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

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 49: 04/26/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we open with the first reading from Peter's speech on the Day of Pentecost, when God sent the Holy Spirit to the rapidly growing Church. Then we move to the second reading and continue our study in the Book of First Peter. Finally, we close with the Gospel lesson from the tenth chapter of John.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Chapter 2 of the Book of Acts. The context is Peter's speech to a crowd of about 120 followers of Christ (Acts 1:15) on the Day of Pentecost, 50 days after that first Easter Sunday. Just before Peter's speech, God poured out His Holy Spirit upon the followers, which empowered them to speak in many known languages. Since this was unusual, some in the crowd that was gathered for the feast accused them of being drunk (Acts 2:13). In response to this allegation, Peter addressed the crowd to explain the reason for this unusual occurrence. Today's reading then jumps to verse 36 because these intermediate verses were covered last week. The opening word in

verse 36 is the adverb "therefore." Without considering the context of the intermediate verses, a significant amount of information is left out that is relevant to this last section. Since we always need to understand what the "therefore" is there for, we will summarize the important points from the intermediate verses (15 – 35). First, read the opening of Peter's address in verse 14.

> *14 But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words."*

Peter said in other words, "Listen up." Next, he immediately corrected some of the people's false assumptions that the followers of Christ were drunk (v. 15). He said that what was happening was the fulfillment of the Prophet Joel's message (v. 16) regarding God's pouring out of His Spirit on all mankind in the end times (Joel 2:28 – 32). In retrospect, we understand that Peter meant this was a partial fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. After Peter quoted from this section of Joel, he presented testimony about how the people crucified "Jesus the Nazarene," and God raised Him from the dead (vv. 22 – 24). Next, Peter quoted from the Psalms to show how Jesus also fulfilled those prophetic writings by King David (vv. 25 – 28). He noted that David died and his tomb is "with us to this day" (v. 29), but Jesus fulfilled the prophecy that Someone would sit on David's throne (vv. 30 – 31). Saint Matthew went to great lengths to show that Jesus was of the line of David (Matthew 1:1-17). Additionally, the Prophet Isaiah stated explicitly that the Messiah would be of the line of David (Isaiah 9:6-7). Next, Peter said, "This Jesus, God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. Therefore, having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear" (vv. 32-33). Peter closed this section of his address by quoting from a Psalm again, this time one that contained a conversation between God the Father and God the Son. "THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, 'SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET'" (vv. 34a – 35). To summarize, the sending of the Holy Spirit was a partial fulfillment of Joel's prophecy, which signaled the start of the end times after the Messiah came. Second, Jesus fulfilled the prophecies that He would be of the line of David. Finally, in the future, Jesus the Lord will overcome all of His enemies and be exalted above all of creation (1 Corinthians 15:27).

Now let's proceed with the reading.

First Reading:

> *36 "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord*

> *and Christ–this Jesus whom you crucified." 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. (Acts 2:14, 36-41)*

To paraphrase, Pete said some something like, "Therefore," take into account the authority of the prophetic Scriptures from which I previously quoted and how Jesus perfectly fulfilled them. God made Jesus both the Supreme Master ("Lord") and Messiah ("Christ," or "Anointed One," meaning Deliverer) (v. 36).

Peter's speech had a profound impact on the crowd. "Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart" and then asked Peter what they should do (v. 37). Peter told them to repent and be baptized, and then they too would receive the Holy Spirit (v. 38). Why do you think this happened? Why were they "pierced to the heart"? Did Peter's speech have a profound impact on **you** after you read it?

Here are some insights into possible reasons Peter's speech had such a profound impact on the Jewish audience gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost). First, the Jews were "people of the Book." These were the ones to whom God first revealed His plan of salvation. God, through His sovereign plan, had gathered the Jews in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Weeks, coinciding with His outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the group of 120 followers of Jesus. To the Jews, the authority of God was vested in the Holy Books, the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. Once Peter presented compelling evidence that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Holy Books, the Jews evidently recognized the overwhelming case for Jesus as God's Promised Messiah. A second possible reason Peter's speech had a profound impact upon the Jews gathered for the Feast was the sheer magnanimity of what happened after the Holy Spirit settled upon the group of believers. "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance. And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered, because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language" (Acts 2:4, 6). Imagine the scene. Pilgrims from the various language groups all around the Roman Empire were gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of Weeks. Next, the pilgrims heard this group of Galileans speaking, but each one of them heard and understood in their own language! This great miracle would have had a profound impact on the people.

Because of this cascading series of events, the pilgrims who heard Peter's message were convicted of their sin; they were "pierced to the heart" (v. 37). A total of 3,000 Jews who heard Peter's speech repented and were baptized in one day.

We cannot underestimate the power that God unveiled that day in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit of God is the Person of God that lives inside of us, the One who empowers the Church. He is the Power (Dunamis in Greek, similar to Dynamite in English) spoken of by Jesus when He said that "the disciples would receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1:8). He is the One who started the Church that day in Jerusalem. He is God With Us, living in us, the Immanuel of Christ Whom God said "would never leave us nor forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6), the One that Jesus said would be in us (John 14:17).

As we leave the first reading and the events of that magical day in Jerusalem, let us focus on how God the Holy Spirit empowers and emboldens **us** to accomplish God's work in our lives. Let's also recognize how the Holy Spirit worked through Peter as he testified about how Jesus suffered and died for our sins, which will be revealed in the next reading.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is another portion of Peter's experience of Jesus. Let's see how Peter used the authority of the Old Testament to support his argument that Jesus Christ suffered as a perfect Man for us.

Second Reading:

> *20 For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. 21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, 22 WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; 23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. 25 For you were*

> *continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls. (1 Peter 2:20-25)*

The people were struggling with various forms of persecution for their faith, as well as finding their identity in Jesus Christ. They may have asked something like, "Why, if I am a Christian, do I have to suffer persecution, when all I have done is to believe the truth of God and follow His commandments?" The answer, according to the Holy Spirit, as recorded by Peter, is that we, as believers, are called by God to suffer (v.21), with Jesus as our example of how we are to go about it. "[W]hile being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously" (v.23). Peter said that Jesus died for our sins, "so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed" (v. 24). It was through Jesus death on the cross that He freed us from the power of sin (Romans 8:2). We suffer for a wide variety of reasons, one of which is to accomplish the purposes of God (v. 20d).

Have you developed your own personal "theology of suffering?" Have you rationalized, in light of the Scriptures, why bad things happen to "good" (Romans 3:23) people? These are good things to wrestle with even before hard times fall upon us. One way suffering benefits us is that it helps us identify with Christ, who suffered for us. There is a fellowship or bond that comes from suffering with someone. God invites us into a bond with Christ as we go through hard times and persecution.

I became friends with a man named Ron Christy several years ago, just before he was diagnosed with ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease). Ron provided a powerful story about how a Christian can suffer while still providing a strong testimony for the Lord. You can read Ron's testimony online at the following link:
https://christiansforchrist.com/articles/testimonies/ron-christy-my-walk-of-faith-with-als/

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Peter's words about returning to the "Shepherd and Guardian of our souls" set the perfect stage for the Gospel lesson from John Chapter 10. The context of His message is just after He healed a blind man and afterwards confronted the Pharisees (John 9). This section of Scripture is profound in that throughout the chapter, Jesus uses a metaphor of Himself as the Shepherd and the Door, with us as the sheep. Other characters come into play in the lesson, including a gatekeeper, robbers, thieves, and strangers. As you read, consider the contemporary relevance of these characters as Jesus' illustration unfolds. In the world today, who are the robbers, thieves, and strangers to whom Jesus

was pointing?

Gospel Reading:

> *1 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. 2 But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers." 6 This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them. 7 So Jesus said to them again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. 9 I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:1-10)*

Jesus' story alluded to Ezekiel 34, where God condemned the shepherds of Israel, meaning the spiritual leaders (Ezekiel 34:1-10). Ezekiel announced God's strong judgment on the kings, priests, and prophets who ruled before the exile of the Jews to Babylon. God said, "Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will demand My sheep from them and make them cease from feeding sheep. So the shepherds will not feed themselves anymore, but I will deliver My flock from their mouth, so that they will not be food for them" (Ezekiel 34:10). It's not coincidental that Jesus' message came just after He told a group of Pharisees that they were spiritually blind (John 9:41). It's evident that Jesus message was pointed squarely at the Pharisees, a group of spiritual "lay ministers" (shepherds) of Israel.

A wealth of rich points can be drawn from the reading. First, notice how as the story unfolded that Jesus was the Shepherd (v. 2), then in verse 7 he became the "door of the sheep" which led to the pasture (v. 9d). In the first century, the shepherds sometimes slept at the gate in order to protect their sheep. Anyone or anything that wanted to come into the sheepfold would have to enter through the gate and thereby come past the shepherd. By application, Jesus is saying that the only way to God is through Him. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). Faith in Jesus is the only means provided by God for a person to cross into Jesus' fold and be saved (v. 9).

Second, if you have ever visited the areas around Jerusalem, you will notice that the shepherds in the region stand in various positions around the sheepfold and summon the animals with their own unique calls. The application of this principle is that Jesus calls His people to God's Kingdom. Jesus went even further than a communal call to His sheep; He said, "he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out" (v. 3c). Jesus knows each one of us, his precious sheep. Later, beyond the range of today's reading, Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd, and I know My own, and My own know Me" (John 10:14). This means that Jesus desires a personal relationship with each of us.

Third, notice Jesus' "I am" statement in verse 7, which is the third of this type of statement in John's Gospel (in the English translation, in the Greek text this is the 13th). This phrase would have been something the First Century Jews recognized as a strong statement of divinity. In Jesus' earlier use of this phrase in John's Gospel He said, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35), and "I am the light of the world" (John 8:35). In today's reading Jesus said, "I am the door" (v. 9a). Jesus is our source of life, our spiritual sustenance. He is the Light of truth from God, the Light that leads us to the single door to obtain eternal life, the only way to God.

Fourth, Jesus is our protector from the spiritual thieves, strangers, and wild animals. Although Jesus addressed His message to the Pharisees, these ungodly forces are alive and well today. All one has to do is click through the television dial on any given day to find spiritual charlatans peddling their wares all across the airwaves. False spiritual cults abound, as do global religious movements that enthrone the false god of the moon and objects in temples. Peter said about the false teachers, "But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed" (2 Peter 2:12). Though we live in a fallen age where spiritual darkness is present across the world, we are called as the ones that God knows by name to continue to plead with the lost and dying generation to repent of their sins and be baptized, trusting only in the Lord Jesus for spiritual life.

Some years ago, I completed a study of the Book of Genesis and made an interesting observation about God's gathering of the animals into the ark. The Bible says, "So they went into the ark to Noah, by twos of all flesh in which was the breath of life" (Genesis 7:15). The insight that I had was that many of the people in that region that had either watched, or possibly even been involved in the building of the ark, had to have seen the animals entering two by two into the ark. Perhaps the people on the outside were saying something like, "There they go, two by two into the ark, just like Preacher Noah had said they would." Noah, a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5) must have suffered terribly knowing all the people that he ministered to perished, except for his small family. The story went on, "Those that entered, male and female of all flesh, entered as God had commanded him; and the LORD closed it behind him" (v. 16). In retrospect, it was easy for them to be convinced of Noah's prophecy regarding the Great Flood once the door of the ark was sealed shut

by God and the deluge began. Noah would have allowed anyone entrance to the ark, right up until the time the flood began. Instead of just eight people being saved (1 Peter 3:20), the Scripture **could** have read something like this:

> *"On the very same day Noah and Shem and Ham and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them, entered the ark" (Genesis 7:13).*

Then, just before God sealed the door of the ark shut, a man named John came running up the ramp into the ark (my words added).

> *"[W]hen 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" (1 Peter 3:20).*

And a man named John (my words added).

The animals are walking two by two into the proverbial ark right now. God is gathering His people through their faith in Jesus, who was foreshadowed in the ark. In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus gathered and called His people by name into the pen where He protected and fed them. Jesus is the ark; He is our only means of escaping the flood of judgment that will come upon the unsaved world because of their sin. Someday God will once again seal up the "ark," forbidding anyone else to cross from death into life. In the parable of the ten virgins, Jesus said, "And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut" (Matthew 25:10). John said in Revelation, "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (Revelation 21:8).

Our first response is to make sure that we have put our trust in Jesus for salvation. Have you resolved this in your own heart, that when you give an account for your life, you can honestly say you trusted in Jesus, not your own good works? Our next response is to warn the world of the coming judgment and point them to the only possible means of salvation, repentance of their sin and faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them

in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20). Amen.

Reflection Questions

1. What does it look like in your life to shine your light in a dark world to those "outside the ark"? What is one concrete step that you could begin praying about and take in the upcoming weeks to reach one person for Jesus?

2. Although we asked you to identify the contemporary roles of the various bad actors in the Gospel lesson, the focus wasn't upon the evil actors but upon Jesus as the only means to reach God. In light of what you learned, what, or who, are the evil actors that are influencing your life in terms of walking with God, and how does Jesus protect and deliver you from them?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 51: 05-11-2025

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we will study readings from the Book of Acts, Revelation, and the Gospel of John. We will go into some great depth on the first two readings. We hope you both enjoy and learn something from our study this week and you are forever spoiled for the ordinary.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Acts. Paul and Barnabus were on their first missionary journey to share the Word of God in the Jewish synagogues (Acts 13:4). So much happened in Jerusalem that they wanted others to know – Jesus Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension had defined the Jewish faith in a whole new way. The Holy Spirit had been sent to the believers to empower them to be witnesses all over the world (Acts 1:8). Paul and Barnabus were "set apart" to be witnesses to Who Jesus was and what He had taught them (Acts 13:1-3). They were also sent to help those who were lost in darkness so that they could see the light of the Good News, that their sins could be forgiven, and that a new relationship with God could be established through faith in Jesus (Acts 13:38-39).

During their travels, they often went to the Jewish synagogue to share how Jesus was the fulfillment

of the promised long-awaited Messiah (Acts 13:33-39). They gave convincing evidence to the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles that Jesus matched the description of the One from God Who would provide salvation. Jesus had risen from the grave, sealing the case that He was the Christ (Acts 13:32-33). In today's reading, we find Paul and Barnabus being invited back to the synagogue to continue sharing their insights about God's work through Christ.

First Reading:

Note: Paul's speech in Antioch was omitted from the reading. If you would like to read the speech, it is included in the "Going Deeper" section at the end of the study.

> *Acts 13:14 NAS95 14 But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day, they went into the synagogue and sat down.*
> *Acts 13:43-52 NAS95 43 Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God. 44 The next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord. 45 But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming. 46 Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. 47 "For so the Lord has commanded us, 'I HAVE PLACED YOU AS A LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES, THAT YOU MAY BRING SALVATION TO THE END OF THE EARTH.'" 48 When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. 49 And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region. 50 But the Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. 51 But they shook off the dust of their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. 52 And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.*

As a result of Paul's speech the previous week, a large group from the city gathered so that they didn't miss Paul's second address. The Jews received this second message of Paul very jealously, which resulted in them instituting persecution of Paul and Barnabus by "incit[ing] the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city" (v. 50) such that they were driven out of the city. However, many of the Gentiles in the mixed crowd heard Paul's speech and responded in faith (v. 48). Paul and Barnabus did as Jesus had commanded the disciples (Matthew 10:14) and shook the dust of the feet in protest while they left that city and went on to Iconium (v. 51).

The reading marks the transition point of Paul's ministry from the Jews to the Gentiles (v. 46), which became his primary ministry (see Galatians 1:16, Romans 15:15-16). Paul said later about this in Romans, "But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous" (Romans 11:11b). The outpouring of God's Spirit on the Gentiles was something that the prophets predicted long ago. Isaiah said, "I will make you a light to the Gentiles, and you will bring my salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6). This marks the dawn of a new and unseen era, the church age. Paul spoke about this later in his ministry:

> *25 Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, 26 that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, 27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. (Colossians 1:25-27).*

The big idea in the reading is that amid rejection and persecution, the Word of the Lord can still penetrate and transform hearts.

Next, we move on to the second reading, in which we will see the eternal impact of Paul's ministry on the eternal lives of believers worldwide.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The context of the reading from the Book of Revelation is a "parenthesis," or pause in John's revealing of the seven seal judgments being unveiled by Jesus. We cannot overstate the importance of understanding the context of any reading, especially when dealing with the end-time events portrayed here in the Book of Revelation. When reading Revelation, one has to know that the story moves between visions of events happening on earth and things happening in heaven. Along the way, there are frequent pauses in the action, or "parenthesis," where the vision shifts from earth to heaven or vice versa.

Looking back on today's reading in chapter 7, beginning in chapter 6, Jesus pours out a series of judgments on the earth (Revelation 6:1-17). With the unleashing of the sixth seal, great signs are seen in the sky (Revelation 6:12). This accords with what Jesus spoke about in Matthew 24:29-30. John said, "I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake, and the sun

became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood" (Revelation 6:12). Jesus said about this in Matthew, "But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (Matthew 24:29). The next verse in this section of Mathew provides is with strong clue as to the overall context of the signs as it relates to Jesus' promised return (Acts 1:11). Jesus said, "And **then** the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory" (Matthew 29:30, emphasis added). Jesus said that He would return after displaying the signs in the sky, just before the seventh seal judgment is poured out on the earth. This brings us to the parenthesis in the text from which we find today's reading, after the revelation of the sixth seal but before the return of the Lord Jesus and the unveiling of the seventh seal.

The event that happens before the parenthesis of today's reading is another tangential pause in which John records the gathering of 12 groups of elect saints (meaning believers) from within Israel. John records the details of this event in the opening of chapter 7:

> *1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. 2 And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, 3 saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bondservants of our God on their foreheads." 4 And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: (Revelation 7:1-4).*

The angels divinely mark 12 "tribes" of Israelites consisting of 12,000 from each group. The value of 12,000 is possibly not a literal number but rather indicative of the fullness or total completion of the task. Regardless, this marking is such that these people are set apart to receive God's divine protection during the balance of the tribulation period, some three and half years. John makes this clear later in Chapter 12. "But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent" (Revelation 12:14). This "sealing of the bondservants of our God" is also indicated in the parallel passage in Matthew. Jesus says in that Gospel about this event, "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other" (Matthew 24:31). This divine sealing, marking or protecting occurs just before Jesus' return and the unleashing of the final judgments upon the earth, including the seventh seal, seven trumpet judgments and seven bowl judgments. The bowl judgments conclude the wrath God has stored out to pour upon the unbelieving world at the end of the age. "Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels

who had seven plagues, which are the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished" (Revelation 15:1).

After the divine "sealing" is completed, the story moves to John's parenthetical vision of a large group of believers in heaven, where we pick up at today's reading.

Second Reading:

Note: Verse 13, which was omitted from the reading, is included separately.

> *Revelation 7:9 NAS95 9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands;*
> *Omitted verse:*
> *Re 7:13 ¶ Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?"*
> *Revelation 7:14-17 NAS95 14 I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. 16 They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; 17 for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes."*

In the reading, John said, "After these things," meaning after the sealing of the "144,000" (Revelation 7:4) and the outpouring of the first six seal judgments upon the earth. The scene now shifts back from events on earth to events in heaven. We must be cautious in our interpretation of the events in heaven because those occur outside of the space/time domain we are bound to on earth. However, John's juxtaposition of this parenthesis in this exact spot in Revelation is significant because it indicates the source of the great cloud of believers about which John is speaking in the reading. Verse 14 reveals that the source of the "great multitude" (v. 9a) are "the ones who come out of the great tribulation." These "tribulation saints" are the believers who are killed for their faith as the end of the age grinds to a halt during the reign of the Antichrist on earth. Later, John says about this wicked person, "It was also given to him to **make war with the saints and to overcome them**, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him"

(Revelation 13:7, emphasis added). During this terrible time, the reign of the Antichrist will be so strong as to almost fatalistically determine the outcome of each person alive on earth at the time. "If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints" (Revelation 13:10). The saints that are killed during this time will be divinely protected in heaven forever; in contrast to the "144,000," we saw who is divinely protected on earth during the tribulation period. This group in heaven will no longer hunger or thirst, or be too hot or too cold" (v. 16) "for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd" (v. 17a). We will read more about Jesus' role as Shepherd in the Gospel lesson. Many of the Christian saints on earth during this time will be martyred for their faith, while the "144,000" will enter the Millennial Kingdom alive to repopulate the earth. When Jesus returns, He will gather the saints (believers) who have survived up to that point and those who died in the Lord. Saint Paul said about this, "Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). This is the return of the Lord promised in Acts 1:11 and the rapture (or catching up) of all believers, both alive and dead as stated in this verse from 1 Thessalonians.

The big idea in the reading is that even though this world does not recognize and treat God's people (saints) well, these verses reassure us that there will be justice and provision in life to come with a sense of eternal comfort. We see how Jesus acted as the divine Shepherd of His sheep in heaven. As we move onto the Gospel reading, we will see how Jesus portrays Himself as the Shepherd of His sheep on earth.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from Saint John. The Book of John casts Jesus as the Son of God and speaks of eternal life in terms of knowing Him. The context of today's reading is Jesus' teaching on His role as the Shepherd of the true sheep in contrast to the false sheep and shepherds that abounded in Israel during this time of extreme satanic activity surrounding Jesus' ministry.

Gospel Reading:

> *John 10:27-30 NAS95 27 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; 28 and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one."*

The big idea in the reading is that God offers security to believers through the Great Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Throughout the Scripture, the Lord God pictures Himself as the "Shepherd of the Sheep," and this occurs early in the Bible. The first time this concept appears is back in the Book of Genesis when Jacob was prophesizing about the twelve sons (and tribes) of Israel, this time about Joseph. "Joseph is a fruitful bough, A fruitful bough by a spring; Its branches run over a wall. The archers bitterly attacked him, and shot at him and harassed him; But his bow remained firm, And his arms were agile, From the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel)" (Genesis 49:22-24). The shepherd theme is reminiscent of the opening of Psalm 23, "The LORD is my Shepherd, I shall not want" v. 1). As we examine today's reading, we find additional insight into the identity of this Shepherd of Israel. He emerges as a Shepherd-King figure With a special relationship with the LORD. This is none other than the Lord Jesus Himself, about whom Jesus says of Himself, "I and the Father are one" (v. 30).

As believers in Jesus, we can find great comfort in John's writing. First, God will never lose any of His sheep; God Himself places a calling upon our lives to come to faith in His Son Jesus Christ (v. 28). Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him, and I will raise him on the last day" (John 6:44). Second, we can trust that God will take care of us in the same way that a Good Shepherd takes care of His sheep. Finally, although we may feel judged by worldly people in this age, our True Judge, the Lord Jesus Himself, is the only absolute judgment that counts. We can trust that God's judgment will be correct in that as we enter eternity, He will judge between the lost sheep and evil shepherds in our land and differentiate between the ones who serve Him well.

Reflection Questions

1. How does the reading from the Gospel of John assure you that you are one of God's sheep? Some characteristics of His sheep are:

- His sheep hear His voice,
- Jesus assures us that He knows us, and

- His sheep follow him.

How can you use this Scripture to help you know that you are in the sheepfold and to counteract the doubts the enemy uses against you to make you question your faith?

2. Looking at the first reading, how does the fact that Paul and Barnabus were met with rejection and violence while simultaneously experiencing a degree of welcome give you an interpretative framework for your own experiences of sharing the Word of God with others?

Going Deeper

The following is Paul's speech to the Jews and Jewish converts (proselytes, Acts 13:43) in Antioch:

> *Acts 13:15-42 NAS95 15 After the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, "Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it." 16 Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, "Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: 17 "The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He led them out from it. 18 "For a period of about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness. 19 "When He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land as an inheritance–all of which took about four hundred and fifty years. 20 "After these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. 21 "Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. 22 "After He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, 'I HAVE FOUND DAVID the son of Jesse, A MAN AFTER MY HEART, who will do all My will.' 23 "From the descendants of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, 24 after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. 25 "And while John was completing his course, he kept saying, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not He. But behold, one is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.' 26 "Brethren, sons of Abraham's family, and those among you who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent. 27 "For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning Him. 28 "And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed. 29 "When they had carried out all that was*

> *written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb. 30 "But God raised Him from the dead; 31 and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people. 32 "And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, 33 that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU.' 34 "As for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: 'I WILL GIVE YOU THE HOLY and SURE blessings OF DAVID.' 35 "Therefore He also says in another Psalm, 'YOU WILL NOT ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY.' 36 "For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay; 37 but He whom God raised did not undergo decay. 38 "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, 39 and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses. 40 "Therefore take heed, so that the thing spoken of in the Prophets may not come upon you: 41 'BEHOLD, YOU SCOFFERS, AND MARVEL, AND PERISH; FOR I AM ACCOMPLISHING A WORK IN YOUR DAYS, A WORK WHICH YOU WILL NEVER BELIEVE, THOUGH SOMEONE SHOULD DESCRIBE IT TO YOU.'" 42 As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging that these things might be spoken to them the next Sabbath.*

Study Questions for Going Deeper:

1. Briefly trace the history of God's work in the world to bring people to reconcile people to Himself. For example:

- God chose the Jews and made them great in a foreign land (v. 17)
- . . .

2. List all the evidence given by Paul in this passage to prove Jesus' Messiahship.

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for 04-21-2024



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the first reading from Acts 4 in which we see Jesus as the Chief Cornerstone, the One whom the builders rejected. Then we cover the second reading from First John in which we learn more about the nature of a believer whose heart has been changed by God. We conclude with the Gospel lesson from John 10 where we see an illustration that Jesus gave of Himself as our Good Shepherd.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Acts. The context is just after Peter's sermon given to the people gathered at the portico of Solomon (Acts 3:11-26) and following the miraculous healing of the man lame from birth (Acts 3:2-11). These events greatly disturbed "the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees" (Acts 4:1) "because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (4:2). At this point, Peter and some of the disciples were taken into custody, most likely protective custody (4:3). The church continued to grow

as a result of the preaching and reached a total size of four thousand people (4:4). The next morning Peter and the disciples were presented to a group including the high priest and two others of priestly descent (4:4-6) at which point they asked them, "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?" (4:7). This led to Peter's response which is covered in the first reading.

First Reading:

> *Acts 4:8-12 NAS95 8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people, 9 if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, 10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead–by this name this man stands here before you in good health. 11 He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, but WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone. 12 And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."*

Peter explained to the Jewish rulers that the lame man was healed by the miraculous power of Jesus Christ whom they crucified (v. 9). He went on to explain that this Jesus is the Messiah, then quoted from the Bible evidence showing that their rejection of Him was prophesied to occur. Peter quoted from Psalm 118:22 which said, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone." In the context of the audience, the builders who rejected the cornerstone can be seen as the unbelieving Jewish leaders. Finally, Peter combined the teaching from Isaiah 28:16 that said something similar about the cornerstone but added the element of belief in Jesus for salvation. Isaiah, speaking on behalf of God said, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, a costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed. He who **believes in it** will not be disturbed" (Isaiah 28:16b, emphasis added). Peter's teaching wasn't new to the disciples because Jesus had Himself taught that the belief in Him was the only way to get to heaven. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). Jesus used the expression "I am" in this passage as a strong statement of His divinity. We will see Jesus' use of this term again in the Gospel lesson.

Peter's bold speech contains some crucially important truths. Faith in Jesus as the Messiah, which fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy of the Chief Cornerstone, is the only way to get to heaven. There is no other Person through whom we can gain forgiveness of our sin; this can come through faith in Jesus Christ alone. These truths are just as applicable to the "rulers and elders of the people" (v. 8) as they are to "all the people of Israel" (v. 10) and by application to everyone in the universe.

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Introduction to the Second Reading:

The free gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9) comes about, as we will see in the second reading, as a result of God's great love for us. The context of this reading from First John is the apostle's teaching on the evidences and nature of true salvation of a believer. John opened Chapter 2 by saying, "By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:3-4). Keeping the commandments of God is evidence of a heart that has been changed by God. Today's reading opens in Chapter 3 by expanding this teaching to include the special relationship that exists between God and the believer.

Second Reading:

> *1 John 3:1-2 NAS95 1 See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.*

John said that believers in Jesus Christ are bestowed with a special relationship with God, that of "children of God" (v. 1). This was in contrast to those who don't know God, whom Jesus called the children of their father the devil (John 8:44), something that he said to the very religious Pharisees. Faith in Christ bestows a special relationship on the believer with God, that of "*sonship*" (John 1:12; Romans 8:14-17). The person whose heart has been changed by God stands in contrast to the values of the worldly people around us (v. 1d). This was John's point in the previous chapter and one of the main ideas that he continues to bring out in the entirety of this letter.

Besides our present status as children of God, John tells of an additional blessing from God in how as a believer in some future time we will become like Jesus because we will see Jesus with eyes opened and will be freed from our sinful flesh (v. 2). Perhaps we will have some of the same powers that Jesus had, Who was able to walk through walls (John 20:19). Whatever the case, we will possess supernatural powers and freedom in our glorified bodies (Romans 8:18). Paul describes our current bodies as perishable, dishonorable, and weak, all due to sin (1 Corinthians 15:42-53). However, our imperishable bodies will be perfect, like Jesus, and unhindered by sin. For this we have only God to thank. "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are" (v. 1).

John's teaching here brings out the reality of our redeemed standing with God. We do not have to perform to get Him to love us. Instead, because we belong to Him as a child of God, we learn how to walk in a way that is consistent with our new identity. The world will not know what to do with us, for we will exhibit the fruit of God's Spirit within us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Opposition, persecution, and being looked down on for our faith are just an opportunity for God to display His nature in us. If these things do not fully characterize our daily lives, we can pray for God to continue His work in us as His children to help us to live in light of our true identity.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

As we transition to the Gospel reading, we must remember the raucous caused by Peter as he healed the man lame from birth that we learned about in the first reading. In the Gospel, we see Jesus teaching just after He healed a blind man and afterwards confronted the Pharisees (John 9). The message today alludes to Ezekiel 34, where God condemned the shepherds of Israel, meaning the spiritual leaders (Ezekiel 34:1-10). Ezekiel announced God's strong judgment on the kings, priests, and prophets who ruled before the exile of the Jews to Babylon. God said, "Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will demand My sheep from them and make them cease from feeding sheep. So, the shepherds will not feed themselves anymore, but I will deliver My flock from their mouth, so that they will not be food for them" (Ezekiel 34:10). It's not coincidental that Jesus' message came just after He told a group of Pharisees that they were spiritually blind (John 9:41).

This section of Scripture is profound in that throughout the Chapter Jesus uses a metaphor of Himself as the Shepherd and the Door, with us (the children of God) as the sheep. Other characters come into play in the lesson including a hired hand, owner, and wolf. As you read, think about the contemporary application of these characters as Jesus' illustration unfolds. In the world today, who are the hired hands and wolves to whom Jesus was pointing?

Gospel Reading:

> *John 10:11-18 NAS95 11 "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. 12 He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, 15 even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep, which*

> *are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd. 17 For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. 18 No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father."*

It's evident that Jesus' message was pointed squarely at the Pharisees, a group of selfishly motivated "lay ministers" (shepherds) of Israel identified as the wolves and hired hands in this story (v. 12). Clearly, the owner of the sheep is God the Father, and Jesus stated outright that He is the Good Shepherd. He even added extra emphasis by using the Greek term transliterated "ego eimi," translated "I Am" (v. 11), a term which Jesus had repeated multiple times about Himself beginning in John 6:35. This phrase was something that the First Century Jews would have recognized as a strong statement of divinity. In Jesus' earlier use of this phrase in this Gospel He said, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35), and "I am the light of the world" (John 8:35). In today's reading Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd" (v. 11a). Jesus is our protector, the one who provides us with spiritual sustenance, and protects us from our enemies. He is the Light of truth from God, the Light that leads us to the single door to obtain eternal life, the only way to God.

Jesus went on to explain, with the context of the Pharisees in mind, that the plan of salvation would be extended to the "other sheep" (v. 16), meaning the Gentiles, and they would join with the flock of the believing Jews. He foreshadowed His death by telling how the shepherd would lay down His life for the combined Jewish and Gentile flock. Finally, Jesus made a very important point that He was not a victim. He said that He was given the power by His Father to lay down His life for His sheep. Nowhere in the Bible is Jesus ever portrayed as a victim. On the night He was betrayed, Jesus said, "Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:53). Jesus gave up His life in voluntary submission to the Father. This teaching has important implications for our daily walk as believers. As we contemplate Jesus' voluntary sacrifice for us, would we not want to voluntarily reciprocate and sacrifice our misguided desires for Him? The call of the Gospel is one of invitation, not coercion and manipulation. Jesus' voluntary death on the cross built a bridge of trust to us in our desperate situation. May we cross the bridge of trust and learn to walk with Him on a daily basis.

Finally, Jesus is our protector from the wolves. Though Jesus directed His message to the Pharisees, these ungodly forces are alive and well in the present day. All one has to do is click through the television dial on any given day to find spiritual charlatans peddling their wares all across the airwaves. False spiritual cults and belief systems abound, as do global religious movements that enthrone the false god of the moon and objects in temples. Peter said about the false teachers, "But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed" (2 Peter

2:12). Though we live in a fallen age where spiritual darkness is present across the world, we are called as the ones that God knows by name to continue to plead with the lost and dying generation to repent of their sins and be baptized, trusting only in the Lord Jesus for spiritual life.

Reflection Questions

1. Jesus is referred to as our Good Shepherd and the Guardian of our soul. In what areas are you struggling on your own and need to let Him into your life to shepherd you? How does this guardianship of your soul change how you view life and your decisions?

2. In all three passages, we see a variety of angles to identify the greatness of Jesus:

He is the Chief Cornerstone of the faith,

He is the One who will appear and make us like Him when He returns for believers,

He is the Good Shepherd.

Write out your response to these descriptions of Jesus and what difference this should make in your life. Pray this back to the Lord and ask Him to help you to internalize these realities in your soul.

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 05-08-2022

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we will study readings from the Book of Acts, Revelation and the Gospel of John. We will go into some great depth on the first two readings. We hope that you both enjoy and learn something this week from our study and that you are forever spoiled for the ordinary.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Acts. Paul and Barnabus were on their first missionary journey to share the Word of God in the Jewish synagogues (Acts 13:4). So much happened in Jerusalem that they wanted others to know – Jesus Christ's death, resurrection and ascension had defined the Jewish faith in a whole new way. The Holy Spirit had been sent to the believers to empower them to be witnesses all over the world (Acts 1:8). Paul's and Barnabus were "set apart" to be witnesses to Who Jesus was and what He had taught them (Acts 13:1-3). They were also sent to help those who were lost in darkness such that they could see the light of the Good News that their sins could be forgiven and a new relationship with God could be established through faith in Jesus (Acts 13:38-39).

On their travels they often went to the Jewish synagogue to share how Jesus was the fulfillment of the promised long-awaited Messiah (Acts 13:33-39). They gave convincing evidence to the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles that Jesus matched the description of the One from God Who would provide salvation. Jesus had risen from the grave, therefore, sealing the case that He was the Christ (Acts 13:32-33). In today's reading, we find Paul and Barnabus being invited back to the synagogue to continue sharing their insights about God's work through Christ.

First Reading:

Note: Paul's speech in Antioch was omitted from the reading. If you would like to read the speech, it is included at the end of the study in the "Going Deeper" section.

Acts 13:14 NAS95 14 But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.

Acts 13:43-52 NAS95 43 Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God. 44 The next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord. 45 But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming. 46 Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. 47 "For so the Lord has commanded us, 'I HAVE PLACED YOU AS A LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES, THAT YOU MAY BRING SALVATION TO THE END OF THE EARTH.'" 48 When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. 49 And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region. 50 But the Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. 51 But they shook off the dust of their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. 52 And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

As a result of Paul's speech the previous week, a large group from the city gathered such that they didn't miss Paul's second address. The Jews received this second message of Paul very jealously, which resulted in them instituting persecution of Paul and Barnabus by "incit[ing] the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city" (v. 50) such that they were driven out of the city.

However, many of the Gentiles in the mixed crowd heard Paul's speech and responded in faith (v. 48). Paul and Barnabus did as Jesus had commanded the disciples (Matthew 10:14) and shook the dust of the feet in protest while they left that city and went on to Iconium (v. 51).

The reading marks the transition point of Paul's ministry from the Jews to the Gentiles (v. 46) which then became his primary ministry (see Galatians 1:16, Romans 15:15-16). Paul said later about this in Romans, "But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous" (Romans 11:11b). The outpouring of God's Spirit on the Gentiles was something that the prophets predicted long ago. Isaiah said, "I will make you a light to the Gentiles, and you will bring my salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6). This marks the dawn of a new and unseen era, the church age. Paul spoke about this later in his ministry:

25 Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God,

26 that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints,

27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. (Colossians 1:25-27).

The big idea in the reading is that in the midst of rejection and persecution, the Word of the Lord is still able to penetrate and transform hearts.

Next, we move on to the second reading in which we will see the eternal impact of Paul's ministry in the eternal lives of believers from around the world.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The context of the reading from the Book of Revelation is a "parenthesis," or pause in John's

revealing of the seven seal judgments being unveiled by Jesus. We cannot overstate the importance of understanding the context of any reading, but especially when we are dealing with the end-time events portrayed here in the Book of Revelation. When reading Revelation one has to understand that the story moves between visions of events happening on earth to things happening in heaven. Along the way there are frequent pauses in the action, or "parenthesis," where the vision shifts from earth to heaven or vice versa.

Looking back from today's reading in chapter 7, beginning in chapter 6 Jesus pours out a series of judgments on the earth (Revelation 6:1-17). With the unleashing of the sixth seal, great signs are seen in the sky (Revelation 6:12). This accords with what Jesus spoke about in Matthew 24:29-30. John said, "I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood" (Revelation 6:12). Jesus said about this in Matthew, "But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (Matthew 24:29). The next verse in this section of Mathew provides is with strong clue as to the overall context of the signs as it relates to Jesus' promised return (Acts 1:11). Jesus said, "And **then** the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory" (Matthew 29:30, emphasis added). Jesus said that He would return after the display of the signs in the sky, which is just before the seventh seal judgment is poured out on the earth. This brings us to the parenthesis in the text from which we find today's reading, after the revelation of the sixth seal, but before the return of the Lord Jesus and the unveiling of the seventh seal.

The event that happens before the parenthesis of today's reading is another tangential pause in which John records the gathering of 12 groups of elect saints (meaning believers) from within Israel. John records the details of this event in the opening of chapter 7:

1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. 2 And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, 3 saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads." 4 And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: (Revelation 7:1-4).

The angels divinely mark 12 "tribes" of Israelites consisting of a large number of 12,000 from each group. The value of 12,000 is possibly not a literal number, but rather indicative of the fullness or total completion of the task. Regardless, this marking is such that these people are set apart in a way that they receive God's divine protection during the balance of the tribulation period, some three and half years. John makes this clear later in Chapter 12. "But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent" (Revelation 12:14). This "sealing of the bondservants of our God" is also indicated in the parallel passage in Matthew. Jesus says in that Gospel about this event, "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other" (Matthew 24:31). This divine sealing, marking or protecting occurs just before Jesus' return and the unleashing of the final judgments upon the earth, including the seventh seal, seven trumpet judgements and seven bowl judgments. The bowl judgments conclude the wrath that God has stored out to pour out upon the unbelieving world at the end of the age. "Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished" (Revelation 15:1).

After the divine "sealing" is completed, the story moves to John's parenthetical vision of a large group of believers in heaven, which is where we pick up at today's reading.

Second Reading:

Note: Verse 13, which was omitted from the reading, is included separately.

Revelation 7:9 NAS95 9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands;

Omitted verse:

Re 7:13 ¶ Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?"

Revelation 7:14-17 NAS95 14 I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. 16 They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; 17 for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes."

In the reading John said, "After these things," meaning after the sealing of the "144,000" (Revelation 7:4) and the outpouring of the first six seal judgments upon the earth. The scene now shifts back from events happening on the earth to events happening in heaven. We must be cautious in our interpretation of the events in heaven because those occur outside of the space / time domain to which we are bound to on earth. However, John's juxtaposition of this parenthesis in this exact spot in Revelation is significant because it indicates the source of the great cloud of believers about which John is speaking in the reading. Verse 14 reveals that the source of the "great multitude" (v. 9a) are "the ones who come out of the great tribulation." These "tribulation saints" are the believers who are killed for their faith as the end of the age grinds to a halt during the reign of the Antichrist on earth. Later, John says about this wicked person, "It was also given to him to **make war with the saints and to overcome them**, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him" (Revelation 13:7, emphasis added). During this terrible time, the reign of the Antichrist will be so strong as to almost fatalistically determine the outcome of each person alive on earth at the time. "If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints" (Revelation 13:10). The saints that are killed during this time will be divinely protected in heaven forever; in contrast to the "144,000," we saw who are divinely protected on earth during the tribulation period. This group in heaven will no longer hunger or thirst, or be too hot or too cold" (v. 16) "for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd" (v. 17a). We will read more about Jesus' role as Shepherd in the Gospel lesson. Many of the Christian saints on earth during this time will be martyred for their faith, while the "144,000" will enter the Millennial Kingdom alive to repopulate the earth. When Jesus returns, He will gather the saints (believers) that have survived up to that point as well as those saints that died in the Lord. Saint Paul said about this, "Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). This is the return of the Lord promised in Acts 1:11 and the rapture (or catching up) of all believers, both alive and dead as stated in this verse from 1 Thessalonians.

The big idea in the reading is that even though this world does not recognize and treat God's people (saints) well, these verses reassure us that there will be justice and provision in the life to come with a sense of eternal comfort. We see how Jesus acted as the divine Shepherd of His sheep in heaven.

As we move onto the Gospel reading, we will see how Jesus portrays Himself as the Shepherd of His sheep on earth.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from Saint John. The Book of John casts Jesus as the Son of God and speaks of eternal life in terms of knowing Him. The context of today's reading is Jesus' teaching on His role as the Shepherd of the true sheep in contrast to the false sheep and false shepherds that abounded in Israel during this time of extreme satanic activity surrounding Jesus' ministry.

Gospel Reading:

John 10:27-30 NAS95 27 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; 28 and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one."

The big idea in the reading is that God offers security to believers through the Great Shepherd Jesus Christ. Throughout the Scripture, the Lord God pictures Himself as the "Shepherd of the Sheep," and this occurs early in the Bible. The first time this concept appears is back in the Book of Genesis when Jacob was prophesizing about the twelve sons (and tribes) of Israel, this time about Joseph. "Joseph is a fruitful bough, A fruitful bough by a spring; Its branches run over a wall. The archers bitterly attacked him, and shot at him and harassed him; But his bow remained firm, And his arms were agile, From the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel)" (Genesis 49:22-24). The shepherd theme is reminiscent of the opening of Psalm 23, "The LORD is my Shepherd, I shall not want" v. 1). As we examine today's reading we find additional insight into the identity of this Shepherd of Israel. He emerges as a Shepherd-King figure Who has a special relationship with the LORD. This is none other than the Lord Jesus Himself, the about whom Jesus says of Himself, "I and the Father are one" (v. 30).

As believers in Jesus, we can find great comfort from John's writing. First, God will never lose any of His sheep, meaning that God Himself places a calling upon our lives to come to faith in His Son Jesus Christ (v. 28). Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I

will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:44). Second, we can trust that God will take care of us in the same way that a Good Shepherd takes care of His sheep. Finally, although we may feel judged by worldly people in this age, the only real judgment that counts is our True Judge the Lord Jesus Himself. We can trust that God's judgment will be correct in that as we enter eternity He will judge between the lost sheep and evil shepherds in our land and differentiate between the ones that do well in serving Him.

Reflection Questions

1. How does the reading from the Gospel of John give you the assurance that you are one of God's sheep? Some characteristics of His sheep are:

- His sheep hear His voice,
- Jesus assures us that He knows us, and
- His sheep follow him.

How can you use this Scripture to help you know that you are in the sheepfold and to counteract the doubts that the enemy uses against you to make you question your faith?

2. Looking at the first reading, how does the fact that Paul and Barnabus were met with rejection and violence while at the same time experiencing a degree of welcome give you an interpretative framework for your own experiences of sharing the Word of God with others?

Going Deeper

The following is Paul's speech to the Jews and Jewish converts (proselytes, Acts 13:43) in Antioch:

Acts 13:15-42 NAS95 15 After the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, "Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it." 16 Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, "Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: 17 "The God of

this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He led them out from it. 18 "For a period of about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness. 19 "When He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land as an inheritance–all of which took about four hundred and fifty years. 20 "After these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. 21 "Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. 22 "After He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, 'I HAVE FOUND DAVID the son of Jesse, A MAN AFTER MY HEART, who will do all My will.' 23 "From the descendants of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, 24 after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. 25 "And while John was completing his course, he kept saying, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not He. But behold, one is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.' 26 "Brethren, sons of Abraham's family, and those among you who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent. 27 "For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning Him. 28 "And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed. 29 "When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb. 30 "But God raised Him from the dead; 31 and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people. 32 "And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, 33 that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU.' 34 "As for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: 'I WILL GIVE YOU THE HOLY and SURE blessings OF DAVID.' 35 "Therefore He also says in another Psalm, 'YOU WILL NOT ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY.' 36 "For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay; 37 but He whom God raised did not undergo decay. 38 "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, 39 and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses. 40 "Therefore take heed, so that the thing spoken of in the Prophets may not come upon you: 41 'BEHOLD, YOU SCOFFERS, AND MARVEL, AND PERISH; FOR I AM ACCOMPLISHING A WORK IN YOUR DAYS, A WORK WHICH YOU WILL NEVER BELIEVE, THOUGH SOMEONE SHOULD DESCRIBE IT TO YOU.'" 42 As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging that these things might be spoken to them the next Sabbath.

Study Questions for Going Deeper:

1. Briefly trace the history of God's work in the world to bring people to reconcile people to Himself. For example:

- God chose the Jews and made them great in a foreign land (v. 17)
- . . .

2. List all the evidence given by Paul in this passage to prove Jesus' Messiahship.

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 04-25-2021



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the first reading from Acts 4 in which we see Jesus as the Chief Cornerstone, the One whom the builders rejected. Then we cover the second reading from First John in which we learn more about the nature of a believer whose heart has been changed by God. We conclude with the Gospel lesson from John 10 where we see an illustration that Jesus gave of Himself as our Good Shepherd.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Acts. The context is just after Peter's sermon given to the people gathered at the portico of Solomon (Acts 3:11-26) and following the miraculous healing of the man lame from birth (Acts 3:2-11). These events greatly disturbed "the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees" (Acts 4:1) "because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (4:2). At this point, Peter and some of the

disciples were taken into custody, most likely protective custody (4:3). The church continued to grow as a result of the preaching and reached a total size of four thousand people (4:4). The next morning Peter and the disciples were presented to a group including the high priest and two others of priestly descent (4:4-6) at which point they asked them, "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?" (4:7). This led to Peter's response which is covered in the first reading.

First Reading:

Acts 4:8-12 NAS95 8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people, 9 if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, 10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead–by this name this man stands here before you in good health. 11 He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, but WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone. 12 And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

Peter explained to the Jewish rulers that the lame man was healed by the miraculous power of Jesus Christ whom they crucified (v. 9). He went on to explain that this Jesus is the Messiah, then quoted from the Bible evidence showing that their rejection of Him was prophesied to occur. Peter quoted from Psalm 118:22 which said, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone." In the context of the audience, the builders who rejected the cornerstone can be seen as the unbelieving Jewish leaders. Finally, Peter combined the teaching from Isaiah 28:16 that said something similar about the cornerstone but added the element of belief in Jesus for salvation. Isaiah, speaking on behalf of God said, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, a costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed. He who **believes in it** will not be disturbed" (Isaiah 28:16b, emphasis added). Peter's teaching wasn't new to the disciples because Jesus had Himself taught that the belief in Him was the only way to get to heaven. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). Jesus used the expression "I am" in this passage as a strong statement of His divinity. We will see Jesus' use of this term again in the Gospel lesson.

Peter's bold speech contains some crucially important truths. Faith in Jesus as the Messiah, which fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy of the Chief Cornerstone, is the only way to get to heaven. There is no other Person through whom we can gain forgiveness of our sin; this can come through faith in Jesus Christ alone. These truths are just as applicable to the "rulers and elders of the people"

(v. 8) as they are to "all the people of Israel" (v. 10) and by application to everyone in the universe.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The free gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9) comes about, as we will see in the second reading, as a result of God's great love for us. The context of this reading from First John is the apostle's teaching on the evidences and nature of true salvation of a believer. John opened Chapter 2 by saying, "By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:3-4). Keeping the commandments of God is evidence of a heart that has been changed by God. Today's reading opens in Chapter 3 by expanding this teaching to include the special relationship that exists between God and the believer.

Second Reading:

1 John 3:1-2 NAS95 1 See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

John said that believers in Jesus Christ are bestowed with a special relationship with God, that of "children of God" (v. 1). This was in contrast to those who don't know God, whom Jesus called children of their father the devil (John 8:44), something that he said to the very religious Pharisees. Faith in Christ bestows a special relationship on the believer with God, that of sonship (John 1:12; Romans 8:14-17). The person whose heart has been changed by God stands in contrast to the values of the worldly people around us (v. 1d). This was John's point in the previous chapter and one of the main ideas that he continues to bring out in the entirety of this letter.

Besides our present status as children of God, John tells of an additional blessing from God in how as a believer in some future time we will become like Jesus because we will see Jesus with eyes opened and will be freed from our sinful flesh (v. 2). Perhaps we will have some of the same powers that Jesus had, Who was able to walk through walls (John 20:19). Whatever the case, we will possess supernatural powers and freedom in our glorified bodies (Romans 8:18). Paul describes our current

bodies as perishable, dishonorable, and weak, all due to sin (1 Corinthians 15:42-53). However, our imperishable bodies will be perfect, like Jesus, and unhindered by sin. For this we have only God to thank. "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are" (v. 1).

John's teaching here brings out the reality of our redeemed standing in God. We do not have to perform to get Him to love us. Instead, because we belong to Him as a child of God, we learn how to walk in a way that is consistent with our new identity. The world will not know what to do with us, for we will exhibit the fruit of God's Spirit within us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Opposition, persecution, and being looked down on for our faith is just an opportunity for God to display His nature in us. If these things do not fully characterize our daily lives, we can pray for God to continue His work in us as His children to help us to live in light of our true identity.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

As we transition to the Gospel reading, we must remember the raucous caused by Peter as he healed the man lame from birth that we learned about in the first reading. In the Gospel, we see Jesus teaching just after He healed a blind man and afterwards confronted the Pharisees (John 9). The message today alludes to Ezekiel 34, where God condemned the shepherds of Israel, meaning the spiritual leaders (Ezekiel 34:1-10). Ezekiel announced God's strong judgment on the kings, priests, and prophets who ruled before the exile of the Jews to Babylon. God said, "Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will demand My sheep from them and make them cease from feeding sheep. So, the shepherds will not feed themselves anymore, but I will deliver My flock from their mouth, so that they will not be food for them" (Ezekiel 34:10). It's not coincidental that Jesus' message came just after He told a group of Pharisees that they were spiritually blind (John 9:41).

This section of Scripture is profound in that throughout the Chapter Jesus uses a metaphor of Himself as the Shepherd and the Door, with us (the children of God) as the sheep. Other characters come into play in the lesson including a hired hand, owner, and wolf. As you read, think about the contemporary application of these characters as Jesus' illustration unfolds. In the world today, who are the hired hands and wolves to whom Jesus was pointing?

Gospel Reading:

John 10:11-18 NAS95 11 "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. 12 He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, 15 even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd. 17 For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. 18 No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father."

It's evident that Jesus' message was pointed squarely at the Pharisees, a group of selfishly motivated "lay ministers" (shepherds) of Israel identified as the wolves and hired hands in this story (v. 12). Clearly, the owner of the sheep is God the Father, and Jesus stated outright that He is the Good Shepherd. He even added extra emphasis by using the Greek term transliterated "ego eimi," translated "I Am" (v. 11), a term which Jesus had repeated multiple times about Himself beginning in John 6:35. This phrase was something that the First Century Jews would have recognized as a strong statement of divinity. In Jesus' earlier use of this phrase in this Gospel He said, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35), and "I am the light of the world" (John 8:35). In today's reading Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd" (v. 11a). Jesus is our protector, the one who provides us with spiritual sustenance, and protects us from our enemies. He is the Light of truth from God, the Light that leads us to the single door to obtain eternal life, the only way to God.

Jesus went on to explain, with the context of the Pharisees in mind, that the plan of salvation would be extended to the "other sheep" (v. 16), meaning the Gentiles, and they would join with the flock of the believing Jews. He foreshadowed His death by telling how the shepherd would lay down His life for the combined Jewish and Gentile flock. Finally, Jesus made a very important point that He was not a victim. He said that He was given the power by His Father to lay down His life for His sheep. Nowhere in the Bible is Jesus ever portrayed as a victim. On the night He was betrayed Jesus said, "Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:53). Jesus gave up His life in voluntary submission to the Father. This teaching has important implications for our daily walk as believers. As we contemplate Jesus' voluntary sacrifice for us, would we not want to voluntarily reciprocate and sacrifice our misguided desires for Him? The call of the Gospel is one of invitation, not coercion and manipulation. Jesus' voluntary death on the cross built a bridge of trust to us in our desperate situation. May we cross the bridge of trust and learn to walk with Him on a daily basis.

Finally, Jesus is our protector from the wolves. Though Jesus directed His message to the Pharisees,

these ungodly forces are alive and well in the present day. All one has to do is click through the television dial on any given day to find spiritual charlatans peddling their wares all across the airwaves. False spiritual cults and belief systems abound, as do global religious movements that enthrone the false god of the moon and objects in temples. Peter said about the false teachers, "But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed" (2 Peter 2:12). Though we live in a fallen age where spiritual darkness is present across the world, we are called as the ones that God knows by name to continue to plead with the lost and dying generation to repent of their sins and be baptized, trusting only in the Lord Jesus for spiritual life.

Reflection Questions

1. Jesus is referred to as our Good Shepherd and the Guardian of our soul. In what areas are you struggling on your own and need to let Him into your life to shepherd you? How does this guardianship of your soul change how you view life and your decisions?

2. In all three passages, we see a variety of angles to identify the greatness of Jesus:

    He is the Chief Cornerstone of the faith

    He is the One who will appear and make us like Him when He returns for believers

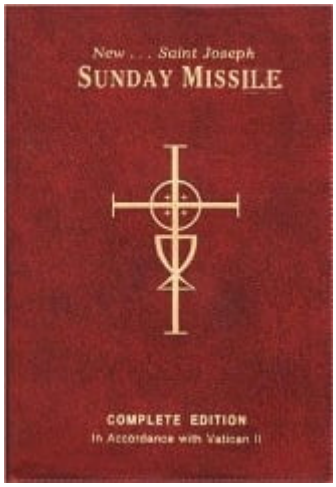
    He is the Good Shepherd

Write out your response to these descriptions of Jesus and what difference this should make in your life. Pray this back to the Lord and ask Him to help you to internalize these realities in your soul.

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday 05-03-2020



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the first reading from Peter's speech on the Day of Pentecost when God sent the Holy Spirit to the rapidly growing Church. Then we move to the second reading and continue our study in the Book of First Peter. Finally, we close with the Gospel lesson from the tenth chapter of the Gospel of Saint John.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Chapter 2 of the Book of Acts. The context is Peter's speech to a crowd of about 120 followers of Christ (Acts 1:15) on the Day of Pentecost, 50 days after that first Easter Sunday. Just before Peter's speech, God poured out His Holy Spirit upon the followers which empowered them to speak in many known languages. Since this was unusual, some in the crowd that were gathered for the feast accused them of being drunk (Acts 2:13). In response to this allegation, Peter addressed the crowd to explain the reason for this unusual occurrence. Today's reading then jumps to verse 36 because these intermediate verses were covered last week. The opening word in verse 36 is the adverb "therefore." Without considering the context of the intermediate verses, a

significant amount of information is left out that is relevant to this last section. Since we always need to understand what the "therefore" is there for, we will summarize the important points from the intermediate verses (15 – 35). First, read the opening of Peter's address in verse 14.

14 But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words."

Peter said in other words, "listen up." Next, he immediately corrected some of the people's false assumptions that the followers of Christ were drunk (v. 15). He said that what was happening was the fulfillment of the Prophet Joel's message (v.16) regarding God's pouring out of His Spirit on all mankind in the end times (Joel 2:28 – 32). In retrospect, we understand that what Peter meant was that this was a partial fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. After Peter quoted from this section of Joel, he presented testimony about how the people crucified "Jesus the Nazarene" and God raised Him from the dead (vv. 22 – 24). Next, Peter quoted from the Psalms to show how Jesus also fulfilled those prophetic writings by King David (vv.25 – 28). He noted that David died and his tomb is "with us to this day" (v.29), but Jesus fulfilled the prophecy that Someone would sit on David's throne (vv. 30 – 31). Saint Matthew went to great lengths to show that Jesus was of the line of David (Matthew 1:1-17). Additionally, the Prophet Isaiah stated explicitly that the Messiah would be of the line of David (Isaiah 9:6-7). Next Peter said, "This Jesus, God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear" (vv. 32-33). Peter closed this section of his address by again quoting from a Psalm, this time one that contained a conversation between God the Father and God the Son. "THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, 'SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET'" (vv. 34a – 35). To summarize, the sending of the Holy Spirit was a partial fulfillment of Joel's prophecy that signaled the start of the end times, after the Messiah came. Second, Jesus fulfilled the prophecies that He would be of the line of David. Finally, in the future Jesus the Lord will overcome all of His enemies, and be exalted above all of creation (1 Corinthians 15:27).

Now let's proceed with the reading.

First Reading:

36 "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ–this Jesus whom you crucified." 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. (Acts 2:14, 36-41)

To paraphrase, Pete said some something like, "Therefore," take into account the authority of the prophetic Scriptures from which I previously quoted and how Jesus perfectly fulfilled them. God made Jesus both the Supreme Master ("Lord") and Messiah ("Christ," or "Anointed One," meaning Deliverer) (v. 36).

Peter's speech had a profound impact upon the crowd. "Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart" and then asked Peter what they should do (v. 37). Peter told them to repent and be baptized, and then they too would receive the Holy Spirit (v. 38). Why do you think this happened, why were they "pierced to the heart"? Did Peter's speech have a profound impact upon **you** after you read it?

Here are some insights into possible reasons why Peter's speech had such a profound impact upon the Jewish audience who were gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost). First, the Jews were "people of the Book." These were the ones to whom God first revealed His plan of salvation. God, through His sovereign plan, had gathered the Jews together in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Weeks to coincide with His outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the group of 120 followers of Jesus. To the Jews, the authority of God was vested in the Holy Books, the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. Once Peter explained with compelling evidence that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Holy Books, the Jews evidently recognized the overwhelming evidence in support of Jesus as God's Promised Messiah. A second possible reason why Peter's speech had a profound impact upon the Jews gathered for the Feast was the sheer magnanimity of what happened after the Holy Spirit of God had settled upon the group of believers. "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance. And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language" (Acts 2:4, 6). Imagine the scene. Pilgrims from the various language groups all around the Roman Empire were gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of Weeks. Next, the pilgrims heard this group of Galileans speaking, but each one of them heard and understood in their own language! This great miracle would have had a profound impact upon the people.

Because of this cascading series of events the pilgrims who heard Peter's message were convicted of their sin, they were "pierced to the heart" (v.37). A total of 3,000 Jews who heard Peter's speech repented and were baptized in one day.

We cannot underestimate the power that God unveiled that day in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit of God is the Person of God that lives inside of us, the One that empowers the Church. He is the Power (Dunamis in Greek, similar to Dynamite in English) spoken of Jesus when He said that "the disciples would receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1:8). He is the One who started the Church that day in Jerusalem. He is God With Us, living in us, the Immanuel of Christ Whom God said "would never leave us nor forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6), the One that Jesus said would be in us (John 14:17).

As we leave the first reading and the events of that magical day in Jerusalem, let us endeavor to focus upon how God the Holy Spirit empowers and emboldens **us** to accomplish God's work in our lives. Let's also recognize how the Holy Spirit worked through Peter as he testified about how Jesus suffered and died for our sins, which will be revealed in the next reading.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is another portion of Peter's experience of Jesus. Let's see how Peter used the authority of the Old Testament to affirm his argument about how Jesus Christ suffered as a perfect Man for us.

Second Reading:

20 For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. 21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, 22 WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; 23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. 25 For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the

Shepherd and Guardian of your souls. (1 Peter 2:20-25)

The people were struggling with various forms of persecution for their faith, as well as finding their identity in Jesus Christ. They may have asked something like, "Why, if I am a Christian, do I have to suffer persecution, when all I have done is to believe the truth of God and follow His commandments?" The answer, according to the Holy Spirit, as recorded by Peter, is that we as believers are called by God to suffer (v.21) with Jesus as our example on how we are to go about it. "[W]hile being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously" (v.23). Peter said that Jesus died for our sins, "so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed" (v. 24). It was through Jesus death on the cross that He freed us from the power of sin (Romans 8:2). We suffer for a wide variety of reasons, one of which is to accomplish the purposes of God (v.20d).

Have you developed your own personal "theology of suffering?" Have you rationalized, in light of the Scriptures, why bad things happen to "good" (Romans 3:23) people? These are good things to wrestle with even before hard times fall upon us. One way that suffering benefits us is that it helps us to identify ourselves with Christ Who suffered for us. There is a fellowship or bond that comes from suffering with someone. God invites us into a bond with Christ as we go through hard times and persecution.

I became friends with a man named Ron Christy several years ago just before he was diagnosed with ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease). Ron provided a powerful story about how a Christian can suffer while still providing a strong testimony for the Lord. You can read Ron's testimony online at the following link: https://www.christiansforchrist.org/articles/testimonies/ron-christy-my-walk-of-faith-with-als

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Peter's words about returning to the "Shepherd and Guardian of our souls" sets the perfect stage for the Gospel lesson from John Chapter 10. The context of His message is just after He healed a blind man and afterwards confronted the Pharisees (John 9). This section of Scripture is profound in that throughout the Chapter Jesus uses a metaphor of Himself as the Shepherd and the Door, with us as the sheep. Other characters come into play in the lesson including a gatekeeper, robbers, thieves, and strangers. As you read, think about the contemporary application of these characters as Jesus' illustration unfolds. In the world today, who are the robbers, thieves, and strangers to whom Jesus was pointing?

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Gospel Reading:

1 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. 2 But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers." 6 This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them. 7 So Jesus said to them again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. 9 I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:1-10)

Jesus' story alluded to Ezekiel 34, where God condemned the shepherds of Israel, meaning the spiritual leaders (Ezekiel 34:1-10). Ezekiel announced God's strong judgment on the kings, priests, and prophets who ruled before the exile of the Jews to Babylon. God said, "Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will demand My sheep from them and make them cease from feeding sheep. So the shepherds will not feed themselves anymore, but I will deliver My flock from their mouth, so that they will not be food for them" (Ezekiel 34:10). It's not coincidental that Jesus' message came just after He told a group of Pharisees that they were spiritually blind (John 9:41). It's evident that Jesus message was pointed squarely at the Pharisees, a group of spiritual "lay ministers" (shepherds) of Israel.

A wealth of rich points can be drawn from the reading. First, notice how as the story unfolded that Jesus was the Shepherd (v. 2), then in verse 7 he became the "door of the sheep" which led to the pasture (v. 9d). In the first century, the shepherds sometimes slept in the gate in order to protect their sheep. Anyone or anything that wanted to come into the sheepfold would have to enter through the gate and thereby come past the shepherd. By application, Jesus is saying that the only way to God is through Him. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). Faith in Jesus is the only means provided by God for a person to cross into Jesus' fold and be saved (v. 9).

Second, if you have ever visited the areas around Jerusalem you will notice that the shepherds in the region stand at various positions around the sheepfold and summon the animals with their own unique calls. The application of this principle is that Jesus calls His people to God's Kingdom. Jesus

went even further than a communal call to His sheep, He said, "he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out" (v. 3c). Jesus knows each one of us, his precious sheep. Later, beyond the range of today's reading, Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me" (John 10:14). This means that Jesus desires a personal relationship with each of us.

Third, notice Jesus' "I am" statement in verse 7, which is the third of this type of statement in John's Gospel (in the English translation, in the Greek text this is the 13'th). This phrase was something that the First Century Jews would have recognized as a strong statement of divinity. In Jesus' earlier use of this phrase in John's Gospel He said, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35), and "I am the light of the world" (John 8:35). In today's reading Jesus said, "I am the door" (v. 9a). Jesus is our source of life, our spiritual sustenance. He is the Light of truth from God, the Light that leads us to the single door to obtain eternal life, the only way to God.

Fourth, Jesus is our protector from the spiritual thieves, strangers, and wild animals. Though Jesus directed His message to the Pharisees, these ungodly forces are alive and well in the present day. All one has to do is click through the television dial on any given day to find spiritual charlatans peddling their wares all across the airwaves. False spiritual cults abound, as do global religious movements that enthrone the false god of the moon and objects in temples. Peter said about the false teachers, "But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed" (2 Peter 2:12). Though we live in a fallen age where spiritual darkness is present across the world, we are called as the ones that God knows by name to continue to plead with the lost and dying generation to repent of their sins and be baptized, trusting only in the Lord Jesus for spiritual life.

Some years ago, I completed a study of the Book of Genesis and made an interesting observation about God's gathering of the animals into the ark. The Bible says, "So they went into the ark to Noah, by twos of all flesh in which was the breath of life" (Genesis 7:15). The insight that I had was that many of the people in that region that had either watched, or possibly even been involved in the building of the ark, had to have seen the animals entering two by two into the ark. Perhaps the people on the outside were saying something like, "There they go, two by two into the ark, just like Preacher Noah had said they would." Noah, a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5) must have suffered terribly knowing all the people that he ministered to perished, except for his small family. The story went on, "Those that entered, male and female of all flesh, entered as God had commanded him; and the LORD closed it behind him" (v. 16). In retrospect, it was easy for them to be convinced of Noah's prophecy regarding the Great Flood once the door of the ark was sealed shut by God and the deluge began. Noah would have allowed anyone entrance to the ark, right up until the time the flood began. Instead of just eight people being saved (1 Peter 3:20), the Scripture **could**

have read something like this:

"On the very same day Noah and Shem and Ham and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them, entered the ark" (Genesis 7:13).

Then, as just before God sealed the door of the ark shut, a man named John came running up the ramp into the ark (my words added).

"[W]hen 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" (1 Peter 3:20).

And a man named John (my words added).

The animals are walking two by two into the proverbial ark right now. God is gathering His people through their faith in the Jesus, who was foreshadowed in the ark. In the Gospel lesson today, Jesus gathered and called His people by name into the pen where He protected them and fed them. Jesus is the ark, He is our only means of escaping the flood of judgment that will come upon the unsaved world because of their sin. Someday God will once again seal up the "ark," forbidding anyone else to cross from death into life. In the parable of the ten virgins Jesus said, "And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut" (Matthew 25:10). John said in Revelation, "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (Revelation 21:8).

Our first response is to make sure that we have put our trust in Jesus for salvation. Have you resolve this in your own heart, that when you give an account for your life you can honestly say you trusted in Jesus, not your own good works? Our next response is to warn the world of the coming judgment and point them to the only possible means of salvation, repentance of their sin and faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20). Amen.

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Reflection Questions

1. What does it look like in your life to shine your light in a dark world to those "outside the ark"? What is one concrete step that you could begin praying about and take in the upcoming weeks to reach one person for Jesus?

2. Although we asked you to identify the contemporary roles of the various bad actors in the Gospel lesson the focus wasn't upon the evil actors but upon Jesus as the only means to reach God. In light of what you learned, what, or who, are the evil actors that are influencing your life in terms of walking with God, and how does Jesus protect and deliver you from them?

Keywords: Fourth Sunday of Easter, Lectionary 49

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 05-12-2019

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we will study readings from the Book of Acts, Revelation and the Gospel of John. We will go into some great depth on the first two readings. We hope that you both enjoy and learn something this week from our study and that you are forever spoiled for the ordinary.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Acts. Paul and Barnabus were on their first missionary journey to share the Word of God in the Jewish synagogues (Acts 13:4). So much happened in Jerusalem that they wanted others to know – Jesus Christ's death, resurrection and ascension had defined the Jewish faith in a whole new way. The Holy Spirit had been sent to the believers to empower them to be witnesses all over the world (Acts 1:8). Paul's and Barnabus were "set apart" to be witnesses to Who Jesus what and what He had taught them (Acts 13:1-3). They were also sent to help those who were lost in darkness such that they could see the light of the Good News that their sins could be forgiven and a new relationship with God could be established through faith in Jesus (Acts 13:38-39).

On their travels they often went to the Jewish synagogue to share how Jesus was the fulfillment of the promised long awaited Messiah (Acts 13:33-39). They gave convincing evidence to the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles that Jesus matched the description of the One from God Who would provide salvation. Jesus had risen from the grave, therefore, sealing the case that He was the Christ (Acts 13:32-33). In today's reading, we find Paul and Barnabus being invited back to the synagogue to continue sharing their insights about God's work through Christ.

First Reading:

Note: Paul's speech in Antioch was omitted from the reading. If you would like to read the speech it

is included at the end of the study in the "Going Deeper" section.

> *Acts 13:14 NAS95 14 But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.*
>
> *Acts 13:43-52 NAS95 43 Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God. 44 The next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord. 45 But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming. 46 Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. 47 "For so the Lord has commanded us, 'I HAVE PLACED YOU AS A LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES, THAT YOU MAY BRING SALVATION TO THE END OF THE EARTH.'" 48 When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. 49 And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region. 50 But the Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. 51 But they shook off the dust of their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. 52 And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.*

As a result of Paul's speech the previous week, a large group from the city gathered such that they didn't miss Paul's second address. The Jews received this second message of Paul very jealously which resulted in them instituting persecution of Paul and Barnabus by "incit[ing] the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city" (v. 50) such that they were driven out of the city. However, many of the Gentiles in the mixed crowd heard Paul's speech and responded in faith (v. 48). Paul and Barnabus did as Jesus had commanded the disciples (Matthew 10:14) and shook the dust of the feet in protest while they left that city and went on to Iconium (v. 51).

The reading marks the transition point of Paul's ministry from the Jews to the Gentiles (v. 46) which then became his primary ministry (see Galatians 1:16, Romans 15:15-16). Paul said later about this in Romans, "But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous" (Romans 11:11b). The outpouring of God's Spirit on the Gentiles was something that the prophets predicted long ago. Isaiah said, "I will make you a light to the Gentiles, and you will bring my salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6). This marks the dawn of a new and unseen era, the church age. Paul spoke about this later in his ministry:

> *25 Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God,*

> *26 that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints,*
>
> *27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. (Colossians 1:25-27).*

The big idea in the reading is that in the midst of rejection and persecution, the Word of the Lord is still able to penetrate and transform hearts.

Next, we move onto the second reading in which we will see the eternal impact of Paul's ministry on the eternal lives of believers from around the world.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The context of the reading from the Book of Revelation is a "parenthesis," or pause in John's revealing of the seven seal judgments being unveiled by Jesus. We cannot overstate the importance of understanding the context of any reading, but especially when we are dealing with the end-time events portrayed here in the Book of Revelation. When reading Revelation one has to understand that the story moves between visions of events happening on earth to things happening in heaven. Along the way there are frequent pauses in the action, or "parenthesis," where the vision shifts from earth to heaven or vice versa.

Looking back from today's reading in chapter 7, beginning in chapter 6 Jesus pours out a series of judgments on the earth (Revelation 6:1-17). With the unleashing of the sixth seal, great signs are seen in the sky (Revelation 6:12). This accords with what Jesus spoke about in Matthew 24:29-30. John said, "I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood" (Revelation 6:12). Jesus said about this in Matthew, "But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (Matthew 24:29). The next verse in this section of Mathew provides is with strong clue as to the overall context of the signs as it relates to Jesus' promised return (Acts 1:11). Jesus said, "And **then** the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory" (Matthew 29:30, emphasis added). Jesus said that He would return after the display of the signs in the sky, which is just before the seventh seal judgment is poured out on the earth. This brings us to the parenthesis in the text from which we find today's reading, after the revelation of the six seal, but before the return of the Lord Jesus and the unveiling of the seventh seal.

The event that happens before the parenthesis of today's reading is another tangential pause in which John records the gathering of 12 groups of elect saints (meaning believers) from within Israel. John records the details of this event in the opening of chapter 7:

> *1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four*

> *winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. 2 And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, 3 saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads." 4 And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: (Revelation 7:1-4).*

The angels divinely mark 12 "tribes" of Israelites consisting of a large number of 12,000 from each group. The value of 12,000 is perhaps not a literal number but rather indicative of the fullness or total completion of the task. Regardless, this marking is such that these people are set apart in a way that they receive God's divine protection during the balance of the tribulation period, some three and half years. John makes this clear later in Chapter 12. "But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent" (Revelation 12:14). This "sealing of the bondservants of our God" is also indicated in the parallel passage in Matthew. Jesus says in that Gospel about this event, "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other" (Matthew 24:31). This divine sealing, marking or protecting occurs just before Jesus' return and the unleashing of the final judgements upon the earth including the seventh seal, seven trumpet judgements and seven bowl judgments. The bowl judgments conclude the wrath that God has stored out to pour out upon the unbelieving world at the end of the age. "Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished" (Revelation 15:1).

After the divine "sealing" is completed, the story moves to John's parenthetical vision of a large group of believers in heaven, which is where we pick up at today's reading.

Second Reading:

> Note: Verse 13, which was omitted from the reading, is included separately.
>
> *Revelation 7:9 NAS95 9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands;*
>
> *Omitted verse: Re 7:13 ¶ Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?"*
>
> *Revelation 7:14-17 NAS95 14 I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. 16 They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat*

> *down on them, nor any heat; 17 for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes."*

In the reading John said, "After these things," meaning after the sealing of the "144,000" (Revelation 7:4) and the outpouring of the first six seal judgments upon the earth. The scene now shifts back from events happening on the earth to events happening in heaven. We must be cautious in our interpretation of the events in heaven because those occur outside of the space / time domain to which we are bound to on earth. However, John's juxtaposition of this parenthesis in this exact spot in Revelation is significant because it indicates the source of the great cloud of believers about which John is speaking in the reading. Verse 14 reveals that the source of the "great multitude" (v. 9a) are "the ones who come out of the great tribulation." These "tribulation saints" are the believers who are killed for their faith as the end of age grinds to a halt during the reign of the Antichrist on earth. Later John says about this wicked person, "It was also given to him to **make war with the saints and to overcome them**, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him" (Revelation 13:7, emphasis added). During this terrible time, the reign of the Antichrist will be so strong as to almost fatalistically determine the outcome of each person alive on earth at the time. "If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints" (Revelation 13:10). The saints that are killed during this time will be divinely protected in heaven forever; in contrast to the "144,000," we saw who are divinely protected on earth during the tribulation period. This group in heaven will no longer hunger or thirst, or be too hot or too cold" (v. 16) "for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd" (v. 17a). We will read more about Jesus' role as Shepherd in the Gospel lesson. Many of the Christian saints on earth during this time will be martyred for their faith, while the "144,000" will enter the Millennial Kingdom alive to repopulate the earth. When Jesus returns He will gather the saints (believers) that have survived up until that point as well as those saints that died in the Lord. Saint Paul said about this, "Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). This is the return of the Lord promised in Acts 1:11 and the rapture (or catching up) of all believers both alive and dead as stated in this verse from 1 Thessalonians.

The big idea in the reading is that even though this world does not recognize and treat God's people (saints) well, these verses reassure us that there will be justice and provision in the life to come with a sense of eternal comfort. We see how Jesus acted as the divine Shepherd of His sheep in heaven. As we move onto the Gospel reading, we will see how Jesus portrays Himself as the Shepherd of His sheep on earth.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from Saint John. The Book of John casts Jesus as the Son of God and speaks of

eternal life in terms of knowing Him. The context of today's reading is Jesus' teaching on His role as the Shepherd of the true sheep in contrast to the false sheep and false shepherds that abounded in Israel during this time of extreme satanic activity surrounding Jesus' ministry.

Gospel Reading:

John 10:27-30 NAS95 27 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; 28 and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one."

The big idea in the reading is that God offers security to believers through the Great Shepherd Jesus Christ. Throughout the Scripture, the Lord God pictures Himself as the "Shepherd of the Sheep," and this occurs early in the Bible. The first time this concept appears is back in the Book of Genesis when Jacob was prophesizing about the twelve sons (and tribes) of Israel, this time about Joseph. "Joseph is a fruitful bough, A fruitful bough by a spring; Its branches run over a wall. The archers bitterly attacked him, And shot at him and harassed him; But his bow remained firm, And his arms were agile, From the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel)" (Genesis 49:22-24). The shepherd theme is reminiscent of the opening of Psalm 23, "The LORD is my Shepherd, I shall not want" v. 1). As we examine today's reading we find additional insight into the identity of this Shepherd of Israel. He emerges as a Shepherd-King figure Who has a special relationship with the LORD. This is none other than the Lord Jesus Himself, the about whom Jesus says of Himself, "I and the Father are one" (v. 30).

As believers in Jesus, we can find great comfort from John's writing. First, God will never lose any of His sheep, meaning that God Himself places a calling upon our lives to come to faith in His Son Jesus Christ (v. 28). Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:44). Second, we can trust that God will take care of us in the same way that a Good Shepherd takes care of His sheep. Finally, although we may feel judged by worldly people in this age, the only real judgment that counts is our True Judge the Lord Jesus Himself. We can trust that God's judgment will be correct in that as we enter eternity He will judge between the lost sheep and evil shepherds in our land and differentiate between the ones that do good in serving Him.

Reflection Questions

1. How does the reading from the Gospel of John give you assurance that you are one of God's sheep? Some characteristics of His sheep are:

- His sheep hear His voice,
- Jesus assures us that He knows us, and
- His sheep follow him.

How can you use this Scripture to help you know that you are in the sheepfold and to counteract the doubts that the enemy uses against you to make you question your faith?

2. Looking at the first reading, how does the fact that Paul and Barnabus were met with rejection and violence while at the same time experiencing a degree of welcome give you an interpretative framework for your own experiences of sharing the Word of God with others?

Going Deeper

The following is Paul's speech to the Jews and Jewish converts (proselytes, Acts 13:43) in Antioch:

> *Acts 13:15-42 NAS95 15 After the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, "Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it." 16 Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, "Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: 17 "The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He led them out from it. 18 "For a period of about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness. 19 "When He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land as an inheritance–all of which took about four hundred and fifty years. 20 "After these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. 21 "Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. 22 "After He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, 'I HAVE FOUND DAVID the son of Jesse, A MAN AFTER MY HEART, who will do all My will.' 23 "From the descendants of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, 24 after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. 25 "And while John was completing his course, he kept saying, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not He. But behold, one is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.' 26 "Brethren, sons of Abraham's family, and those among you who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent. 27 "For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning Him. 28 "And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed. 29 "When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb. 30 "But God raised Him from the dead; 31 and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people. 32 "And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, 33 that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU.' 34 "As for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: 'I WILL GIVE YOU THE HOLY and SURE blessings OF DAVID.' 35 "Therefore He also says in another Psalm, 'YOU WILL NOT ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY.' 36 "For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own*

> *generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay; 37 but He whom God raised did not undergo decay. 38 "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, 39 and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses. 40 "Therefore take heed, so that the thing spoken of in the Prophets may not come upon you: 41 'BEHOLD, YOU SCOFFERS, AND MARVEL, AND PERISH; FOR I AM ACCOMPLISHING A WORK IN YOUR DAYS, A WORK WHICH YOU WILL NEVER BELIEVE, THOUGH SOMEONE SHOULD DESCRIBE IT TO YOU.'" 42 As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging that these things might be spoken to them the next Sabbath.*

Study Questions for Going Deeper:

1. Briefly trace the history of God's work in the world to bring people to reconcile people to Himself. For example:

- God chose the Jews and made them great in a foreign land (v. 17)
- . . .

2. List all of the evidence given by Paul in this passage to prove Jesus' Messiahship.

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 04-22-2018

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the first reading from Acts 4 in which we see Jesus as the Chief Cornerstone, the One whom the builders rejected. Then we cover the second reading from First John in which we learn more about the nature of a believer whose heart has been changed by God. We conclude with the Gospel lesson from John 10 where we see an illustration that Jesus gave of Himself as our Good Shepherd.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Acts. The context is just after Peter's sermon given to the people gathered at the portico of Solomon (Acts 3:11-26) and following the miraculous healing of the man lame from birth (Acts 3:2-11). These events greatly disturbed "the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees" (Acts 4:1) "because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (4:2). At this point, Peter and some of the disciples were taken into custody, most likely protective custody (4:3). The church continued to grow as a result of the preaching and reached a total size of four thousand people (4:4). The next morning Peter and the disciples were presented to a group including the high priest and two others of priestly descent (4:4-6) at which point they asked them, "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?" (4:7). This led to Peter's response which is covered in the first reading.

First Reading:

> *Acts 4:8-12 NAS95 8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people, 9 if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, 10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead–by this name this man stands here before you in good health. 11 He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by*

> *you, THE BUILDERS, but WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone. 12 And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."*

Peter explained to the Jewish rulers that the lame man was healed by the miraculous power of Jesus Christ whom they crucified (v. 9). He went on to explain that this Jesus is the Messiah, then quoted from the Bible evidence showing that their rejection of Him was prophesied to occur. Peter quoted from Psalm 118:22 which said, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone." In the context of the audience, the builders who rejected the cornerstone can be seen as the unbelieving Jewish leaders. Finally, Peter combined the teaching from Isaiah 28:16 that said something similar about the cornerstone but added the element of belief in Jesus for salvation. Isaiah, speaking on behalf of God said, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, a costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed. He who **believes in it** will not be disturbed" (Isaiah 28:16b, emphasis added). Peter's teaching wasn't new to the disciples because Jesus had Himself taught that the belief in Him was the only way to get to heaven. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). Jesus used the expression "I am" in this passage as a strong statement of His divinity. We will see Jesus' use of this term again in the Gospel lesson.

Peter's bold speech contains some crucially important truths. Faith in Jesus as the Messiah, which fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy of the Chief Cornerstone, is the only way to get to heaven. There is no other Person through whom we can gain forgiveness of our sin; this can come through faith in Jesus Christ alone. These truths are just as applicable to the "rulers and elders of the people" (v. 8) as they are to "all the people of Israel" (v. 10) and by application to everyone in the universe.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The free gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9) comes about, as we will see in the second reading, as a result of God's great love for us. The context of this reading from First John is the apostle's teaching on the evidences and nature of true salvation of a believer. John opened Chapter 2 by saying, "By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:3-4). Keeping the commandments of God is evidence of a heart that has been changed by God. Today's reading opens in Chapter 3 by expanding this teaching to include the special relationship that exists between God and the believer.

Second Reading:

> *1 John 3:1-2 NAS95 1 See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.*

John said that believers in Jesus Christ are bestowed with a special relationship with God, that of "children of God" (v. 1). This was in contrast to those who don't know God, whom Jesus called children of their father the devil (John 8:44), something that he said to the very religious Pharisees. Faith in Christ bestows a special relationship on the believer with God, that of sonship (John 1:12; Romans 8:14-17). The person whose heart has been changed by God stands in contrast to the values of the worldly people around us (v. 1d). This was John's point in the previous chapter and one of the main ideas that he continues to bring out in the entirety of this letter.

Besides our present status as children of God, John tells of an additional blessing from God in how as a believer in some future time we will become like Jesus because we will see Jesus with eyes opened and will be freed from our sinful flesh (v. 2). Perhaps we will have some of the same powers that Jesus had, Who was able to walk through walls (John 20:19). Whatever the case, we will possess supernatural powers and freedom in our glorified bodies (Romans 8:18). Paul describes our current bodies as perishable, dishonorable, and weak, all due to sin (1 Corinthians 15:42-53). However, our imperishable bodies will be perfect, like Jesus, and unhindered by sin. For this we have only God to thank. "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are" (v. 1).

John's teaching here brings out the reality of our redeemed standing in God. We do not have to perform to get Him to love us. Instead, because we belong to Him as a child of God, we learn how to walk in a way that is consistent with our new identity. The world will not know what to do with us, for we will exhibit the fruit of God's Spirit within us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Opposition, persecution, and being looked down on for our faith is just an opportunity for God to display His nature in us. If these things do not fully characterize our daily lives, we can pray for God to continue His work in us as His children to help us to live in light of our true identity.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

As we transition to the Gospel reading, we must remember the raucous caused by Peter as he healed the man lame from birth that we learned about in the first reading. In the Gospel, we see Jesus teaching just after He healed a blind man and afterwards confronted the Pharisees (John 9). The message today alludes to Ezekiel 34, where God condemned the shepherds of Israel, meaning the spiritual leaders (Ezekiel 34:1-10). Ezekiel announced God's strong judgment on the kings, priests, and prophets who ruled before the exile of the Jews to Babylon. God said, "Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will demand My sheep from them and make them cease from feeding sheep. So, the shepherds will not feed themselves anymore, but I will deliver My flock from their mouth, so that they will not be food for them" (Ezekiel 34:10). It's not coincidental that Jesus' message came just after He told a group of Pharisees that they were spiritually blind (John 9:41).

This section of Scripture is profound in that throughout the Chapter Jesus uses a metaphor of Himself as the Shepherd and the Door, with us (the children of God) as the sheep. Other characters come into play in the lesson including a hired hand, owner, and wolf. As you read, think about the

contemporary application of these characters as Jesus' illustration unfolds. In the world today, who are the hired hands and wolves to whom Jesus was pointing?

Gospel Reading:

> *John 10:11-18 NAS95 11 "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. 12 He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, 15 even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd. 17 For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. 18 No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father."*

It's evident that Jesus' message was pointed squarely at the Pharisees, a group of selfishly motivated "lay ministers" (shepherds) of Israel identified as the wolves and hired hands in this story (v. 12). Clearly, the owner of the sheep is God the Father, and Jesus stated outright that He is the Good Shepherd. He even added extra emphasis by using the Greek term transliterated "ego eimi," translated "I Am" (v. 11), a term which Jesus had repeated multiple times about Himself beginning in John 6:35. This phrase was something that the First Century Jews would have recognized as a strong statement of divinity. In Jesus' earlier use of this phrase in this Gospel He said, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35), and "I am the light of the world" (John 8:35). In today's reading Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd" (v. 11a). Jesus is our protector, the one who provides us with spiritual sustenance, and protects us from our enemies. He is the Light of truth from God, the Light that leads us to the single door to obtain eternal life, the only way to God.

Jesus went on to explain, with the context of the Pharisees in mind, that the plan of salvation would be extended to the "other sheep" (v. 16), meaning the Gentiles, and they would join with the flock of the believing Jews. He foreshadowed His death by telling how the shepherd would lay down His life for the combined Jewish and Gentile flock. Finally, Jesus made a very important point that He was not a victim. He said that He was given the power by His Father to lay down His life for His sheep. Nowhere in the Bible is Jesus ever portrayed as a victim. On the night He was betrayed Jesus said, "Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:53). Jesus gave up His life in voluntary submission to the Father. This teaching has important implications for our daily walk as believers. As we contemplate Jesus' voluntary sacrifice for us, would we not want to voluntarily reciprocate and sacrifice our misguided desires for Him? The call of the Gospel is one of invitation, not coercion and manipulation. Jesus' voluntary death on the cross built a bridge of trust to us in our desperate situation. May we cross the bridge of trust and learn to walk with Him on a daily basis.

Finally, Jesus is our protector from the wolves. Though Jesus directed His message to the Pharisees, these ungodly forces are alive and well in the present day. All one has to do is click through the television dial on any given day to find spiritual charlatans peddling their wares all across the airwaves. False spiritual cults and belief systems abound, as do global religious movements that enthrone the false god of the moon and objects in temples. Peter said about the false teachers, "But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed" (2 Peter 2:12). Though we live in a fallen age where spiritual darkness is present across the world, we are called as the ones that God knows by name to continue to plead with the lost and dying generation to repent of their sins and be baptized, trusting only in the Lord Jesus for spiritual life.

Reflection Questions

1. Jesus is referred to as our Good Shepherd and the Guardian of our soul. In what areas are you struggling on your own and need to let Him into your life to shepherd you? How does this guardianship of your soul change how you view life and your decisions?

2. In all three passages, we see a variety of angles to identify the greatness of Jesus:

    He is the Chief Cornerstone of the faith

    He is the One who will appear and make us like Him when He returns for believers

    He is the Good Shepherd

Write out your response to these descriptions of Jesus and what difference this should make in your life. Pray this back to the Lord and ask Him to help you to internalize these realities in your soul.

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday,

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5-7-2017



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the first reading from Peter's speech on the Day of Pentecost when God sent the Holy Spirit to the rapidly growing Church. Then we move to the second reading and continue our study in the Book of First Peter. Finally, we close with the Gospel lesson from the tenth chapter of the Gospel of Saint John.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Chapter 2 of the Book of Acts. The context is Peter's speech to a crowd of about 120 followers of Christ (Acts 1:15) on the Day of Pentecost, 50 days after that first Easter Sunday. Just before Peter's speech, God poured out His Holy Spirit upon the followers which empowered them to speak in many known languages. Since this was unusual, some in the crowd that were gathered for the feast accused them of being drunk (Acts 2:13). In response to this allegation, Peter addressed the crowd to explain the reason for this unusual occurrence. Today's reading then jumps to verse 36 because these intermediate verses were covered last week. The opening word in verse 36 is the adverb "therefore." Without considering the context of the intermediate verses, a significant amount of information is left out that is relevant to this last section. Since we always need to understand what the "therefore" is there for, we will summarize the important points from the intermediate verses (15 – 35). First, read the opening of Peter's address in verse 14.

14 But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words."

Peter said in other words, "listen up." Next, he immediately corrected some of the people's false

assumptions that the followers of Christ were drunk (v. 15). He said that what was happening was the fulfillment of the Prophet Joel's message (v.16) regarding God's pouring out of His Spirit on all mankind in the end times (Joel 2:28 – 32). In retrospect, we understand that what Peter meant was that this was a partial fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. After Peter quoted from this section of Joel, he presented testimony about how the people crucified "Jesus the Nazarene" and God raised Him from the dead (vv. 22 – 24). Next, Peter quoted from the Psalms to show how Jesus also fulfilled those prophetic writings by King David (vv.25 – 28). He noted that David died and his tomb is "with us to this day" (v.29), but Jesus fulfilled the prophecy that Someone would sit on David's throne (vv. 30 – 31). Saint Matthew went to great lengths to show that Jesus was of the line of David (Matthew 1:1-17). Additionally, the Prophet Isaiah stated explicitly that the Messiah would be of the line of David (Isaiah 9:6-7). Next Peter said, "This Jesus, God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear" (vv. 32-33). Peter closed this section of his address by again quoting from a Psalm, this time one that contained a conversation between God the Father and God the Son. "THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, 'SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET'" (vv. 34a – 35). To summarize, the sending of the Holy Spirit was a partial fulfillment of Joel's prophecy that signaled the start of the end times, after the Messiah came. Second, Jesus fulfilled the prophecies that He would be of the line of David. Finally, in the future Jesus the Lord will overcome all of His enemies, and be exalted above all of creation (1 Corinthians 15:27).

Now let's proceed with the reading.

First Reading:

36 "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ–this Jesus whom you crucified." 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. (Acts 2:14, 36-41)

To paraphrase, Pete said some something like, "Therefore," take into account the authority of the prophetic Scriptures from which I previously quoted and how Jesus perfectly fulfilled them. God made Jesus both the Supreme Master ("Lord") and Messiah ("Christ," or "Anointed One," meaning Deliverer) (v. 36).

Peter's speech had a profound impact upon the crowd. "Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart" and then asked Peter what they should do (v. 37). Peter told them to repent and be baptized, and then they too would receive the Holy Spirit (v. 38). Why do you think this

happened, why were they "pierced to the heart"? Did Peter's speech have a profound impact upon **you** after you read it?

Here are some insights into possible reasons why Peter's speech had such a profound impact upon the Jewish audience who were gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost). First, the Jews were "people of the Book." These were the ones to whom God first revealed His plan of salvation. God, through His sovereign plan, had gathered the Jews together in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Weeks to coincide with His outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the group of 120 followers of Jesus. To the Jews, the authority of God was vested in the Holy Books, the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. Once Peter explained with compelling evidence that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Holy Books, the Jews evidently recognized the overwhelming evidence in support of Jesus as God's Promised Messiah. A second possible reason why Peter's speech had a profound impact upon the Jews gathered for the Feast was the sheer magnanimity of what happened after the Holy Spirit of God had settled upon the group of believers. "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance. And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language" (Acts 2:4, 6). Imagine the scene. Pilgrims from the various language groups all around the Roman Empire were gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of Weeks. Next, the pilgrims heard this group of Galileans speaking, but each one of them heard and understood in their own language! This great miracle would have had a profound impact upon the people.

Because of this cascading series of events the pilgrims who heard Peter's message were convicted of their sin, they were "pierced to the heart" (v.37). A total of 3,000 Jews who heard Peter's speech repented and were baptized in one day.

We cannot underestimate the power that God unveiled that day in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit of God is the Person of God that lives inside of us, the One that empowers the Church. He is the Power (Dunamis in Greek, similar to Dynamite in English) spoken of Jesus when He said that "the disciples would receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1:8). He is the One who started the Church that day in Jerusalem. He is God With Us, living in us, the Immanuel of Christ Whom God said "would never leave us nor forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6), the One that Jesus said would be in us (John 14:17).

As we leave the first reading and the events of that magical day in Jerusalem, let us endeavor to focus upon how God the Holy Spirit empowers and emboldens **us** to accomplish God's work in our lives. Let's also recognize how the Holy Spirit worked through Peter as he testified about how Jesus suffered and died for our sins, which will be revealed in the next reading.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is another portion of Peter's experience of Jesus. Let's see how Peter used the authority of the Old Testament to affirm his argument about how Jesus Christ suffered as a perfect

Man for us.

Second Reading:

20 For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. 21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, 22 WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; 23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. 25 For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls. (1 Peter 2:20-25)

The people were struggling with various forms of persecution for their faith, as well as finding their identity in Jesus Christ. They may have asked something like, "Why, if I am a Christian, do I have to suffer persecution, when all I have done is to believe the truth of God and follow His commandments?" The answer, according to the Holy Spirit, as recorded by Peter, is that we as believers are called by God to suffer (v.21) with Jesus as our example on how we are to go about it. "[W]hile being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously" (v.23). Peter said that Jesus died for our sins, "so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed" (v. 24). It was through Jesus death on the cross that He freed us from the power of sin (Romans 8:2). We suffer for a wide variety of reasons, one of which is to accomplish the purposes of God (v.20d).

Have you developed your own personal "theology of suffering?" Have you rationalized, in light of the Scriptures, why bad things happen to "good" (Romans 3:23) people? These are good things to wrestle with even before hard times fall upon us. One way that suffering benefits us is that it helps us to identify ourselves with Christ Who suffered for us. There is a fellowship or bond that comes from suffering with someone. God invites us into a bond with Christ as we go through hard times and persecution.

I became friends with a man named Ron Christy several years ago just before he was diagnosed with ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease). Ron provided a powerful story about how a Christian can suffer while still providing a strong testimony for the Lord. You can read Ron's testimony online at the following link: https://www.christiansforchrist.org/articles/testimonies/ron-christy-my-walk-of-faith-with-als

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Peter's words about returning to the "Shepherd and Guardian of our souls" sets the perfect stage for the Gospel lesson from John Chapter 10. The context of His message is just after He healed a blind man and afterwards confronted the Pharisees (John 9). This section of Scripture is profound in that throughout the Chapter Jesus uses a metaphor of Himself as the Shepherd and the Door, with us as the sheep. Other characters come into play in the lesson including a gatekeeper, robbers, thieves,

and strangers. As you read, think about the contemporary application of these characters as Jesus' illustration unfolds. In the world today, who are the robbers, thieves, and strangers to whom Jesus was pointing?

Gospel Reading:

1 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. 2 But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers." 6 This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them. 7 So Jesus said to them again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. 9 I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:1-10)

Jesus' story alluded to Ezekiel 34, where God condemned the shepherds of Israel, meaning the spiritual leaders (Ezekiel 34:1-10). Ezekiel announced God's strong judgment on the kings, priests, and prophets who ruled before the exile of the Jews to Babylon. God said, "Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will demand My sheep from them and make them cease from feeding sheep. So the shepherds will not feed themselves anymore, but I will deliver My flock from their mouth, so that they will not be food for them" (Ezekiel 34:10). It's not coincidental that Jesus' message came just after He told a group of Pharisees that they were spiritually blind (John 9:41). It's evident that Jesus message was pointed squarely at the Pharisees, a group of spiritual "lay ministers" (shepherds) of Israel.

A wealth of rich points can be drawn from the reading. First, notice how as the story unfolded that Jesus was the Shepherd (v. 2), then in verse 7 he became the "door of the sheep" which led to the pasture (v. 9d). In the first century, the shepherds sometimes slept in the gate in order to protect their sheep. Anyone or anything that wanted to come into the sheepfold would have to enter through the gate and thereby come past the shepherd. By application, Jesus is saying that the only way to God is through Him. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). Faith in Jesus is the only means provided by God for a person to cross into Jesus' fold and be saved (v. 9).

Second, if you have ever visited the areas around Jerusalem you will notice that the shepherds in the region stand at various positions around the sheepfold and summon the animals with their own unique calls. The application of this principle is that Jesus calls His people to God's Kingdom. Jesus went even further than a communal call to His sheep, He said, "he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out" (v. 3c). Jesus knows each one of us, his precious sheep. Later, beyond the range of today's reading, Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me"

(John 10:14). This means that Jesus desires a personal relationship with each of us.

Third, notice Jesus' "I am" statement in verse 7, which is the third of this type of statement in John's Gospel (in the English translation, in the Greek text this is the 13'th). This phrase was something that the First Century Jews would have recognized as a strong statement of divinity. In Jesus' earlier use of this phrase in John's Gospel He said, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35), and "I am the light of the world" (John 8:35). In today's reading Jesus said, "I am the door" (v. 9a). Jesus is our source of life, our spiritual sustenance. He is the Light of truth from God, the Light that leads us to the single door to obtain eternal life, the only way to God.

Fourth, Jesus is our protector from the spiritual thieves, strangers, and wild animals. Though Jesus directed His message to the Pharisees, these ungodly forces are alive and well in the present day. All one has to do is click through the television dial on any given day to find spiritual charlatans peddling their wares all across the airwaves. False spiritual cults abound, as do global religious movements that enthrone the false god of the moon and objects in temples. Peter said about the false teachers, "But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed" (2 Peter 2:12). Though we live in a fallen age where spiritual darkness is present across the world, we are called as the ones that God knows by name to continue to plead with the lost and dying generation to repent of their sins and be baptized, trusting only in the Lord Jesus for spiritual life.

Some years ago, I completed a study of the Book of Genesis and made an interesting observation about God's gathering of the animals into the ark. The Bible says, "So they went into the ark to Noah, by twos of all flesh in which was the breath of life" (Genesis 7:15). The insight that I had was that many of the people in that region that had either watched, or possibly even been involved in the building of the ark, had to have seen the animals entering two by two into the ark. Perhaps the people on the outside were saying something like, "There they go, two by two into the ark, just like Preacher Noah had said they would." Noah, a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5) must have suffered terribly knowing all the people that he ministered to perished, except for his small family. The story went on, "Those that entered, male and female of all flesh, entered as God had commanded him; and the LORD closed it behind him" (v. 16). In retrospect, it was easy for them to be convinced of Noah's prophecy regarding the Great Flood once the door of the ark was sealed shut by God and the deluge began. Noah would have allowed anyone entrance to the ark, right up until the time the flood began. Instead of just eight people being saved (1 Peter 3:20), the Scripture **could** have read something like this:

"On the very same day Noah and Shem and Ham and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them, entered the ark" (Genesis 7:13).

Then, as just before God sealed the door of the ark shut, a man named John came running up the

ramp into the ark (my words added).

"[W]hen 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" (1 Peter 3:20).

And a man named John (my words added).

The animals are walking two by two into the proverbial ark right now. God is gathering His people through their faith in the Jesus, who was foreshadowed in the ark. In the Gospel lesson today, Jesus gathered and called His people by name into the pen where He protected them and fed them. Jesus is the ark, He is our only means of escaping the flood of judgment that will come upon the unsaved world because of their sin. Someday God will once again seal up the "ark," forbidding anyone else to cross from death into life. In the parable of the ten virgins Jesus said, "And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut" (Matthew 25:10). John said in Revelation, "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (Revelation 21:8).

Our first response is to make sure that we have put our trust in Jesus for salvation. Have you resolve this in your own heart, that when you give an account for your life you can honestly say you trusted in Jesus, not your own good works? Our next response is to warn the world of the coming judgment and point them to the only possible means of salvation, repentance of their sin and faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20). Amen.

Reflection Questions

1. What does it look like in your life to shine your light in a dark world to those "outside the ark"? What is one concrete step that you could begin praying about and take in the upcoming weeks to reach one person for Jesus?

2. Although we asked you to identify the contemporary roles of the various bad actors in the Gospel lesson the focus wasn't upon the evil actors but upon Jesus as the only means to reach God. In light of what you learned, what, or who, are the evil actors that are influencing your life in terms of walking with God, and how does Jesus protect and deliver you from them?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 4-17-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **4-17-2016**. This week we will study readings from the Book of Acts, Revelation and the Gospel of John. We will go into some great depth on the first two readings. We hope that you both enjoy and learn something this week from our study and that you are forever spoiled for the ordinary.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Acts. Paul and Barnabus were on their first missionary journey to share the Word of God in the Jewish synagogues (Acts 13:4). So much happened in Jerusalem that they wanted others to know – Jesus Christ's death, resurrection and ascension had defined the Jewish faith in a whole new way. The Holy Spirit had been sent to the believers to empower them to be witnesses all over the world (Acts 1:8). Paul's and Barnabus were "set apart" to be witnesses to Who Jesus what and what He had taught them (Acts 13:1-3). They were also sent to help those who were lost in darkness such that they could see the light of the Good News that their sins could be forgiven and a new relationship with God could be established through faith in Jesus (Acts 13:38-39).

On their travels they often went to the Jewish synagogue to share how Jesus was the fulfillment of the promised long awaited Messiah (Acts 13:33-39). They gave convincing evidence to the Jews and

God-fearing Gentiles that Jesus matched the description of the One from God Who would provide salvation. Jesus had risen from the grave, therefore, sealing the case that He was the Christ (Acts 13:32-33). In today's reading, we find Paul and Barnabus being invited back to the synagogue to continue sharing their insights about God's work through Christ.

First Reading:

Note: Paul's speech in Antioch was omitted from the reading. If you would like to read the speech it is included at the end of the study in the "Going Deeper" section.

Acts 13:14 NAS95 14 But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.

Acts 13:43-52 NAS95 43 Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God. 44 The next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord. 45 But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming. 46 Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. 47 "For so the Lord has commanded us, 'I HAVE PLACED YOU AS A LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES, THAT YOU MAY BRING SALVATION TO THE END OF THE EARTH.'" 48 When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. 49 And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region. 50 But the Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. 51 But they shook off the dust of their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. 52 And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

As a result of Paul's speech the previous week, a large group from the city gathered such that they didn't miss Paul's second address. The Jews received this second message of Paul very jealously which resulted in them instituting persecution of Paul and Barnabus by "incit[ing] the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city" (v. 50) such that they were driven out of the city. However, many of the Gentiles in the mixed crowd heard Paul's speech and responded in faith (v. 48). Paul and Barnabus did as Jesus had commanded the disciples (Matthew 10:14) and shook the dust of the feet in protest while they left that city and went on to Iconium (v. 51).

The reading marks the transition point of Paul's ministry from the Jews to the Gentiles (v. 46) which then became his primary ministry (see Galatians 1:16, Romans 15:15-16). Paul said later about this in Romans, "But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous" (Romans 11:11b). The outpouring of God's Spirit on the Gentiles was something that the prophets predicted long ago. Isaiah said, "I will make you a light to the Gentiles, and you will bring my

salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6). This marks the dawn of a new and unseen era, the church age. Paul spoke about this later in his ministry:

25 Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God,

26 that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints,

27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. (Colossians 1:25-27).

The big idea in the reading is that in the midst of rejection and persecution, the Word of the Lord is still able to penetrate and transform hearts.

Next, we move onto the second reading in which we will see the eternal impact of Paul's ministry on the eternal lives of believers from around the world.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The context of the reading from the Book of Revelation is a "parenthesis," or pause in John's revealing of the seven seal judgments being unveiled by Jesus. We cannot overstate the importance of understanding the context of any reading, but especially when we are dealing with the end-time events portrayed here in the Book of Revelation. When reading Revelation one has to understand that the story moves between visions of events happening on earth to things happening in heaven. Along the way there are frequent pauses in the action, or "parenthesis," where the vision shifts from earth to heaven or vice versa.

Looking back from today's reading in chapter 7, beginning in chapter 6 Jesus pours out a series of judgments on the earth (Revelation 6:1-17). With the unleashing of the sixth seal, great signs are seen in the sky (Revelation 6:12). This accords with what Jesus spoke about in Matthew 24:29-30. John said, "I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood" (Revelation 6:12). Jesus said about this in Matthew, "But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (Matthew 24:29). The next verse in this section of Mathew provides is with strong clue as to the overall context of the signs as it relates to Jesus' promised return (Acts 1:11). Jesus said, "And **then** the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory" (Matthew 29:30, emphasis added). Jesus said that He would return after the display of the signs in the sky, which is just before the seventh seal judgment is poured out on the earth. This brings us to the parenthesis in the text from which we find today's reading, after the revelation of the six seal, but before the return of the Lord

Jesus and the unveiling of the seventh seal.

The event that happens before the parenthesis of today's reading is another tangential pause in which John records the gathering of 12 groups of elect saints (meaning believers) from within Israel. John records the details of this event in the opening of chapter 7:

1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. 2 And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, 3 saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads." 4 And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: (Revelation 7:1-4).

The angels divinely mark 12 "tribes" of Israelites consisting of a large number of 12,000 from each group. The value of 12,000 is perhaps not a literal number but rather indicative of the fullness or total completion of the task. Regardless, this marking is such that these people are set apart in a way that they receive God's divine protection during the balance of the tribulation period, some three and half years. John makes this clear later in Chapter 12. "But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent" (Revelation 12:14). This "sealing of the bondservants of our God" is also indicated in the parallel passage in Matthew. Jesus says in that Gospel about this event, "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other" (Matthew 24:31). This divine sealing, marking or protecting occurs just before Jesus' return and the unleashing of the final judgements upon the earth including the seventh seal, seven trumpet judgements and seven bowl judgments. The bowl judgments conclude the wrath that God has stored out to pour out upon the unbelieving world at the end of the age. "Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished" (Revelation 15:1).

After the divine "sealing" is completed, the story moves to John's parenthetical vision of a large group of believers in heaven, which is where we pick up at today's reading.

Second Reading:

Note: Verse 13, which was omitted from the reading, is included separately.

Revelation 7:9 NAS95 9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands;

Omitted verse:

Re 7:13 ¶ Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?"

Revelation 7:14-17 NAS95 14 I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. 16 They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; 17 for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes."

In the reading John said, "After these things," meaning after the sealing of the "144,000" (Revelation 7:4) and the outpouring of the first six seal judgments upon the earth. The scene now shifts back from events happening on the earth to events happening in heaven. We must be cautious in our interpretation of the events in heaven because those occur outside of the space / time domain to which we are bound to on earth. However, John's juxtaposition of this parenthesis in this exact spot in Revelation is significant because it indicates the source of the great cloud of believers about which John is speaking in the reading. Verse 14 reveals that the source of the "great multitude" (v. 9a) are "the ones who come out of the great tribulation." These "tribulation saints" are the believers who are killed for their faith as the end of age grinds to a halt during the reign of the Antichrist on earth. Later John says about this wicked person, "It was also given to him to **make war with the saints and to overcome them**, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him" (Revelation 13:7, emphasis added). During this terrible time, the reign of the Antichrist will be so strong as to almost fatalistically determine the outcome of each person alive on earth at the time. "If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints" (Revelation 13:10). The saints that are killed during this time will be divinely protected in heaven forever; in contrast to the "144,000," we saw who are divinely protected on earth during the tribulation period. This group in heaven will no longer hunger or thirst, or be too hot or too cold" (v. 16) "for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd" (v. 17a). We will read more about Jesus' role as Shepherd in the Gospel lesson. Many of the Christian saints on earth during this time will be martyred for their faith, while the "144,000" will enter the Millennial Kingdom alive to repopulate the earth. When Jesus returns He will gather the saints (believers) that have survived up until that point as well as those saints that died in the Lord. Saint Paul said about this, "Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). This is the return of the Lord promised in Acts 1:11 and the rapture (or catching up) of all believers both alive and dead as stated in this verse from 1 Thessalonians.

The big idea in the reading is that even though this world does not recognize and treat God's people (saints) well, these verses reassure us that there will be justice and provision in the life to come with a sense of eternal comfort. We see how Jesus acted as the divine Shepherd of His sheep in heaven. As we move onto the Gospel reading, we will see how Jesus portrays Himself as the Shepherd of His sheep on earth.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from Saint John. The Book of John casts Jesus as the Son of God and speaks of eternal life in terms of knowing Him. The context of today's reading is Jesus' teaching on His role as the Shepherd of the true sheep in contrast to the false sheep and false shepherds that abounded in Israel during this time of extreme satanic activity surrounding Jesus' ministry.

Gospel Reading:

John 10:27-30 NAS95 27 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; 28 and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one."

The big idea in the reading is that God offers security to believers through the Great Shepherd Jesus Christ. Throughout the Scripture, the Lord God pictures Himself as the "Shepherd of the Sheep," and this occurs early in the Bible. The first time this concept appears is back in the Book of Genesis when Jacob was prophesizing about the twelve sons (and tribes) of Israel, this time about Joseph. "Joseph is a fruitful bough, A fruitful bough by a spring; Its branches run over a wall. The archers bitterly attacked him, And shot at him and harassed him; But his bow remained firm, And his arms were agile, From the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel)" (Genesis 49:22-24). The shepherd theme is reminiscent of the opening of Psalm 23, "The LORD is my Shepherd, I shall not want" v. 1). As we examine today's reading we find additional insight into the identity of this Shepherd of Israel. He emerges as a Shepherd-King figure Who has a special relationship with the LORD. This is none other than the Lord Jesus Himself, the about whom Jesus says of Himself, "I and the Father are one" (v. 30).

As believers in Jesus, we can find great comfort from John's writing. First, God will never lose any of His sheep, meaning that God Himself places a calling upon our lives to come to faith in His Son Jesus Christ (v. 28). Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:44). Second, we can trust that God will take care of us in the same way that a Good Shepherd takes care of His sheep. Finally, although we may feel judged by worldly people in this age, the only real judgment that counts is our True Judge the Lord Jesus Himself. We can trust that God's judgment will be correct in that as we enter eternity He will judge between the lost sheep and evil shepherds in our land and differentiate between the ones that do good in serving Him.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

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1. How does the reading from the Gospel of John give you assurance that you are one of God's sheep? Some characteristics of His sheep are:

- His sheep hear His voice,
- Jesus assures us that He knows us, and
- His sheep follow him.

How can you use this Scripture to help you know that you are in the sheepfold and to counteract the doubts that the enemy uses against you to make you question your faith.

2. Looking at the first reading, how does the fact that Paul and Barnabus were met with rejection and violence while at the same time experiencing a degree of welcome give you an interpretative framework for your own experiences of sharing the Word of God with others?

Going Deeper

The following is Paul's speech to the Jews and Jewish converts (proselytes, Acts 13:43) in Antioch:

Acts 13:15-42 NAS95 15 After the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, "Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it." 16 Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, "Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: 17 "The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He led them out from it. 18 "For a period of about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness. 19 "When He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land as an inheritance–all of which took about four hundred and fifty years. 20 "After these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. 21 "Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. 22 "After He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, 'I HAVE FOUND DAVID the son of Jesse, A MAN AFTER MY HEART, who will do all My will.' 23 "From the descendants of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, 24 after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. 25 "And while John was completing his course, he kept saying, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not He. But behold, one is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.' 26 "Brethren, sons of Abraham's family, and those among you who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent. 27 "For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning Him. 28 "And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed. 29 "When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb. 30 "But God raised Him from the dead; 31 and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people. 32 "And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, 33 that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU.' 34 "As for the

fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: 'I WILL GIVE YOU THE HOLY and SURE blessings OF DAVID.' 35 "Therefore He also says in another Psalm, 'YOU WILL NOT ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY.' 36 "For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay; 37 but He whom God raised did not undergo decay. 38 "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, 39 and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses. 40 "Therefore take heed, so that the thing spoken of in the Prophets may not come upon you: 41 'BEHOLD, YOU SCOFFERS, AND MARVEL, AND PERISH; FOR I AM ACCOMPLISHING A WORK IN YOUR DAYS, A WORK WHICH YOU WILL NEVER BELIEVE, THOUGH SOMEONE SHOULD DESCRIBE IT TO YOU.'" 42 As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging that these things might be spoken to them the next Sabbath.

Study Questions:

1. Trace the history of God's work in the world to bring people to reconcile people to Himself. For example:

- God chose the Jews and made them great in a foreign land (v. 17)
- . . .

2. List all of the evidence given by Paul in this passage to prove Jesus' Messiahship.

Readings for the Week

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

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/041716.cfm

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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