically expresses their death to their former way of life and their birth in the newness of life as a believer in the Lord Jesus. Through it, believers identify with Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection from the dead. One commentator put it this way. "Immersion = Death. Submersion = Burial (the ratification of death). Emergence = Resurrection." Saint Paul said:

4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection (Romans 6:4-5 NAS95).

Regardless of how the practice of baptism has developed in the church, and God has granted liberty to them to make this determination, the biblical teaching is straightforward as to the meaning.

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday 03-01-2020



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass Notes. This week we will examine the creation of man in the Book of Genesis and then the fall of humankind into sin through the temptation of the devil that brought about God's curse upon the earth. Then in the second reading, we will examine God's plan of redemption that He brought about by sending Jesus to die for our sins. Finally, we will study in the Gospel lesson how Jesus successfully resisted the temptation of the devil. Our lesson this week followed a lengthy study last week on the subject of worry. If you haven't read that we suggest you find time to review it on the web site.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Genesis and covers the sections of creation and the fall of humanity. This text together with the second reading from Romans constitutes the great bookends of human history. On one hand, Genesis records the creation of the universe including the earth, animal kingdom, and humankind. This is closely followed by the ugly record of the day when man sinned against God, which invoked His curse upon the world. On the other hand, the Book of Romans that we will see in the second reading, records in detail God's plan of redemption through Jesus Christ. This is a critically important study this week because we will cover a summary of all of human history, which can be summed up in just four short words: creation, fall, redemption, and glory.

As we move to the first reading let me point out some helpful context since the reading skipped the ending of Chapter 2 in Genesis. The context of the reading from Genesis is that it occurred just after the point at which God created Adam and before He made Eve, the first woman, though she wasn't officially named until Chapter 3 (Genesis 3:20). Chapter 1 recorded the record of the entire creation, including man. Chapter 2 expands on the creation account by filling in additional details. In the opening of Chapter two God had finished his creation of the universe and had placed Adam on earth in the Garden of Eden with the commandment to cultivate it (Genesis 2:15). He provided clear

direction to Adam by saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely, but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die" (2:16b – 17). Subsequently, God formed the entirety of the animal kingdom and appointed Adam with the task of naming every animal and bird (v. 19). The creation story continues:

20 The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. 21 So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. 22 The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. 23 The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." 24 For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. (Genesis 2:20-25).

At this point in history man was in the perfect company of God, had the perfect wife named Eve, tilled a perfect garden with unlimited food, and walked around perfectly naked all day. What more could anyone ask for? However, it was just too good to last. Think back to the single commandment that God gave to Adam. He said not to eat of the "tree of knowledge of good and evil" (v.17). It is easy to look back on Adam and wonder why if he had so much, he had to concentrate upon the one thing that he couldn't have. But, don't we do the very same thing? If we know that the speed limit is 55, why do we feel the need to drive 60 or 70? Just the fact that we have a law almost compels us to break it. Our consideration of whether or not we will break a law is generally tied to the penalty for failing to obey the law. A speed limit law is one thing, but God told Adam that if he broke this one certain law that the penalty would be death (v. 17). Adam had no frame of reference for the devastating effects of death upon his life here on earth.

Now, with this context in mind, let's jump back to verse seven where the first reading begins. As you read, notice the mention of another special tree growing in the Garden.

First Reading:

2:7 Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. 8 The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed. 9 Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?" 2 The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; 3 but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.'" 4 The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! 5 For God knows that

in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6 When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. (Genesis 2:7-9, 3:1-7)

With the job of creation completed God placed man in the Garden of Eden with trees that were already fully grown (3:6). Adam's wife was then confronted by a talking serpent, which probably wasn't too unusual to her because of her complete lack of history – everything would have been new to her. The first thing the talking serpent told her was to question the word of God. "Indeed, **has** God said?" spoke the serpent to the woman (3:1). The woman restated the warning from God, but added a prohibition about touching the tree, something which wasn't recorded in the warning given to Adam. The text doesn't say whether Adam told his wife not to touch the tree as a protective measure, or whether Eve added to God's prohibition not to eat from the tree. Regardless, had she not touched the tree this whole affair wouldn't have played out the way it did, at least not at this stage of history. [It's almost a foregone conclusion that the Fall was going to happen, it was just a matter of time.]

Next, the serpent tempted the woman a second time by once again casting doubt about the word of God. He said, "You surely will not die! 5 For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (v. 6). There is a nugget of truth in what the serpent said, as is usually the case, since he was a master deceiver and he evidently understood that the woman wouldn't believe an outright lie. What we mean by saying that there was some truth in the statement about not dying is that after both Adam and Eve sinned, they did not die physically (3:7), but they certainly did die spiritually. God defines death as separation from Him, which is what happened in their disobedience (Ephesians 4:17-18). God just delayed Adam's physical death for some 930 years. "So all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years, and he died" (Genesis 5:5). We are not told when Eve died. The second element of truth in the serpent's subterfuge was that their eyes *were* opened, as was told clearly in the text (3:7a).

The sin that Eve committed was great, but she at least had the excuse that she was deceived by the serpent. Adam, however, could not plead that the devil made him do it. No, the text said, "she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate" (v. 6e). Adam sinned without having the excuse that he was deceived, he sinned with his eyes wide open, and willfully disobeyed God's law regarding not eating from the tree. God held Adam responsible for his sin and the subsequent curse that He poured out onto His perfect creation, something that must have grieved our Lord to no end. Adam was created first and was appointed as the leader for stewardship of God's creation, including the woman. Eve was created as the helper (2:18). If we look forward in Chapter 3, we will see that God questioned Adam first about what happened in the Garden. "Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?'" (3:9). In the New Testament God verified that He held Adam responsible for the sin, even though Eve sinned first. We will read about this when we study the second reading from Romans Chapter 5.

The other special tree in the garden was the "tree of life" (v. 9b). It's important to note that although Adam did eat from the "tree of knowledge of good and evil" he didn't eat from the tree of life. Had he done so he would have remained in his fallen state in the cursed creation forever. God said later in Chapter 3, "Then the LORD God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever'" (3:22). Instead, what happened was that Adam ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil and as a result, his eyes *were* opened (v.7), just as the devil had said they would be (v.4), such that he knew both good and evil. He knew about goodness before he sinned, and after his sin he found out about evil.

The fall of humanity that we read about in the first reading had a gigantic impact upon the world, both on the creation itself, humankind and also the animal world. Just ask anyone that has raised a two-year-old. Although I haven't had that privilege, I do have a story about how the fall has affected even the animal kingdom. My family used to have a golden retriever named Rusty. I remember our beloved dog very well as both of us used to like to go running together. Whenever I went jogging around the country roads in the neighborhood, Rusty used to like to come along with me. He used to run in front of me and then would frequently cross into the woods to follow whatever animal scent he could find there. Rusty just loved running around the woods in the neighborhood. I remember that when Rusty was young he would follow me outside thinking that I was going to take him running. Rusty would then take off down the road and I would call him back. There was an awkward moment when I would call to him while he decided whether or not he was going to obey. He turned his body away from me but looked back towards me while he made up his mind. Frequently he would think it about it for maybe a half a minute while I continued calling, then he would take off running away from me down the road. What a little stinker. He knew that he was being bad, but he ran away anyway. This sin wasn't something that we taught him; it was instinctive. The corrupted state of this world frustrates all of us in every layer of life.

The fall of humanity resulted in God's pronouncement of a curse upon His creation. This curse affected men's relationship with women (Genesis 3:15), men and women's relationship with their work (Genesis 3:19), and the ground itself (Genesis 3:17-18). God predicted the ultimate physical death for Adam. "By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

We need to let the depth of the bad news provide a backdrop to the message of hope delivered in the second reading. God sent the Second Adam to redeem mankind from their sin, which is a gift freely given to those who believe God has provided His righteousness through faith. This reading is from Saint's Paul's Letter to the Romans. The context of the reading is that Paul had just explained the crucial concept of justification by faith. "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). The word "therefore" is present to provide a linkage to what Paul discussed in the previous chapter. Here Paul explained how Father Abraham's faith was the reason that he was found righteous before the Lord, not his good works. Paul said,

"For what does the Scripture say? ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Romans 4:3, the capital letters in this NASB version indicates a quotation from the Old Testament). Abraham's good works were laudable, but they didn't merit his salvation from the curse of Adam's sin. Paul said, "For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God" (4:2).

As you read the second reading from Romans 5 you will recognize the story we read about in the Garden of Eden.

Second Reading:

12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned– 13 for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. 14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. 15 But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. 16 The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. 17 For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. 18 So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. 19 For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:12-19)

Paul said a mouthful in this text, enough that entire books could be written on just one of these verses alone. Here are some of the key points that arise from the reading.

- Salvation, meaning forgiveness of the penalty of sin, is provided as a free gift (v. 15) only through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ.
- God held Adam ("one man"), not Eve, accountable for the Fall of Mankind (v.12). All people from Adam onwards are sinners (v.14), except for Jesus (v.18).
- Though everyone even before the Jewish Law was a sinner, those before the Law couldn't be held accountable for the Law which hadn't yet been given (v.13). Nevertheless, humans are accountable to God for the laws that are written on their heart. Paul said, "For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them" (Romans 2:14-15).
- The sinful state of Adam was imparted to all of humankind from that moment forward. "For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners" (v.19a).

- Death didn't exist before the Fall and came into the world only after sin (v.12b). This negates the possibility of theistic evolution to explain God's creative process as any form of evolution requires a cycle of death.
- Jesus' sacrificial death resulted in the imputed righteousness of believers, the "gift of righteousness" (v.16, 18).

These foundational insights give us a sense of hope in our day to day lives, if we have turned to Jesus as our righteousness. We no longer have to pay the penalty for our own sins, but we are declared righteous by God if we will live under His provision of grace. The idea of grace is unmerited favor, which means we have been given a gift. A gift that has been given, needs to be received if it is to be useful to the recipient. Have you opened the gift of God's grace in your life by trusting in Jesus Christ as your only source of salvation?

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson from today is from Matthew Chapter 4. As we read in the first reading, Adam and Eve were tempted by the devil and succumbed to his temptation that resulted in the Fall of Humanity. In the Gospel reading we will see how Jesus was also tempted by the devil and how he persisted in his obedience to God the Father. As you read pay special attention to how Jesus dealt with the temptation of the devil, and how this contrasted with how Eve interacted with him.

Gospel Reading:

1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. 3 And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." 4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'" 5 Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU'; and 'ON their HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.'" 7 Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.'" 8 Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; 9 and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'" 11 Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him. (Matthew 4:1-11)

We saw that Jesus dealt with the devil's temptation by quoting from the word of God. Notice in the NASB version how easily it is to spot the quotations from the Old Testament since they are shown in all capital letters. Three times the devil tempted Jesus, and three times Jesus resisted while quoting from the word of His Father.

The temptation for Jesus was to get His rightful place of rulership without having to go through the

cross. In some ways, all of our temptations have this sense of shortcutting the process in order to attain the glory without the upfront cost. What the devil doesn't tell people is the price tag, which will be paid in full by the person who purchases his shortcut. Jesus saw through his scheme and was not pushed around by the devil's slick talk or even deceived by the twisting of Scripture. By standing in the midst of temptation, Jesus becomes our strong advocate in our own times of temptation. Hebrews 2:18 says, "For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted." He wants us to call on Him and to ask Him for help. Let's take Him at His word.

How should we go about resisting temptation? Saint Paul provided us with some guidance, and along with what we learned from the readings it should be obvious that we too need to rely upon the word of God to deliver us from temptation. Paul said, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it" (1Corinthians 10:13). In times of temptation, instead of looking for a loophole, look for the way of escape!

Reflection Questions

This week had a lot of powerful concepts for us to consider in our daily lives. Here are some questions to prompt further reflection:

1. Compare the two temptation accounts again and list the ways that Jesus dealt differently than Adam and Eve. What do you learn from His example?
2. The bookends of history are encompassed in this week's reading, starting with the bad news (sin's price tag is death) and moving to the good news (Jesus' payment for our sin). If you were to analyze where you are at today in your relationship with God, where would you place yourself on the continuum of living in your sin verses living in God's grace?

   (Living in my sin —- Living in God's grace)



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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 3-10-2019



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. Today we learn about the nature of faith and the importance of knowing God's word so that when we need it we have it to combat temptations we encounter in our lives.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Deuteronomy, the last Book of what is called the Pentateuch, the first five Books of the Bible. Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land (see Numbers 20:12), so God gave him instructions about what the people were to do when they entered the land. As always, understanding the context is important because some forty years had passed since God had delivered the Israelites from their captivity in Egypt. Only the people who were twenty years and younger were allowed to enter because of their sin of unbelief (Numbers 14:29). This was a time of much grieving because many memorials would likely have been held for the numerous people that had died during the era of wandering in the desert. The chapter opens with an introductory statement which sets the tone for today's reading. "Then it shall be, when you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance, and you possess it and live in it" (Deut 21:1). Finally, God had opened the way for the people to enter the Promised Land.

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First Reading:

> *Deuteronomy 26:4-10 NAS95 4 "Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the LORD your God. 5 "You shall answer and say before the LORD your God, 'My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; but there he became a great, mighty and populous nation. 6 'And the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, and imposed hard labor on us. 7 'Then we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction and our toil and our oppression; 8 and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with great terror and with signs and wonders; 9 and He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. 10 'Now behold, I have brought the first of the produce of the ground which You, O LORD have given me.' And you shall set it down before the LORD your God, and worship before the LORD your God;*

God architected the people's entry into the Promised Land at a time to correspond with the harvest, at which point the manna would cease (Joshua 5:12). God provided instructions to the priest that the first thing that was to be done was to make an offering to Him (v. 4). God affirmed the legacy of the father of the Israelite nation, "a wandering Aramean," likely referring to Jacob who sojourned for a long period in that region (Syria) under the control of his father in law Laban (v. 5). During the Nation's time in Egypt, the population of Jews greatly multiplied, a trend which began way back when Jacob had first entered Egypt (v.5e). This is affirmed in Genesis, "Now Israel lived in the land of Egypt, in Goshen, and they acquired property in it and were fruitful and became very numerous" (Genesis 47:27). The Egyptians then began to resent and distrust the people, and took them as their slaves (v. 6). God however heard their cries and began the process to move them out in the Land that he had promised to Abraham. The closing verse of the reading marks a bookend of God's instructions to make a kind of "first fruits" offering to the Lord upon entering the Land.

Today's message served as a reminder to the people who were about to enter the Land about the naure of God's fruitfulness. When the people entered the Land, they would find it very fruitful, just as the Lord had promised them (Exodus 3:8, Numbers 14:8, etc.).

In our day it is perhaps easy for us to overlook the fact that everything comes from God when His actions are more behind the scenes compared to His bold and obvious acts in leading the people out of captivity in Egypt and eventually into the Land. As we approach Easter Sunday, we also have the opportunity presented to us from God to reflect upon the nature of God as our supreme provider. God has given us fruitful blessings beyond comparison by sending His Son to atone for our sins once and for all. Like the fruit of the harvest that waited for the Jewish people for which they had done nothing to earn, we can celebrate how God gave us Jesus as a totally free gift which we cannot earn and not deserve. We will learn move about this gift in the next reading.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Today's second reading is from one of the most important texts in the entire New Testament Bible.

The context of the tenth chapter or Romans deals with the current situation of the Nation of Israel. This section of Romans is sandwiched between chapter nine dealing with Israel's past situation, and chapter 11 which deals with Israel's future. Chapter 10 opens with a message concerning the Nation, "*Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation*" (Romans 10:1). This is God's present-day message for all people, not just Israel. Many in the Nation of Israel in Paul's day misunderstood the message of faith, a condition which continues until the present time. Paul said in the second verse, "*For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge*" (Romans 10:2). In today's reading, Paul will explain the basis of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Second Reading:

> *Romans 10:8-13 NAS95 8 But what does it say? "THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, in your mouth and in your heart" –that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, 9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. 11 For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; 13 for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."*

Here, Paul quoted from a crucial Old Testament text in Deuteronomy which explained the conditional nature of the Mosaic Covenant. It is important to understand the biblical citation anytime when all capitals appear in the text. This section in the Law first provided the list of blessing that God has promised to the Nation, but then concluded with the condition, "*if you obey the LORD your God to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this book of the law, if you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and soul*" (De 30:10). The Law then went on to say that the Law was undeniably right within their reach, "*But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it*" (De 30:14). Paul quoted from the Greek version (Septuagint) of this important text to say that God's message of the New Covenant is right here among them through his message. Whoever trusts in the Lord through belief that God raised Jesus from the dead will be saved, whether they are a Jew or a Gentile. "Whoever will call on the name of the LORD will be *saved*" (v. 13), period.

Paul wrote his message to a church which was being tossed by the false Gospel that salvation came through works and not by faith alone which produces the fruit of good works. In fact, he dedicated the entire Book of Galatians to refute the controversy brought about by the Judaizers who taught this false doctrine. Paul summarized the matter in the second chapter of that Book, "*nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified*" (Galatians 2:16).

What does Paul's message mean to the church in our time? Everything, since this same false

message has continued from the time when Paul first wrote against it. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is a free gift (Ephesians 2:8-9), one that is brought about from reading the word of God. Paul made the source of our Christian faith clear just a few verses past today's reading, "*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ*" (Romans 10:17). As believers in the resurrection and life of the Lord Jesus Christ we can trust in our salvation as an accomplished fact of God from which will flow the fruit of our good works. Our salvation does not come from works any more than the Creator comes about from its own creation. This is a crucially important core truth about salvation that makes today's reading one of the most important texts in the entire Bible.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The context of the reading from Saint Luke is right after Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist (Luke 3:21), which marked the opening of His ministry when He was around 30 years of age (Luke 3:23).

Gospel Reading:

> *Luke 4:1-13 NAS95 1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness 2 for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry. 3 And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." 4 And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE.'" 5 And he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. 6 And the devil said to Him, "I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. 7 Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours." 8 Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'" 9 And he led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here; 10 for it is written, 'HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU TO GUARD YOU,' 11 and, 'ON their HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.'" 12 And Jesus answered and said to him, "It is said, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.'" 13 When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time.*

Luke recalled how Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit of God to be tempted by Satan in the desert for a period of forty days during which he fasted. These temptations were many (see verse 13, "every temptation"), however since Jesus was hungry the first one recorded here dealt with Satan's offer of food (v. 3). Satan's question to Jesus began with the word "if," through which the master deceiver doubted Jesus' identity as the Son of God. Jesus replied to each inquiry of the devil by answering with the Word of God. "If you are the Son of God," then make the stones into bread (v. 3). Also, "If you are the Son of God," throw Yourself down from the height of the temple (v. 9).

Today's reading teaches us how we are to resist temptation, whether we understand that it comes from the devil or not. By placing God's word into our hearts through reading and memorization of it, we can "answer" each temptation with the word of the Lord in our hearts.

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I remember once when I was a teenager our family went on a summer vacation trip to the Washington, DC area with its rich history. One day we visited a old well which was famous for some events during the Civil War in which people through coins into expecting a blessing. As I peered into the well, I saw the large amount of money sitting just a few feet below the edge and within an easy hop into the now dry ditch. I looked around and seriously considering jumping in at a time when nobody was watching. However, a thought began to reverberate through my mind as I began to carry out my plan. "Though shalt not steal" (Exodus 20:15). I had evidently heard this from my Catechism classes. But, I thought, this isn't stealing, these people are just throwing their money into this hole. Still, the words echoed through my heart, and I finally turned away from my folly. Looking back on this many years later I realized how knowing just a bit of God's word had protected me from carrying out something that was truly stupid!

Carrying God's word in our heart takes hard work and isn't something that comes about by accident. Instead, we have to endeavor to prepare before we face temptation such that when it comes, we will be prepared to answer it with God's word in our hearts. If we don't have the word in our reserves, we will never be able to rely upon it when the need arises. That is the heart of what Luke taught us in today's reading.

Reflection Questions

1. In the first reading we saw how God prepared the Nation of Israel before their entrance into the Promised Land by asking them to first prepare a sacrificial offering from the goodness of His provision from the fruit of the harvest. In what ways can you prepare your heart to celebrate Easter Sunday in such a way, so that then it comes you can see things differently in light of God's provision?
2. In the second reading we learned about God's teaching regarding faith. Once a person understands the Gospel message faith is indeed truly mixed together with works (please refer to James 2:18 on your own). In what ways have you ever perhaps trusted in works instead of faith for your salvation at some point in your life by going through the motions of your religious practices?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 02-18-2018



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the first reading from the Book of Genesis in which we study the covenant that God made with Noah when he landed in the ark after the Great Flood. Then we move to the second reading from the Book of First Peter where we learn of the fate of those that were swept away in the Flood as well as the means by which God provides believers with safety through His ark of salvation in Jesus. Finally, we conclude with the Gospel lesson from Mark in which we see Jesus' temptation in the wilderness and the beginning of His earthly reign that brought the kingdom of heaven down to earth.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Genesis and provides the backdrop to the origin of the rainbows. The context of this passage is just after Noah and his family, eight people in total, landed in the ark at the conclusion of the Great Flood. This followed a 120 year period during which Noah both built the ark and at the same time ministered to the people that ended up perishing on the earth. After the Flood, God blessed Noah telling him to "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Genesis 9:1). At this point, God changed the human diet to allow the eating of animals and established capital punishment (Genesis 9:3-6). It was no wonder that God placed fear of humans in the minds of the animals (v. 2). Today's reading outlines what is known as the "Noahic Covenant."

First Reading:

8 Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying, 9 "Now behold, I Myself do establish My covenant with you, and with your descendants after you; 10 and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you; of all that comes out of the ark, even every beast of the earth. 11 "I establish My covenant with you; and all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth." 12 God said, "This is the sign of the covenant which I am making between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all successive generations; 13 I set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth. 14 "It shall come about, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow will be seen in the cloud, 15 and I will remember My covenant, which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and never again shall the water become a flood to destroy all flesh. (Genesis 9:8-15 NAS95)

The unconditional promise that God made to Noah was that the earth would never again be destroyed by a global flood (v. 11). This "Noahic Covenant" is unconditional because it is not predicated upon Noah, his family, or anyone born afterwards to perform some duty. God's promise was confirmed by His giving of the sign of the rainbow, something that evidently did not exist before the Great Flood. In our day when we see the rainbow we can remember God's grace and faithfulness. God was faithful in accomplishing His promise to Noah in rescuing those that trusted in His ark. God showed His tremendous grace because He didn't altogether destroy the earth because "Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (Genesis 6:8). God provided the "ark of salvation" to all of those who believed. Had anyone else other than those eight people acted in faith and stepped onto the ark, they too would have been saved from the flood of God's wrath that was poured out upon the earth. In the same way, Jesus is the "ark of salvation" for all those who believe, which is what we will discuss in the next reading. In the case of Noah's family, it was both the physical ark and their belief in it that saved them. They had to believe a global flood was coming, build the ark, and enter into it before the flood began. It is interesting to note that Noah's ark is a type of Christ that prefigured the coming of Jesus (the antitype). A "type" is a theological term for people, statements, or events prefiguring or superseded by antitypes. The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus is the only "ark of salvation." When we trust in Jesus we ourselves enter the ark by faith and by God's grace (Ephesians 2:8-9). Like the ark that only had one door, Jesus is the only door to heaven (John 10:9).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from the Book of First Peter. The reading follows Saint Peter's teaching on the characteristics desirable in a Christian including being "harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit" (1 Peter 3:8). This was in order to bring others to faith in Jesus even during times of spiritual persecution, and calling believers to provide a defense to the antagonists of the hope that we have in God (1 Peter 3:15).

Second Reading:

18 For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; 19 in which also He went and

made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, 20 who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. 21 Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you–not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience–through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him. (1 Peter 3:18-22 NAS95)

Peter explained that Jesus died **once** for our sins, which is a sacrifice that can never be repeated (v. 18, Hebrews 9:28). God used Noah as a "minister of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5) to preach to the people during his generation over the 120 years it took for him to build the ark (Genesis 6:3). Jesus' Gospel message was proclaimed through Noah during his days on earth "to the spirits now in prison" (v. 19), meaning Hell. This does not mean that Jesus went to Hell and preached to the dead spirits in order to give them a second chance. The Bible is clear that it is appointed for man once to die and then to face judgment (Heb. 9:27). Everyone that did not believe that they needed to be saved ended up in this terrible, eternal prison. Except for Noah, his wife, his three sons and their three wives, the entire population of earth was destroyed.

The apostle Peter is saying in this passage that salvation comes through faith in God's provision of Jesus. Just like the ark was God's provision in the time of Noah, God has made the ultimate provision for our sins through Jesus' death and resurrection. He is the one and only "ark of salvation." Peter is not saying that water baptism as we think of it saves you. Rather, he is making a correlation between the ark's ability to save Noah and his family and Jesus' ability to save anyone who comes to Him in faith ("an appeal to God for a good conscience" v. 21). Peter equated baptism with faith, and he explained that the "baptism" which does save us is our faith that we have in the Lord Jesus who is above all authorities and powers (v. 22b). The text uses the term "corresponding" (Greek "antitupos") in the first word of verse 21. Water baptism is the counterpart (corresponds) to the salvation that we as believers possess through faith in Jesus Christ and God's grace alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). During the time of Saint Peter, a person who expressed faith in the Lord Jesus obediently submitted to baptism (Acts 2:38). We can be joyful that God has provided Jesus as our "ark of salvation" in which we can enter through the means of faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). Although we are members of the church universal, the church doesn't save us, Jesus does.

We encourage you to learn more about the practice of baptism in the Bible by reading the **Going Deeper Section** as the end of this week's Mass Notes.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from Saint Mark a few verses before that which we studied last week. This passage records Jesus' forty days of temptation in the wilderness (also found in Matthew 4:2). It is important to note that Jesus' temptation was all part of an ongoing story in the book of Mark that began with Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist and followed by Jesus starting His earthly ministry. Each of these components should be seen as Jesus' credentials for verifying His claim to be the Son of God (Mark 1:1).

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Gospel Reading:

12 Immediately the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness. 13 And He was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts, and the angels were ministering to Him. 14 Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:12-15 NAS95)

Immediately after Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist, Jesus was compelled by God the Holy Spirit to go to the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. Although God knew that Jesus would successfully endure this trial of 40 days without food and in constant temptation by Satan, Jesus still had to complete the test in order to show to the world both His victory over temptation as well as his triumph over His human condition. Who can imagine going without food for 40 days in the desert? Saint Paul said the following about Jesus:

Philippians 2:6-8 NAS95 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Jesus voluntarily emptied Himself of the independent use of His divine attributes. Although he was fully God, He was also fully human, and as such was subject to temptations that only a human can experience. Where the first Adam failed, we find in this passage that Jesus (the last Adam 1 Cor. 15:45) resisted the deceptive lies of the Enemy. This is all part of the testimony that Mark is gathering to persuade his audience that Jesus is worthy of our worship as God's Servant to bring the good news that salvation is accessible (at hand).

Undoubtedly Jesus' temptation went far beyond anything that any of us will ever experience. However, we can have hope that in light of Jesus' example, we too can persist in our temptations. Saint Paul said, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Finally, Jesus' successful completion of the 40 days of temptation brought about the beginning of His earthly ministry and the unveiling of the "kingdom of God" (v. 15). By this time, John the Baptist had been arrested and Jesus took over his message to repent and believe in the Good News (v. 15).

What does this week's study mean for us today? God calls us to identify with Reverend Noah's message of faith and a call to action the same way He calls us to faith and action in our times. Jesus took over where Noah left off and called for people to examine their hearts by repenting of their sin and trusting in His once for all sacrifice to take their transgressions away forever. As believers, we are vastly different from the "spirits in prison" who didn't believe in Noah's message and therefore perished in the Great Flood. Every time that we see a rainbow, whether it is in the sky or in the colors of a peacock, we can remember God's grace and faithfulness in granting us salvation through

faith in Jesus Christ alone and not because of any of our good works. God has provided us with the power to resist temptation. We have Jesus' example that a person can resist through trusting in God's dynamic power, the Holy Spirit who lives inside of those who believe.

Reflection Questions

1. Although it's not directly stated in the Bible, I have always maintained that Noah hired workers to build the ark during this 120 year construction project. Additionally, I think that Noah ministered to the people during this time, both in the building of the ark and in ways in which are not told in the Bible. In what ways are you a "preacher of righteousness" in the various contexts in which God has placed you (work, home, school, etc.)?

2. How does Jesus' fulfillment of all righteousness (even in resisting temptation) give you hope in the midst of your own journey? List one particular area in which you have recently been tempted. In what ways can you identify with Jesus' temptation in the wilderness? How does the application of 1 Corinthians 10:13 empower you to resist?

"No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Going Deeper: Biblical Teaching about Baptism

What does the Bible teach about baptism? Throughout the ages the church's understanding and practice of baptism has developed. The following information is not meant to disparage any particular church's teaching on the subject, but to provide the biblical foundation from which the practice evolved.

The word translated "baptism" from the original is "baptizo" which means to immerse or submerge. The practice of baptism is very Jewish in that the Jews were familiar with ceremonial cleansings in a bath known as the "mikvah." It was in such a mikvah in which Bathsheba was cleansing after her time of the month when King David spied upon her. A popular myth is that Baptism was also a means in the Old Testament of confirming the reception of a Jewish Proselyte, although this practice is found nowhere in the Bible. Nobody in the Bible was ever baptized into the Jewish community. This came about only through the prescriptions of the Law, and especially by circumcision (Exodus 12:48-49). The Jewish practices of ritual cleansing are, however, mentioned as an elementary doctrine by the author of Hebrews (Hebrews 6:2), one that is emblematic of the purity in which God requires of worshippers. We know from the Bible that a ritual cleansing of the body in a mikvah or

any other type of bath, be it sprinkling, immersion, or pouring, cannot remove the **spiritual** dirt from anyone (1 Peter 3:21). The Scripture says that only God can forgive sin (Mark 2:7, Ephesians 2:8-9, and especially Luke 5:23-24).

John the Baptist initiated the practice of baptism, although his was a baptism of repentance. Saint Mark said, "John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4). This "baptism of repentance" signified the participant's testimony of their personal repentance of their sin, meaning they had a change of mind and agreed with God that they had sinned and they desired to follow a new direction in their lives. In the case of John's baptism, we see the believer's response to their need of repentance is to immediately submit to immersion in water as a public, outward expression of the inward change they had experienced in their hearts after hearing John's preaching. Jesus took over where John the Baptist left off and continued this baptism of repentance. It wasn't until the Book of Acts that we find the disciples teaching a different kind of water baptism.

In order to understand the transition brought about in the practice of baptism in the Book of Acts, we must first understand that this Book is itself one of transitions. The first transition was that of Jesus to heaven when he left His disciples in charge of continuing His ministry. As the disciples were all gathered with Jesus they watched Him ascend into the clouds with the promise to "come again in like manner" (Acts 1:11). The next big transition was when the disciples gathered to await the promised Holy Spirit on Pentecost. On that day they received a baptism of a different type, the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Finally, we see an interesting exchange that occurred between Paul and a group of disciples in Ephesus:

Acts 19:1-5 NAS95 1 It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples. 2 He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said to him, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." 3 And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism." 4 Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus." 5 When they heard this, they were baptized ***in the name of the Lord Jesus*** *(emphasis added).*

John's baptism was qualitatively different as it was a baptism of repentance; whereas the baptism performed in the Book of Acts and hereafter is 1) a baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus (v. 5), 2) tied to the personal reception of the Holy Spirit, and 3) still contains the element of repentance, but also includes the recognition of Christ's resurrection power in living the Christian life. These elements are all tied together, creating a complex conglomeration of multiple dimensions of saving faith: repentance, believing in Jesus Christ, and receiving of the Holy Spirit from God. We find this in the Second Chapter of Acts during Peter's address to a large group of devout Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 2:5) on the Day of Pentecost:

Acts 2:37-41 NAS95 37 Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter

and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" 38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 "For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." 40 And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" 41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

Here we see the instantaneous response of the people who repented of their sin, believed in Jesus "for the forgiveness of their sin" (v. 38b), received the Holy Spirit (v. 38c), and submitted to immersion as a public profession of their newfound belief. Baptism was for them a means of identifying with the death of Jesus by immersing themselves in the water, and then rising to a newness of life upon coming out. This ceremonial practice would have knit well with their previous Jewish religious practices. Baptism is Jewish, it was given to us by the Jew John the Baptist, practiced by Jewish Jesus, brought into its final form by Jewish Peter, and immortalized by the Pharisaical Jew, Paul.

Another case in Acts is descriptive of the later application of these same proscriptive principles:

*Acts 8:26-40 NAS95 26 But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert road.) 27 So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. 29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot." 30 Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" 31 And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: "HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO SLAUGHTER; AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT, SO HE DOES NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH. 33 "IN HUMILIATION HIS JUDGMENT WAS TAKEN AWAY; WHO WILL RELATE HIS GENERATION? FOR HIS LIFE IS REMOVED FROM THE EARTH." 34 The eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?" 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. 36 As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch *said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" 37 And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." 38 And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing. 40 But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea.*

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In the story of Philip and the Jewish Ethiopian "eunuch" (one who voluntarily submitted to castration for the purpose of serving among a king's harem), we see the progression of events as they played out in the life of this royal official who was returning from Jerusalem where he had been worshiping.

1. The man read the Word of God,
2. He understood the Word of God and believed it (Philip was obedient to the Holy Spirit in answering the call to explain it to him),
3. He publicly expressed his faith (to Philip),
4. He was baptized as soon as it was practically possible.

In baptism a person symbolically expresses their death to their former way of life and their birth in the newness of life as a believer in the Lord Jesus. Through it, believers identify with Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection from the dead. One commentator put it this way. "Immersion = Death. Submersion = Burial (the ratification of death). Emergence = Resurrection." Saint Paul said:

4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection (Romans 6:4-5 NAS95).

Regardless of how the practice of baptism has developed in the church, and God has granted liberty to them to make this determination, the biblical teaching is straightforward as to the meaning.

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 3-5-2017

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass Notes. This week we will examine the creation of man in the Book of Genesis and then the fall of humankind into sin through the temptation of the devil that brought about God's curse upon the earth. Then in the second reading, we will examine God's plan of redemption that He brought about by sending Jesus to die for our sins. Finally, we will study in the Gospel lesson how Jesus successfully resisted the temptation of the devil. Our lesson this week followed a lengthy study last week on the subject of worry. If you haven't read that we suggest you find time to review it on the web site.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Genesis and covers the sections of creation and the fall of humanity. This text together with the second reading from Romans constitutes the great bookends of human history. On one hand, Genesis records the creation of the universe including the earth, animal kingdom, and humankind. This is closely followed by the ugly record of the day when man sinned against God, which invoked His curse upon the world. On the other hand, the Book of Romans that we will see in the second reading, records in detail God's plan of redemption through Jesus Christ. This is a critically important study this week because we will cover a summary of all of human history, which can be summed up in just four short words: creation, fall, redemption, and glory.

As we move to the first reading let me point out some helpful context since the reading skipped the ending of Chapter 2 in Genesis. The context of the reading from Genesis is that it occurred just after the point at which God created Adam and before He made Eve, the first woman, though she wasn't officially named until Chapter 3 (Genesis 3:20). Chapter 1 recorded the record of the entire creation, including man. Chapter 2 expands on the creation account by filling in additional details. In

the opening of Chapter two God had finished his creation of the universe and had placed Adam on earth in the Garden of Eden with the commandment to cultivate it (Genesis 2:15). He provided clear direction to Adam by saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely, but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die" (2:16b – 17). Subsequently, God formed the entirety of the animal kingdom and appointed Adam with the task of naming every animal and bird (v. 19). The creation story continues:

20 The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. 21 So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. 22 The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. 23 The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." 24 For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. (Genesis 2:20-25).

At this point in history man was in the perfect company of God, had the perfect wife named Eve, tilled a perfect garden with unlimited food, and walked around perfectly naked all day. What more could anyone ask for? However, it was just too good to last. Think back to the single commandment that God gave to Adam. He said not to eat of the "tree of knowledge of good and evil" (v.17). It is easy to look back on Adam and wonder why if he had so much, he had to concentrate upon the one thing that he couldn't have. But, don't we do the very same thing? If we know that the speed limit is 55, why do we feel the need to drive 60 or 70? Just the fact that we have a law almost compels us to break it. Our consideration of whether or not we will break a law is generally tied to the penalty for failing to obey the law. A speed limit law is one thing, but God told Adam that if he broke this one certain law that the penalty would be death (v. 17). Adam had no frame of reference for the devastating effects of death upon his life here on earth.

Now, with this context in mind, let's jump back to verse seven where the first reading begins. As you read, notice the mention of another special tree growing in the Garden.

First Reading:

2:7 Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. 8 The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed. 9 Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?" 2 The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; 3 but from the

fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.'" 4 The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! 5 For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6 When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. (Genesis 2:7-9, 3:1-7)

With the job of creation completed God placed man in the Garden of Eden with trees that were already fully grown (3:6). Adam's wife was then confronted by a talking serpent, which probably wasn't too unusual to her because of her complete lack of history – everything would have been new to her. The first thing the talking serpent told her was to question the word of God. "Indeed, **has** God said?" spoke the serpent to the woman (3:1). The woman restated the warning from God, but added a prohibition about touching the tree, something which wasn't recorded in the warning given to Adam. The text doesn't say whether Adam told his wife not to touch the tree as a protective measure, or whether Eve added to God's prohibition not to eat from the tree. Regardless, had she not touched the tree this whole affair wouldn't have played out the way it did, at least not at this stage of history. [It's almost a foregone conclusion that the Fall was going to happen, it was just a matter of time.]

Next, the serpent tempted the woman a second time by once again casting doubt about the word of God. He said, "You surely will not die! 5 For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (v. 6). There is a nugget of truth in what the serpent said, as is usually the case, since he was a master deceiver and he evidently understood that the woman wouldn't believe an outright lie. What we mean by saying that there was some truth in the statement about not dying is that after both Adam and Eve sinned they did not die physically (3:7), but they certainly did die spiritually. God defines death as separation from Him, which is what happened in their disobedience (Ephesians 4:17-18). God just delayed Adam's physical death for some 930 years. "So all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years, and he died" (Genesis 5:5). We are not told when Eve died. The second element of truth in the serpent's subterfuge was that their eyes *were* opened, as was told clearly in the text (3:7a).

The sin that Eve committed was great, but she at least had the excuse that she was deceived by the serpent. Adam however, could not plead that the devil made him do it. No, the text said, "she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate" (v. 6e). Adam sinned without having the excuse that he was deceived, he sinned with his eyes wide open, and willfully disobeyed God's law regarding not eating from the tree. God held Adam responsible for his sin and the subsequent curse that He poured out onto His perfect creation, something that must have grieved our Lord to no end. Adam was created first, and was appointed as the leader for stewardship of God's creation, including the woman. Eve was created as the helper (2:18). If we look forward in Chapter 3 we will see that God questioned Adam first about what happened in the Garden. "Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?'" (3:9). In the New Testament God verified that He held Adam

responsible for the sin, even though Eve sinned first. We will read about this when we study the second reading from Romans Chapter 5.

The other special tree in the garden was the "tree of life" (v. 9b). It's important to note that although Adam did eat from the "tree of knowledge of good and evil" he didn't eat from the tree of life. Had he done so he would have remained in his fallen state in the cursed creation forever. God said later in Chapter 3, "Then the LORD God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever'" (3:22). Instead, what happened was that Adam ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil and as a result, his eyes *were* opened (v.7), just as the devil had said they would be (v.4), such that he knew both good and evil. He knew about goodness before he sinned, and after his sin he found out about evil.

The fall of humanity that we read about in the first reading had a gigantic impact upon the world, both on the creation itself, humankind and also the animal world. Just ask anyone that has raised a two year old. Although I haven't had that privilege I do have a story about how the fall has affected even the animal kingdom. My family used to have a golden retriever named Rusty. I remember our beloved dog very well as both of us used to like to go running together. Whenever I went jogging around the country roads in the neighborhood, Rusty used to like to come along with me. He used to run in front of me and then would frequently cross into the woods to follow whatever animal scent he could find there. Rusty just loved running around the woods in the neighborhood. I remember that when Rusty was young he would follow me outside thinking that I was going to take him running. Rusty would then take off down the road and I would call him back. There was an awkward moment when I would call to him while he decided whether or not he was going to obey. He turned his body away from me but looked back towards me while he made up his mind. Frequently he would think it about it for maybe a half a minute while I continued calling, then he would take off running away from me down the road. What a little stinker. He knew that he was being bad but he ran away anyway. This sin wasn't something that we taught him, it was instinctive. The corrupted state of this world frustrates all of us in every layer of life.

The fall of humanity resulted in God's pronouncement of a curse upon His creation. This curse affected men's relationship with women (Genesis 3:15), men and women's relationship with their work (Genesis 3:19), and the ground itself (Genesis 3:17-18). God predicted the ultimate physical death for Adam. "By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

We need to let the depth of the bad news provide a backdrop to the message of hope delivered in the second reading. God sent the Second Adam to redeem mankind from their sin, which is a gift freely given to those who believe God has provided His righteousness through faith. This reading is from Saint's Paul's Letter to the Romans. The context of the reading is that Paul had just explained the crucial concept of justification by faith. "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace

with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). The word "therefore" is present to provide a linkage to what Paul discussed in the previous chapter. Here Paul explained how father Abraham's faith was the reason that he was found righteous before the Lord, not his good works. Paul said, "For what does the Scripture say? ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Romans 4:3, the capital letters in this NASB version indicates a quotation from the Old Testament). Abraham's good works were laudable, but they didn't merit his salvation from the curse of Adam's sin. Paul said, "For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God" (4:2).

As you read the second reading from Romans 5 you will recognize the story we read about in the Garden of Eden.

Second Reading:

12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned– 13 for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. 14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. 15 But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. 16 The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. 17 For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. 18 So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. 19 For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:12-19)

Paul said a mouthful in this text, enough that entire books could be written on just one of these verses alone. Here are some of the key points that arise from the reading.

- Salvation, meaning forgiveness of the penalty of sin, is provided as a free gift (v. 15) only through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ.
- God held Adam ("one man"), not Eve, accountable for the Fall of Mankind (v.12). All people from Adam onwards are sinners (v.14), except for Jesus (v.18).
- Though everyone even before the Jewish Law was a sinner, those before the Law couldn't be held accountable for the Law which hadn't yet been given (v.13). Nevertheless, humans are accountable to God for the laws that are written on their heart. Paul said, "For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them"

(Romans 2:14-15).

- The sinful state of Adam was imparted to all of humankind from that moment forward. "For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners" (v.19a).
- Death didn't exist before the Fall and came into the world only after sin (v.12b). This negates the possibility of theistic evolution to explain God's creative process as any form of evolution requires a cycle of death.
- Jesus' sacrificial death resulted in the imputed righteousness of believers, the "gift of righteousness" (v.16, 18).

These foundational insights give us a sense of hope in our day to day lives, if we have turned to Jesus as our righteousness. We no longer have to pay the penalty for our own sins, but we are declared righteous by God if we will live under His provision of grace. The idea of grace is unmerited favor, which means we have been given a gift. A gift that has been given, needs to be received if it is to be useful to the recipient. Have you opened the gift of God's grace in your life by trusting in Jesus Christ as your only source of salvation?

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson from today is from Matthew Chapter 4. As we read in the first reading, Adam and Eve were tempted by the devil and succumbed to his temptation that resulted in the Fall of Humanity. In the Gospel reading we will see how Jesus was also tempted by the devil and how he persisted in his obedience to God the Father. As you read pay special attention to how Jesus dealt with the temptation of the devil, and how this contrasted with how Eve interacted with him.

Gospel Reading:

1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. 3 And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." 4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'" 5 Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU'; and 'ON their HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.'" 7 Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.'" 8 Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; 9 and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'" 11 Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him. (Matthew 4:1-11)

We saw that Jesus dealt with the devil's temptation by quoting from the word of God. Notice in the NASB version how easily it is to spot the quotations from the Old Testament since they are shown in

all capital letters. Three times the devil tempted Jesus, and three times Jesus resisted while quoting from the word of His Father.

The temptation for Jesus was to get His rightful place of rulership without having to go through the cross. In some ways, all of our temptations have this sense of shortcutting the process in order to attain the glory without the upfront cost. What the devil doesn't tell people is the price tag, which will be paid in full by the person who purchases his shortcut. Jesus saw through his scheme and was not pushed around by the devil's slick talk or even deceived by the twisting of Scripture. By standing in the midst of temptation, Jesus becomes our strong advocate in our own times of temptation. Hebrews 2:18 says, "For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted." He wants us to call on Him and to ask Him for help. Let's take Him at His word.

How should we go about resisting temptation? Saint Paul provided us with some guidance, and along with what we learned from the readings it should be obvious that we too need to rely upon the word of God to deliver us from temptation. Paul said, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it" (1Corinthians 10:13). In times of temptation, instead of looking for a loophole, look for the way of escape!

Reflection Questions

This week had a lot of powerful concepts for us to consider in our daily lives. Here are some questions to prompt further reflection:

1. Compare the two temptation accounts again and list the ways that Jesus dealt differently than Adam and Eve. What do you learn from His example?

2. The bookends of history are encompassed in this week's reading, starting with the bad news (sin's price tag is death) and moving to the good news (Jesus' payment for our sin). If you were to analyze where you are at today in your relationship with God, where would you place yourself on the continuum of living in your sin verses living in God's grace?

| Living in my sin ——————————————————————————— Living in God's grace|

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