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 Sunday, 1-29-2017



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with a reading from Zephaniah, one of the so-called "Minor Prophets," largely because their 12 prophecies are shorter than the Major Prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah. We will also read from 1 Corinthians and then the section of the Gospels known as the Beatitudes.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Zephaniah has been called "the Royal Prophet," probably because he was the great-great-grandson of King Hezekiah of Judah. He was the last of the prophets before the captivity of Judah and ministered during the reign of Josiah who tried to restore proper worship practices that had been pretty much abandoned in Judah. His message centers on "the Day of the LORD," which is seen from two perspectives: 1) a time of judgment against sinners, and 2) a time of blessing for those who follow God.

Today's reading, however, is in a concluding portion of the book that looks forward—beyond the captivity—to a time, yet future, when Israel will rejoice in the promised Kingdom blessing, chapter 3:9-20). Such a blessed future will be occasion to "shout for joy … shout in triumph … rejoice and exult." Why? Because God has "taken away His judgments against you" and "He has cleared away your enemies." What causes for joy and rejoicing? But, even more astounding, the promise is that God Himself will be among them. The phrase is repeated: "The LORD is in your midst" (vv. 15, 17).

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First Reading:

Zephaniah 2:3 NAS95 3 Seek the LORD, All you humble of the earth Who have carried out His ordinances; Seek righteousness, seek humility. Perhaps you will be hidden In the day of the LORD'S anger.

Zephaniah 3:12-13 NAS95 12 "But I will leave among you A humble and lowly people, And they will take refuge in the name of the LORD. 13 "The remnant of Israel will do no wrong And tell no lies, Nor will a deceitful tongue Be found in their mouths; For they will feed and lie down With no one to make them tremble."

As in other Old Testament prophecies, Zephaniah warns his people that judgment is certain; it will come at the Day of the Lord's wrath. In chapter 2, verses 1 – 3, the latter of which is included in today's reading, he admonishes them to "Seek the Lord … seek righteousness; seek humility." As today's reading continues in chapter 3, we see that here will be a restoration, when a remnant will be saved. This remnant left by God's sovereign actions among the people will be a godly people who "do no wrong and tell no lies" (v. 13).

God has always preserved a remnant of believers among His people. We saw this during the time of Elijah when even though this mightiest of all the prophets thought that all of God's people were dead, however, a remnant of 7,000 people remained (1 Kings 19:18). In a future age before the Lord Jesus returns, a remnant of Israel will arise and herald God's righteousness through the world. God will seal these "12,000 from each of the 12 tribes" and divinely protect them from the plagues coming upon the earth and the wrath of the Antichrist (Revelation 7:4, we leave it to our readers to determine whether this is a literal or symbolic number of people or just the fullness of Israel). Interestingly, the Christian believers alive during this time of trouble won't be so fortunate during their physical lives for we see how John describes "a great multitude that no one could number" in heaven who were martyred for their faith (Revelation 7:9-17).

God calls each of us as Christians to function as His faithful remnant to a dead and dying world. As we will see in the second reading, God's divine hand is upon this relatively small group of humble people to live as "called out ones," the "ekklesia" is the word used in the original Greek language. Peter says in 1 Peter 2:9, "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light." One day these two groups, those on the narrow road of the ekklesia in the Christian church and the others in the ekklesia of Jewish Israel will be joined together as one people of God.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

This reading from the opening chapter of Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians focuses upon the necessary attribute of humility found among the true believers of God in the church. These "called out" people

Second Reading:

1 Corinthians 1:26-31 NAS95 26 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; 27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, 28 and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, 29 so that no man may boast before God. 30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, 31 so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."

Paul told of how "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise." God's true believers on earth have always been considered ignored and foolish by the worldly people around them. These "walkers of the narrow road of salvation" through their faith in Jesus Christ shun the proud ways of the world surrounding them. In the same way that the people in Noah's day shunned the safety and salvation offered by God in the ark as the only means of survival, the proud in our day shun the only means of salvation offered by Jesus Christ.

Paul sums up the reading by quoting from the prophet Jeremiah who was speaking in that Old Testament context about the imminent destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians. During that time, Jeremiah said "The corpses of men will fall like dung on the open field, And like the sheaf after the reaper, But no one will gather them" (Jeremiah 9:22b). During this time of tremendous trouble that came upon the people of Jerusalem, God calling was, "but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things" (Jeremiah 9:24).

God calls us in our day to focus upon Him by boasting only in the Lord (v. 31). Faith in Jesus Christ is the only means of our rescue from a sinful and dying generation and world. Today's reading reveals to us that the attribute believers have in common among themselves is a sense of spiritual humility. True believers trust only in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross and not in their "good" works as means of earning their salvation (see Ephesians 2:8-9). "*LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD"* ***(v. 31b).***

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The message today is from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount known and contains the "Beatitudes." The Beatitudes are pronouncements of blessings for those waiting for the promises of the Messiah, and curses for those who were trying to obtain God's blessing through their own effort.

Gospel Reading:

Matthew 5:1-12 NAS95 1 When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. 2 He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying, 3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 "Blessed are those who mourn,

for they shall be comforted. 5 "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. 6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. 7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. 8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. 9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. 10 "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. 12 "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

In this reading, Jesus announced a total of nine blessings, each opening with "Blessed are." Jesus is fulfilling the role of Prophet by providing a series of blessings, a word which means "happy." This contrasts with the usual words given by the Old Testament prophets who announced a series of curses and woes against those who refused to follow God. Jesus came to announce that the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and this is what the kingdom looks like. Therefore, it is important to recognize that the Sermon on the Mount is not a list of new things that people have to do in order to be right with God, but rather it is a list of defining qualities of people who have been transformed by God.

Jesus is redefining the blessed life. Think about how these traits contrast how the world defines blessing. Someone living the blessed life:

1. Is poor in spirit, meaning humble which leads a person to recognize their spiritual need for God.
2. Mourns, meaning they recognize that this world is not their home and looks to God for comfort.
3. Exhibits gentleness, meaning they don't have to be aggressive to get things done because their heart is established in Christ's power.
4. Hungers and thirsts for righteousness meaning they prioritize eternal things over finite satisfaction in the world.
5. Shows mercy, because they were offered mercy themselves through the forgiveness given them by God and can extend it to others.
6. Is pure in heart, meaning they are not entangled with the evil ways of the world including lying, deceiving and manipulating people in order to get their own way.
7. Is a peacemaker, not just someone who tries to keep the peace at all costs. They actively seek peaceful solutions even in difficult situations which forces them to rely upon God more deeply.
8. Endures persecution with a vision toward eternity knowing that it is better to suffer than to succumb to temptation to compromise.
9. Endures insult because of their proclamation of truth (Word of God) just like happened to the prophets.

In summary, Jesus raised the bar of understanding to show the people that righteousness was not a bunch of behaviors that came by trying harder, but rather were qualities of the heart that were only possible through God's transforming power. These nine traits are the result of being born from above (John 3:3). Instead of being depressed that we can never be this good, Jesus delivered this

sermon in order to invite us into a new way of life. This new way of life recognizes that our self-righteousness is as filthy rags before the LORD (Isaiah 64:6). We must come to the place where we receive Christ's righteousness into our hearts as a substitute for our former way of life (Romans 3:21-22). Jesus went before us as the extreme example of divine forgiveness. Jesus not only sinned those who sinned against Him but also bore the penalty for our sins. Through His example, we can persevere in our Christian lives to forgive those who sin against us.

Reflection Questions

1. How do you respond internally when you read the Sermon on the Mount? Does it feel like another list of impossible feats that you must accomplish in order to win God's favor? Or, have you responded to Jesus' invitation to life in the kingdom (where He is the King of your heart), and the Sermon on the Mount is a reflection of the work that He is doing in your life? If your response is more the former, that this is another list of impossible feats, you can turn to God in prayer and ask Him to give you His life from above and so be born anew.

2. What does it look like in your life to live as a chosen remnant of God among a spiritually dead and physically dying generation? What are two or three actions you can take each week to set yourself as a beacon of God's hope to the people around you?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 10-23-2016

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **10-23-2016**. This week we are going to cover the Gospel reading first and then the second one, the first is from the Apocrypha and will not be covered.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

It was the classical dark and stormy night as I (Jim) flew the instrument approach into snowy Saranac Lake, New York with two friends nestled warmly in the seat behind me one night in March. As I made the necessary turns and altitude changes, I manipulated the aircraft's radar system downwards such that it revealed the two mountains on either side. These showed up in bright red on the screen, although my passengers were oblivious to the danger. Later they told me that what they perceived was a methodical series of a dozen button presses and knobs being turned followed by the plane emerging from the clouds and being greeted with flashing runway lights welcoming us to New York. As we taxied off the runway, they congratulated me on a great landing and we headed for the terminal to pick up our rental car. As we made our way towards the resort at which we were staying in Lake Placid I settled down for a relaxing drink in the lounge. What a great trip!

Then the terror hit me. I had forgotten to cancel my flight plan with air traffic control! As I frantically called air control on my cell phone I knew that I was in a lot of trouble. I knew that since this was a flight performed under instrument flight regulations that once I did not report on the ground after a few minutes of signing off from the in-flight air traffic control that search and rescue procedures would have been initiated immediately. The flight service station answered on the first ring and I explained that I had made a huge mistake and had forgotten to cancel my flight plan. In my state of utter shock, I begged for forgiveness and prayed at the same time. The controller explained that the sheriff had indeed been called and had launched a search for the plane. The first

place that they looked was in the aircraft parking area where they had already located my plane safely tied down. I knew that I deserved punishment since the typical response to such an infraction would be at a minimum the suspension of my license for a period along with a hefty fine. But the controller said, "Never mind, it's OK. We are just glad that you are safe. Have a good evening." [If you are interested in reading the whole story, I wrote about it here.]

Have you ever been in a situation where you deserved punishment and even knew it was coming but got off the hook? What if I had acted proudly and told the air traffic controller that it wasn't my fault. Do you think that he would have let me off the hook easily by confronting him this way?

That is what we are going to talk about in our Gospel lesson today. In the Gospel lesson, Jesus told a parable about two people who approached God with completely different hearts. The New International Version entitled this section, "The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector" since it was evident from the context of the previous chapters that the first man in this parable today was a member of the group known as the Pharisees. We have frequently discussed this group in past lessons, here's a review of their primary traits. The Pharisees were people who held to a strict interpretation of the Jewish Law but also added requirements known in the New Testament as traditions. Their doctrine evolved over several hundred years until the observance of their traditions became more important to them than obeying a basic interpretation of the Jewish Law. Jesus said in Mark's Gospel regarding the Pharisee's traditions, "You nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition" (Mark 7:9). Jesus summed up his feelings about them by saying several chapters earlier in Luke, "Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness." The Pharisees approached God with a proud heart compared to the tax collector who we will read about in the next parable today.

The Gospel lesson today was a parable through which Jesus illustrated prayer through the contrast of two different types of people, a religious Pharisee and a humble tax collector.

Gospel Reading:

9 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' 13 But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

14 I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." Luke 18:9-14 NIV

It was helpful in this study to step back and survey the context of this text. This parable was sandwiched between the parable of the persistent widow (that we studied last week) and an incident

in which a group of children who approached Jesus were scolded by the disciples (Luke 18:15-17). The point of the first parable was that believers are always to pray and not lose heart (Luke 18:1). The persistent widow expressed grownup, godly faith and never gave up seeking justice. The point of the story of the children coming to visit Jesus was to illustrate the value of possessing childlike faith. Jesus closed the section by saying, "whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." It was useful to understand this context because the parable we are studying today deals with the same subjects addressed in the two surrounding stories, prayer and the condition of a person's heart while praying. It was with these truths in mind that we approached the central text being studied today.

This parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector was a study of contrasts between the proud heart of the Pharisee and the meek heart of the tax collector. Luke began with a summary statement about the condition of the Pharisee's heart. They were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else (v.9). On the other hand, the tax collector referred to himself as a sinner (v.13b). The Pharisee's prayer was nothing more than a boast about his perceived goodness. His prayer was similar to a eulogy which he gave himself! The Pharisees' works were substantial since the Law only required fasting once a year and tithing only upon crops and animals. But his boastful prayer never made it up to heaven to the one who could answer it, though this man never actually asked for anything. It was evident that the Pharisee believed that he obtained righteous standing with God through his religious works or perceived goodness. The tax collector on the other hand perceived that righteousness came only through God's power. His prayer reflected a humble and contrite heart. The deep contrast between the two men in the story illustrated the central truth of the parable. God calls believers to be reconciled to Himself through humble acceptance of their sinful position before Him. They are unable to earn their way to God but must accept Jesus' finished work on the cross in order to be found righteous before Him.

One of the defining doctrines of the New Testament is justification by faith and not by works. The topic of justification is found this in verse 14, "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home *justified* before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." The key word is "justified." This word in the New Testament is a legal term that means "a declaration of one to be innocent or just." A way to remember the biblical application of the word "justified" is the phrase, "Just as if I'd never sinned." When a person is declared just in the eyes of God they are considered righteous such that they don't receive their rightful *penalty* for their sin. The source of a believer's righteousness is foreign, which means that it doesn't come from any of their own works or self-perceived goodness. God's righteousness can only come through the gateway of faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. God has declared the universality of sin. Paul said, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). He explained further in Romans that the proper payment for a life of sin was death, meaning eternal separation from God. However, with this bad news he also brought good news, literally the word in the New Testament translated as "Gospel." "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Paul explains that faith in Jesus is the mechanism through which the gift of eternal life is imparted to the believer. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works,

that no one should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Good works are important in serving the Lord and provide evidence of salvation but they are not the *source* of our justification. Righteous standing before God can only be granted by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Some questions may arise after this very brief study of justification. Some may ask, "Can we just keep on sinning since we believe and are going to heaven?" Paul answered quite succinctly in the Book of Romans. "1 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? 2 By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" (6:1-2). What about the role of works in our salvation? The Scripture is very clear that we cannot earn our salvation through our works, but works are very important because it's the method through which we serve the Lord Jesus. Finally, others may inquire, can we *know* that we have received salvation through faith in Jesus, isn't that being presumptuous? The Disciple John said, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may *know* that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13, emphasis added). Yes, you can know that you have received salvation. The Holy Spirit testifies to this fact. Paul said in Romans, "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (8:15-16). Having questions is normal and reveals that a person is really seeking the truth of Scripture. Paul said about this, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you–unless, of course, you fail the test?" (1 Corinthians 13:5).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

This passage comes from the Apostle Paul's last known letter, written to Timothy, his son in the faith.

Second Reading:

6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Skipped verses (9-15): Personal Remarks

9 Do your best to come to me quickly, 10 for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. 11 Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. 12 I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. 13 When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments.

14 Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. 15 You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message.

16 At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. 17 But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. 18 The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Last words bring a sober realization of one's life and values. Here we see Paul's values being consistent with his message of salvation through faith in God's grace. The first section points to these important truths about biblical Christianity:

- Faith is not easy—Paul said he was being poured out like a drink offering (read "sacrifice"). He also likens faith to a fight and a rigorous race. While he feels spent on behalf of his call, he realizes that the sacrifices have been a special offering to the Lord.
- Faith is worth it! Paul looks back with satisfaction that he has kept the faith. He is not implying that one can lose his or her salvation. He is marveling that God has kept him faithful in the midst of great opposition.
- Faith provides us with hope for the future. Death is not the end of the story. Paul states that there is great reward on the other side for him—specifically a crown of righteousness. Why is this so valuable to Paul? Righteousness, being right with God, is the entrance requirement for heaven. Paul knew that he was not right with God based on his own performance in life. So to think that at the end of his earthly life he would be rewarded by being in right standing with God was a treasure he cherished.
- The Lord is righteous in his judgments, which means that his perspective and rulings are the final word and they are right. There will be no arguing with or manipulating the Lord, the righteous judge, at the end of our lives. His say is final. This should give us motivation to get on the same page with Him now, so that we will not be surprised in the life to come.
- Faith is equated to longing for Jesus' appearing. We may wonder how these two concepts connect. Longing for Jesus' appearing implies faith, since we long for things we love. Longing for Christ's appearing is an expression of our relational intimacy, affection and value system bent towards Christ. The treasure of a crown of righteousness can be ours as well, if we, like Paul, long for his appearing.

Although verses 9-15 are skipped in the Mass Reading, they are important for establishing Paul as a real person with real relationships, in real messes, expressing real faith. The application for us is that we can be encouraged to know that real Christians have real struggles with circumstances and people that our out of our control, but are very much still under God's control.

The last section tells how Paul got through his struggles and the open opposition he felt against the message of Good News. He attributes his success to the Lord, who stood by his side and gave him strength. This strong trust in the Lord is what allowed him to forgive others who deserted him. He was not compelled to pay anybody back for the wrongs they had done to him. He could let them off the hook because he trusted the Lord to defend him. What a vision for us—to have such deep roots in the Lord that painful offenses and hurts can be released and brought into perspective.

I (Christy) remember a time when I was deeply hurt by an individual who claimed to love me. His desertion in my time of need left a large wound that I could not, in my own strength, forgive. Up until this point in my life, I had been able to easily forgive others of their offenses. But curled up in fetal position on my bed, crying from the emotional pain that would not go away, I asked the Lord to help me forgive. While the feelings of forgiveness did not happen overnight, eventually, I was able to release this person from the debt that their offense had incurred. I imagine that Paul, too, had to work through feelings of bitterness, resentment and anger, in order to not hold these hurts against those who deserved severe consequences. Like the story of the tax collector, when one sees the great debt that has been forgiven on our behalf, it is difficult to feel justified in withholding forgiveness from others.

Paul ends with a sense that the Lord will rescue him and bring him safely to his heavenly kingdom. So no matter what obstacles or trials we face, we can trust that because we are in Christ nothing can ultimately harm us. No wonder Paul breaks out in praise: "To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen." What a place a deep, abiding rest and assurance that God will take care of His children, no matter what!

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Justification through faith in God's grace is an important concept. Summarize your understanding of what justification means, why it is necessary for salvation and how one can be assured of their just standing before the LORD.

2. If you recognize that you, like the Pharisee, have been trusting in your good works to get you into right standing before God, take a moment and confess this wrong attitude in your heart to the LORD. First John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleans us from all unrighteousness."

3. Review the bullet points about biblical Christianity from the discussion on the second reading. Which of the points address a specific question, concern or fear of your life? How does this truth provide you with comfort, hope or direction?

4. In what real relationships and real messes are you finding it hard to exercise real faith? How can Paul's example of fighting the good fight, longing for the appearing of the Lord, and forgiving those who hurt him be an inspiration for you? Take a moment and talk to the Lord about your situation. Ask him to stand by your side and give you strength, so that you too might say—"To him be glory for ever and ever"!

Readings for the Week

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

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http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/102316.cfm

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 150

Sources: 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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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 8-28-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **8-28-2016**. This week we examine the Book of Hebrews where we see the difference between the Old and New Covenants. We close with Jesus' teaching the Pharisees about humility, a message that all of us need to hear.

The first reading is from the Apocrypha. This body of work provides some important historical

insights into the 400-year silent period just prior to the birth of Jesus. We encourage our readers to become familiar with the cultural and historical context leading up to the publishing of the New Testament.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading continues the study from last week in the Book of Hebrews. The context of the reading is following the author's teaching on the necessity of a believer to pursue peace and sanctification, "without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14b). The writer provided the counter example of ungodly Esau, "who sold his own birthright for a single meal" (v. 16b). Today's reading moves to the subject of the ways in which God deals with believers in the Old versus New Covenants.

Second Reading:

Note: The text below includes verses 20-21 and 24b-ff that were omitted from the reading.

Hebrews 12:18-24 NAS95 18 For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, 19 and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them. 20 For they could not bear the command, "IF EVEN A BEAST TOUCHES THE MOUNTAIN, IT WILL BE STONED." 21 And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I AM FULL OF FEAR and trembling." 22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

The author expressed the great contrast that exists between God's covenantal relationship with believers in the Old and New Covenants. The idea expressed is the difference between the terrors of God revealed on Mount Sinai versus the peace found on Mount Zion. Believers in the Lord Jesus as a part of the New Covenant can approach the throne of God with boldness in contrast to the fearful manner in which the Jews experienced God at Mount Sinai in the Old (see also Hebrews 4:16). The writer expressed how as New Testament believers we come not to a mountain burning with fire but rather Mount Zion, the holy city of God (v. 22a). This spiritual city consists of "myriads of angels" (v. 22c), "the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven" (v. 23a), God the Judge of all (v. 23b), "the spirits of the righteous made perfect" (v. 23d), and "Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant" (v. 24a). The New Covenant provides a qualitatively different relationship between God and man through the "mediatorship" of Jesus Christ. This covenant is much better than the old one because through the blood of Jesus Christ believers are made perfect without the consciousness of sin that perpetually existed in the Old Covenant. We find this stated earlier in the Book. "For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect

those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins?" (Hebrews 10:1-2).

The reading shows us how our changeless God revealed Himself through two different covenants. The Mosaic Covenant was delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai through "blazing fire, "darkness," "gloom," a "whirlwind," "trumpet and the sounds of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them" (v. 18). This contrast is nowhere more evident in that of the blood of Abel versus the blood of Jesus in verse 24. Although God accepted Abel's sacrifice because it was offered by faith, the blood of Jesus Christ is infinitely greater than that of Abel because Christ's blood atoned for the sins of the whole world. As New Testament believers, we look forward to seeing Mount Zion, the holy city.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

This week we return to Hebrews and the Gospel of Luke that we saw last week. And again we see some more about the group called the Pharisees in the Gospel teaching, just like the last week. Perhaps what may be helpful here is a bit of background about this group of Jewish people. The Pharisees were middle-class common men that were not necessarily educated like the other group known as the Sadducees. The Pharisees differed in their beliefs from the Sadducees in that they believed in life after death, in miracles, and also in angelic beings. They believed that the word of God was inspired and sought to hold very strictly to the tradition of the Law as given by Moses in the first five books of the Bible, known as the Pentateuch. However, they taught falsely that their oral traditions held equal authority to Scripture. Jesus warned the Pharisees about these and other false teachings in His message of the seven woes found in Matthew 23:1-36. In our day, we must endeavor to always measure and test our own religious traditions and beliefs against the unchanging Scriptures.

Now we will examine the context of today's reading from Saint Luke. Here we find Jesus dining at the home of a certain famous Pharisee, likely a member of the ruling council called the Sanhedrin. Could it have been someone like Saint Paul, who was a Pharisee himself? Anyway the Scripture says that the "people" were observing him carefully. It would seem that they were trying to find some fault in Jesus, to trip him up, to find a reason for which they could bring him to trial. It would also seem that other Pharisees were present. So as Jesus often did he told a parable. When you hear the word "parable" I suggest you think of it this way. The word means quite literally "to throw alongside." So think of a parable as a story is thrown alongside to show you some certain spiritual truth. Be careful not to try and make a parable walk on all fours, but just try to get out of it the single spiritual truth. Also, be careful to not take it literally if it isn't meant to be taken that way, and we can determine if that is the case by looking at the context.

Consider this parable that Jesus gave directly to the Pharisees and also the context as you read it. Imagine yourself sitting with the Jesus among the Pharisees, a group who strived to please God through their observance of the Law and holding to *their* oral traditions. We need to also carefully

consider that the reading for this week omitted verses 2-6 in Luke chapter 14. This is unfortunate because these verses very clearly describe the context of Jesus' teaching. Looking at the missing five verses, we find that the audience also included a man suffering from some abnormal swelling of his body. The Pharisees proceed to ask Jesus whether it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath which was the day all of this took place, Saturday (the Jews' Sabbath was always the last day of the week not on Sunday as is celebrated by Christians). Jesus responded to their question with a question (as Jesus' often did!). He asked the Pharisees what would they do if their child or ox fell into a hole on the Sabbath, would they pull them out immediately? The implied answer is of course **yes**. Anyone knows through pure common sense that you would pull your child or ox out of hole on the Sabbath Day. Jesus then took a hold of the man and healed him on the spot, something which no doubt caused great anger to the Pharisees. They were likely thinking something like, "You just broke the Sabbath Law, and for this lowly scum of a man with a bloated face and who is ceremonially unclean." The question is, what was this man with dropsy even doing there at the prominent Pharisee's house? According to the Law he would be ruled unclean and unable to enter the temple, but here he was at the home of the prominent Pharisee. Were the Pharisees not already bending their rules to allow this unclean man to be there at the meal? Or were they being hypocritical, or was the man able to wander in because of the typically open configuration of the ancient near eastern home? The text does not say. Now with this context in mind let's look at the parable.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 14:1 NAS95 1 It happened that when He went into the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees on the Sabbath to eat bread, they were watching Him closely.

Omitted Verses:

Luke 14:2-6 NAS95 2 And there in front of Him was a man suffering from dropsy. 3 And Jesus answered and spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" 4 But they kept silent. And He took hold of him and healed him, and sent him away. 5 And He said to them, "Which one of you will have a son or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?" 6 And they could make no reply to this.

Luke 14:7-14 NAS95 7 And He began speaking a parable to the invited guests when He noticed how they had been picking out the places of honor at the table, saying to them, 8 "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, 9 and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this man,' and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place. 10 But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you. 11 For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be

exalted. 12 And He also went on to say to the one who had invited Him, 'When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and that will be your repayment. 13 But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.'"

Jesus' parable was a frontal attack upon the Pharisees who "love[d] the chief seats in the synagogues and the respectful greetings in the market places" (Luke 11:43). Because the Pharisees were exalting themselves over everyone else, their problem was one of pride. The central taught by Jesus in this passage was God's calling to be humble. By humbling yourself to help those that cannot help themselves you will be repaid in heaven, but the reward may not be obvious in this life. Jesus was upsetting the apple cart of the Pharisees' world by suggesting that the lowly people in this world, like the man with the terrible dropsy, would be exalted in the coming kingdom of heaven. Jesus demonstrated His own humility through the healing of the man with dropsy (Luke 14:3) in spite of the fact that He knew it would anger the Pharisees with whom He would soon be dining. He then went on to give them teaching about why being humble was so important.

Read again the section in the reading regarding this upside down world that Jesus is teaching regarding His kingdom. "For every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted" (v. 11). God is the only one we may exalt any of us, although the Pharisees exalted themselves above everyone else, even above their sick brother.

To apply today's reading in our lives we can pray to God to help us to see ourselves as servants to those people that don't believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. We can ask God to show us how to see ourselves "washing their dirty feet," helping to heal their sickness, and serving them by praying for them. We can ask God to give us the courage to speak to them about the forgiveness of sins that is given only through believing that Jesus Christ died one single time on the cross for their sins, through a sacrifice than can never be repeated.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Can you think of a time this past week when I considered myself as better than someone else? What was the circumstance? In what ways does Jesus speak to you from what you learned in the Gospel message?

2. What is one thing that you can change in regards to this teaching of Jesus on the necessity of being humble?

Readings for the Week

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

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

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/082816.cfm

Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 126

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass-Study-Notes-for-Sunday_08-28-2016.pdfDownload

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 7-3-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **7-3-2016**. This week we learn something about how to find peace and comfort from God during hard times by resting upon His future promises of peace and prosperity in the closing chapter of Isaiah. We learn about the value of humility and how God calls us to reflect upon His works and not our own. In the Gospel reading we see God's early

missionary force sent out before His crucifixion in order to spread the word of the kingdom being ushered in through the Messiah Jesus and about coming judgment for those who ignored His promises.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The context of the message from the last chapter of the Book of Isaiah is God's closing message to Judah concerning the ultimate future restoration of Jerusalem, the city of God's own choosing given to the people of his choosing – the Nation of Israel. Chapter 66 provides important insights to the contemporary audience who were facing threats from the Assyrian Empire who soon took over the Northern Kingdom and also the Babylonians who later took over Judah itself.

First Reading:

Isaiah 66:10-14 NAS95 10 "Be joyful with Jerusalem and rejoice for her, all you who love her; Be exceedingly glad with her, all you who mourn over her, 11 That you may nurse and be satisfied with her comforting breasts, That you may suck and be delighted with her bountiful bosom. 12 For thus says the LORD, "Behold, I extend peace to her like a river, And the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream; And you will be nursed, you will be carried on the hip and fondled on the knees. 13 As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; And you will be comforted in Jerusalem. 14 Then you will see this, and your heart will be glad, And your bones will flourish like the new grass; And the hand of the LORD will be made known to His servants, But He will be indignant toward His enemies.

In the opening verses God taught Isaiah how Jerusalem was as a holy mother to God's people, a place of safe dwelling and nourishment full of bounty (vv. 10 – 11). Jerusalem, which was at that time still standing and had yet to face the utter destruction promised to it (Isaiah 22:1-14), had been since the conquering of the Jebusites and the placing of the temple there been a beacon of God's glory to the world. The city in which God dwelled served to reveal Himself to the Hebrew nation as well as the surrounding Gentiles. It is no coincidence that the name Jerusalem itself means "city of peace" since it was (and will be in some future age) the representation of God's presence and rule on earth. In verse 12 we see this aspect of the City of Peace extolled, where God says, "Behold, I extend peace to her like a river." The next part of this verse reveals the future, universal significance of the City of God not just to the Jews but also to the Gentiles. God says that He will bring the glory of the nations into Jerusalem, with the coming of the nations is shown by Him to be a good thing. These would have been strange words to Isaiah's contemporary audience since they would have viewed anything from the Gentiles as unclean and dangerous. This was especially in light of the fact that the Gentile Assyrian army was posed ready to strike down the Jewish Northern Kingdom very shortly. The reading concludes by continuing the expression of God's peace and comfort to His people (vv. 13 – 15). God said their hearts would be glad (14a), that they would flourish physically like "new grass" (14b), and that He would conquer their enemies (14c).

This message of hope given by Isaiah the Prophet of Judah would have been very comforting to the people who had only to look to God for their ultimate deliverance from their enemies and future peace. Little did they know that the ultimate peace would not come until after they had killed their promised Messiah and waited while God fulfilled His divine plan by bringing the Gentiles to faith in Him through the mystery of the church (Ephesians 5:32). In our day we can look to Isaiah's message and find a similar application. We can trust that in the end God will vanquish our enemies, bring eternal peace to us as spiritual prosperity and ultimately will fulfil all of the prophetic promises that He has made to us. When we read about the "nations" in the Old Testament passages such as we saw in Isiah, we can trust that God has a plan for us and that we are a people grafted into the nation of his choosing, Israel. As in-grafted believers we share not only in the responsibilities of God's people, but also in the current and promised blessings.

The Scriptures teach us about the importance of focusing upon God both in the good times and the bad. I remember once a few years back while I was windsurfing on the eastern coast of Florida when the boom which held the sail to the mast suddenly broke in two and I was forced to swim a long distance back to the shore. My readers may recognize that many of the illustrations I include are often drawn from my experiences windsurfing! As I made my way back towards shore with a side-stroke while grasping onto my board and broken rig and kept my focus upon the distant shoreline. I found it helpful to focus upon my goal as I made progress towards it at a snail's pace. It is during these times when keeping the goal in sight is helpful and how promises never to leave us or forsake us. During the easy times it's easy to place our beliefs on a shelf and not retrieve them again until the next hard thing comes along. But during our difficult struggles God becomes paramount in our minds. This isn't necessarily a bad thing because we do indeed turn more closely to God when hard times come rather than to fall away and feel that God has left us during our challenges. As I continued my long swim that day as I got closer to the shore the lifeguard who earlier been blowing his whistle at me for being too close to the guarded area began watching me through binoculars to see if I needed any help. With the whistle blowing exercise fresh in my mind I happily scurried onto the grassy shoreline of the public park quickly rather than waiting around for him to question me. I thought, how dare I break down in the guarded area where windsurfing was prohibited, and there was nothing that the lifeguard could do about it! These lessons have taught me reliance upon God and the value of focusing upon Him during the good times and the bad.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading picks up where we left off last week in Galatians. Here Paul continues his explanation of salvation by faith alone and not through the works of the Law. Earlier, Paul had just finished explaining the danger of the believers falling into the trap of conforming to religious Jewish practices for the sake of preventing persecution for their faith. Paul said, "Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ" (Galatians 6:12). Some in the church were urging conformance to religious practices including circumcision and the boasting about it as though they were the religious police, judge, and jury (v. 13). Paul's opposition to their boasting is the subject of today's

reading.

Second Reading:

Galatians 6:14-18 NAS95 14 But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. 15 For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. 16 And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. 17 From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus. 18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen.

In this short message, Saint Paul extolled the value of boasting only in the finished work of Jesus Christ who died on the cross for us rather than in anything that we do, even if it be of great religious or spiritual value. God promises the peace will fall upon those that walk humbly in light of this admonition although they may endure persecution for Him (v. 17, the "brand marks of Jesus"). Paul closes the reading and the entire Book of Galatians with a closing blessing in which he calls for God's blessing while affirming the brotherhood of those whom he had addressed so sternly throughout his message.

Paul's words from the reading reminds us of the Prophet Micah's message from God to the people of his era. Near the end of his Book he wrapped up the entirety of the calling God was placing upon the people in one short sentence: "He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8). As we saw in the first reading God calls us to focus upon His works and promises and through this we find comfort through our difficult times. In today's second reading Paul added to this by reminding his readers the value of walking in humility and boasting only in what God has done for them rather in what they have done for Him.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The context of the Gospel reading from Luke is Jesus' sending of the seventy, an early missionary group who went out across the land in pairs to present the message that "the kingdom of God [had] come near to [them" (v. 9). This group was given spiritual power for healing along with this message which also included an admonition for those who turned against God's provisions of the kingdom.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 10:1-12 NAS95 1 Now after this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them in pairs ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come. 2 And He was saying to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. 3 Go; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. 4 Carry no money belt, no bag, no shoes; and greet no one on the way. 5 Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house.' 6 If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you. 7 Stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is

worthy of his wages. Do not keep moving from house to house. 8 Whatever city you enter and they receive you, eat what is set before you; 9 and heal those in it who are sick, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' 10 But whatever city you enter and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, 11 'Even the dust of your city which clings to our feet we wipe off in protest against you; yet be sure of this, that the kingdom of God has come near.' 12 I say to you, it will be more tolerable in that day for Sodom than for that city."

Luke 10:17-20 NAS95 17 The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." 18 And He said to them, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning. 19 Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you. 20 Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven."

God sent the seventy in pairs with very specific instructions, the first of which was to discern the receptiveness of the house in which they were preparing to enter. Jesus had earlier warned His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount about "not casting their pearls before swine" (Matthew 7:6), meaning not to attempt to preach godly things to those persisting in ungodliness and unwilling to listen. Jesus expanded upon this admonition by promising to His missionary force that those who don't listen will be subject to severe and eternal discipline. Jesus told them that the destruction of those who reject the message would be worse than the destruction experienced by the unrepentant sinners in Sodom which the Lord destroyed by divine fire from heaven (v. 12). This missionary force returned after the conclusion of their assignment with the astounding news of divine power over Satanic forces (v. 17). Jesus then told them about how He had already seen Satan fall from his exalted position and how He had given them this divine authority which they experienced during their journey (v. 19). In closing, Jesus pointed them to His higher purpose. They were not to boast about the power that He had given them for their missionary responsibilities but rather to rejoice in the fact that, unlike Satan and the nonbelievers, their names were written in Book of Life in heaven (v. 20).

By application, the power to which Jesus extended to His first ministry force of seventy people extends to us in a certain extent today. As missionaries of Jesus we are called to use discernment in gaging the receptiveness of our audience. We are also to recognize that like the seventy we too possess divine power that comes from God according to the spiritual gift which is given to us (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; and 1 Corinthians 12:28). We are also reminded to keep in mind the urgency of this message because nonbelievers will be judged with a worse fate than those at Sodom. And like we saw in the second reading we need to walk humbly before the Lord and exalt in His works rather than our own. We are to "rejoice that [our] names are recorded in heaven" (v. 20) while using the example of the seventy as guidance in how we are to approach that that may be highly resistant to the Gospel.

A few things to keep in mind regarding the reading are:

- There is a great need for missionaries in our world today.

- God places a great intrinsic value upon each person where He wishes that none would perish (2 Peter 3:9).
- The consequences of rejecting Jesus are real and eternal.
- Jesus demonstrated the value of community in accomplishing His missionary work by sending the missionaries in pairs. We don't need to accomplish our "scary" ministry alone but rather we can follow Jesus' example and work in teams to achieve the greater glory of God.
- There is a fantastic spiritual battle that is happening behind the scenes in the heavenly realm. As believers we enter the "second heaven" which is invisible domain but which is very real in terms of the spiritual battles being waged.
- Through all of these things we need to remember Jesus' Great Commission, "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).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the Gospel reading we learned about Jesus' first missionary force of seventy people sent out as "lambs in the midst of wolves (v. 3). In what ways do you feel as a lamb among wolves in the work that God has called for you to do today?

2. In what ways to God's promises empower you to accomplish His work, including the Great Commission? How does gaining a better understanding of God's promises help you? What are some ways in which you could learn more about God's promises and create future reminders about what you have learned?

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/070316.cfm

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 102

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass-Study-Notes-for-Sunday_07-03-2016.pdfDownload

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 2-8-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 2-8-2015. This week we open with the first reading from the Old Testament Book of Job where we see Job's cry to God about the futility and brevity of life. Although his ancient message is somber it provides us with tremendous wisdom in our day. Then we move to the second reading from First Corinthians and close with the Gospel lesson from Saint Mark that continues from last week.

The first reading is from the Book of Job that recorded events which happened during the Patriarchal Period (the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). This Book records a story about a man named Job who was a victim of an invisible spiritual battle with Satan. Job was a godly man that God has blessed with a large family as well as many material possessions (Job 1:1-3). At some point Satan approached God and told Him that if He removed these blessings from him that Job would curse Him. God allowed Satan's challenge, yet after his family and possessions were taken from him he still praised God (Job 1:20-11). Next, Satan approached God and told him that if his good health were taken away from him that this would cause him to curse God. God then allowed Satan to bring about "sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head" (Job 2:7). Even though Job's wife urged him to "curse God and die" (Job 2:7), Job persisted in his reverence of God and went about scraping his wounds with a potsherd (2:8). The next scenes alternate between Job's lament to God (Job 3), the false wisdom of his friends (Job 4 – 5), his response to his friends (Job 6), and then the section of today's reading in which he again cries out to God. Job's friend Eliphaz was the first to

speak and incorrectly made the case that people who are innocent do not suffer. Job's response was to tell Eliphaz and the others gathered with him, "For the despairing man there should be kindness from his friend; So that he does not forsake the fear of the Almighty" (Job 6:17). Second, he said, "My brothers have acted deceitfully like a wadi, Like the torrents of wadis which vanish" (6:17) and he continued in this same vain in the subsequent verses. Even during this time of terrible affliction Job affirmed the just nature of God, saying "But as for me, I would seek God, And I would place my cause before God; Who does great and unsearchable things, Wonders without number" (Job 5:8-9). We pick up in Chapter 7 with today's reading, noting the previously mentioned condition of Job's skin that appears in verse 5.

1 "Is not man forced to labor on earth, And are not his days like the days of a hired man? 2 As a slave who pants for the shade, And as a hired man who eagerly waits for his wages, 3 So am I allotted months of vanity, And nights of trouble are appointed me. 4 When I lie down I say, 'When shall I arise?' But the night continues, And I am continually tossing until dawn. 5 My flesh is clothed with worms and a crust of dirt, My skin hardens and runs. 6 My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, And come to an end without hope. 7 Remember that my life is but breath; My eye will not again see good." (Job 7:1-7)

Job lamented to God that his days were in vain, and no better than those of a bond servant (vv. 1 – 2). Even when he attempted to rest at night even this solstice was taken from him (v. 5), probably in part because of his painful sores (v. 5). The reading culminates with wisdom in verse 7 where Job observed that his "life is but breath" and because he had lost hope (v. 6) he felt that his "eye will not again see good" (v 7b). It is because of verses like this that this Book of the Bible is categorized as a Book of wisdom. Job is wise to understand that in the large scope of the world, his life is short and that when a person loses hope they have nothing good to look forward to. In reality Job should have hoped that God would resupply his wealth. If you read ahead you know how the story ends with God restoring to Job two times that of what he had before (Job 42:10), along with seven new sons and three daughters. The double portion of children were evidently granted to him because if you think about it the first portion of his family was already awaiting for Job to join them in heaven.

What does the reading mean to us today? First, we must recognize as did Job that our lives are but a vapor (James 4:14). We must make the most of our service to God regardless of our circumstances during the brief time that He has granted to us. Whether we receive physical blessings from God and regardless of our health, we are still called to glorify the Lord Jesus in our hearts. Second, there is a true, unseen spiritual battle that rages on around us. Saint Peter said, "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Saint Paul urged Christians to "Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11). Even though Job never knew the cause of his tumultuous trials, we can learn from this Book that when we experience trials they may arise from a spiritual source.

A third point is that we are to be on alert for the false doctrine presented by Eliphaz that the

innocent do not suffer. The innocent most certainly do suffer, and this is to serve God's purposes. Job, himself an example of an innocent man suffering, had a very humble spirit who even after he was afflicted he still maintained his integrity before God. In contrast, Job's friend Eliphaz sat with him and attempted to show his superiority over Job by proclaiming Job's guilt because he knew that somehow innocent people couldn't suffer. If the innocent cannot suffer, he mused, then Job must not be innocent! The best example of the innocent suffering is the Lord Jesus Himself. In general, all of humanity is far from innocent, because "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God "Romans 3:23). However, regardless of our perception of our own level of innocence, suffering is allowed by God as a supreme mystery in order to bring about His perfect will in our lives.

A forth point is that spiritual warfare can result in both physical illness as well as the manifestation of psychological illness and suffering. Although Job was not aware of either the cause of his physical loss or bodily affliction, both were from a spiritual cause – Satan himself. Finally, we are called to live humbly as servants and see ourselves as no better than common day laborers or bondservants in the ancient world. Again we see the example of the Lord Jesus who came not to be served but to serve (Mark 10:45).

The second reading is from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. The context is Paul's teaching on the calling for believers to follow his pattern of self-denial and service to the Lord. Paul is providing a defense of his ministry during which he mostly provided for his own means even though as a ministry worker he was due wages in this position (1 Corinthians 9:9). Paul paid his own way through his tent making business (Acts 18:3). "Tentmaking" is a term that has arisen since then which refers to a minister that makes a living off a different occupation while at the same time working as a minister without a salary from that position. *Note: We have included all of the intervening verses between verses 16 and 23 in order to provide the full meaning and context.*

16 For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. 17 For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me. 18 What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel. 19 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. 20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; 21 to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. 22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. 23 I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it. (1 Corinthians 9:16-23)

Paul said that the reward for his ministry wasn't money but the privilege of preaching the Gospel without financial support (v. 18). Paul said that he willfully set aside his right to be paid as a minister

and therefore became "enslaved" to this form of "tentmaking" ministry in order to remove any possible offence that anyone might have in him being paid (v. 19). Second, Paul forced himself to confirm to the Jewish customs within biblical limits, without being bound to the Law (vv. 19 – 21). He became as a Jew to win the Jews, and continued this principle by becoming as a weak person to win the weak person (v. 22).

If we look back and compare these passages with what we learned from the first reading, Paul had a godly attitude towards winning others to the Lord Jesus Christ, much in the same way that Job had a humble way of responding to his friends as well as to God during his affliction. Had Job's friends acted to become weak in order to win the weak, they would have been commended by God instead of cursed (Job 42:7).

The Gospel lesson is from Mark Chapter one which continues from last week. The context is Jesus teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum, a fishing village on the north side of the Sea of Galilee, and the home of Saint Peter.

29 And immediately after they came out of the synagogue, they came into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. 30 Now Simon's mother-in-law was lying sick with a fever; and immediately they spoke to Jesus about her. 31 And He came to her and raised her up, taking her by the hand, and the fever left her, and she waited on them. 32 When evening came, after the sun had set, they began bringing to Him all who were ill and those who were demon-possessed. 33 And the whole city had gathered at the door. 34 And He healed many who were ill with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He was not permitting the demons to speak, because they knew who He was. 35 In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there. 36 Simon and his companions searched for Him; 37 they found Him, and said to Him, "Everyone is looking for You." 38 He said to them, "Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for." 39 And He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out the demons. (Mark 1:29-39)

Several points arise from the text. First, even this early on in His earthly ministry the Lord Jesus has the power to heal the sick. His healing of Peter's mother was in fact so complete that upon her being raised up from her sick bed she immediately began to serve them (v. 31). Jesus fame became evident because after the Sabbath day had concluded the people brought those sick or possessed by demons to be healed even at night (v. 33 – 34). This continued throughout the night and Peter's home became a regular hospital for those afflicted both physically as well as spiritually. Second, in a related point, Jesus' ministry was the occasion of an intense spiritual war that brought about both spiritual suffering and outright demonization of the people. The text doesn't say whether the cause of Peter's mom's affliction was spiritual, but regardless the outcome of Jesus' healing of her was for the glory of God. This is the same theme that we saw in the first reading with God allowing Job's suffering for the ultimate glory of Himself. This was also the case in the second reading with Paul suffering in being a tentmaker working without financial support for his ministry in order to remove

any stumbling stones in the way of potential believers. In both cases God allowed suffering for the purpose of expressing His glory.

A final point in the reading is Jesus' conscious and intentional prayer ministry before God. Even after spending much of the night healing people in the vicinity of Peter's home, early in the morning while it was still dark Jesus set out to find an isolated place at which to pray (v. 35). Jesus made it a habit throughout His ministry to seek an isolated place at which to pray. By means of application, if Jesus felt that prayer was at least as important of a ministry as was his divine healing, how much more important should prayer be in our lives as a source or our own divine power in our lives and for the intercession of others?

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. What is one point that you can take away from your study this week? We suggest starting next week with a conscious effort to remember that this world is under the control of dark, spiritual forces until it is delivered back into the hands of Jesus as His Second Coming. We are to "Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11). Putting on the armor of God means a variety of things, but foremost it is both knowing and holding to the promises of God that we find in the Bible. One such promise is that "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it" (1Corinthians 10:13). With what are you being tempted?

2. In the second reading we read that Paul said, "21 to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. 22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. 23 I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it" (1 Corinthians 9:21-23). Think about the application of this verse in your own life and complete the sentence below.

I will become as _____ in order that I may win _____ to the Lord Jesus Christ.

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/020815.cfm

First Reading JB 7:1-4, 6-7

Second Reading 1 COR 9:16-19, 22-23

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Gospel Reading MK 1:29-39

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 9-28-2014



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 9-28-2014. This week we open with a reading from the Prophet Ezekiel in which we learn about the seriousness of sin. Then we move to the second reading with a continuation of the study in the Book of Philippians. Finally, we conclude with the Gospel lesson from Saint Matthew.

The first reading is from the Prophet Ezekiel. We provided a comprehensive introduction to the Prophet Ezekiel in the September 7 edition of Mass Notes. The context of the reading is the Lord's teaching on the seriousness of sin. "The soul who sins shall die," (v. 4d) the text says in the opening section of this chapter. Specifically, God taught on the seriousness of idolatry (v. 6), covetousness (v.

6), robbing the poor (v. 7), depriving the hungry from food and the poor from adequate clothing (v. 7), and charging interest on loans to a fellow Jew (v. 8). Obedience to God's Laws flows from an obedient heart, one that has been changed through embracing the mystery of God's love. Saint Paul said, "[F]or all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). And, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). God's gift is eternal life but it comes only through faith in Him. In the Old Testament times this meant trusting in what they knew about God and looking forward to their Messiah Jesus' future conquering of sin forever. In a sense, God had already provided salvation because Jesus is called the Lamb slain since before the foundation of the world, although that event was yet future (Revelation 13:8). In a similar way the Kingdom of Heaven is an already, not yet proposition. In our day, we receive eternal life by trusting in what we know about God and looking back to what Jesus did for us on the cross.

A summary of this section is given in the verses that immediately proceed the reading:

> *"Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked," declares the Lord GOD, "rather than that he should turn from his ways and live? 24 But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity and does according to all the abominations that a wicked man does, will he live? All his righteous deeds which he has done will not be remembered for his treachery which he has committed and his sin which he has committed; for them he will die." (Ezekiel 18:23-24)*

With this context in mind let's proceed with the reading.

> *25 "Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not right.' Hear now, O house of Israel! Is My way not right? Is it not your ways that are not right? 26 When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity and dies because of it, for his iniquity which he has committed he will die. 27 Again, when a wicked man turns away from his wickedness which he has committed and practices justice and righteousness, he will save his life. 28 Because he considered and turned away from all his transgressions which he had committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die." (Ezekiel 18:25-28)*

The reading is a study in contrasts, first, that of a wicked man that repented of his sin, and second, one that continued in his sin to the point of death. We see in verse 26 that habitual sin can have serious consequences, even to the point of death. Let's back up and look more closely at the difference between someone whose heart has been renewed by God and the person who remains spiritually dead. The Scripture reveals very clearly that there are two distinct classes of people, two different roads with only one of them leading to heaven. Jesus called them the narrow road and the broad road (Matthew 7:13-14, below). The first class is those whose sins are forgiven and who are spiritually alive, born from above (John 3:3). Ezekiel said something about this earlier in this chapter, "All his transgressions which he has committed will not be remembered against him; because of his righteousness which he has practiced, he will live" (Ezekiel 18:22). The second class is those whose soul is spiritually dead and whose sin will be held against them for an eternity after they die. This is a crucial point especially since most people in the world are unknowingly on the

broad road. Jesus said, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13-14). If a person never truly experiences and trusts in God's saving grace through faith in Jesus then their soul remains spiritually dead during their life on earth. When they die physically, their already dead soul enters the abode of the dead and at some future point they will experience a second death. This fearsome event is enough to scare anyone and is described in the Book of 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). "And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15).

Let's go back to the reading. In verse 27 God said, "when a wicked man turns away from his wickedness which he has committed and practices justice and righteousness, he will save his life." Is God saying that a person earns their way to heaven by their good works? No, the whole of Scripture is clear that good works flow out of a heart that has been regenerated by God. Yes, nonbelievers can do good works, but their motivation is different from a child of the kingdom. Even though they are spiritually dead, they are still human beings created in the image of God. Whatever they do flows out of their existence as an image bearer of God, but their deeds do not result in them obtaining eternal life. The Scripture shows that works that are pleasing to God flow from a heart that is submitted to God through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus said this plainly in John 6:29. When people asked what they should do to fulfill the works that God requires, Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: To believe in the one He has sent."

Ezekiel's message is reminiscent of an event that occurred in the Book of Acts with a couple named Ananias and Sapphira that showed the deadly result of sin in the rapidly growing, early church. The story best tells itself as follows below.

> *1 But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, 2 and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet. 3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? 4 "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." 5 And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it. 6 The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him. 7 Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 8 And Peter responded to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?" And she said, "Yes, that was the price." 9 Then Peter said to her, "Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out as well." 10 And immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her*

> *husband. 11 And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things. (Acts 5:1-11)*

While not every sin is met with such immediate consequences, we see that sin is a serious matter and believers are called to holiness. As we move onto the second reading, we will see Saint Paul's call to holy living by being unselfish and walking in unity to accomplish God's purposes. The context is that Paul had wrestled with a hypothetical argument whether it was better for him to continue ministering amidst his struggles in prison or go to heaven to be with the Lord. His conclusion was that it was better for the Philippians if he stayed (Philippians 1:24), and that he was confident that he would indeed continue (v. 25). Next, Paul admonished the Philippians to walk in a unified way worthy of Jesus Christ (v. 27). He warned them that they may have to suffer for Jesus' sake (v. 29). All of this leads to the reading for today which opens with the adverb "therefore." Therefore, with these previous things in mind, let's read the text. [Note: Two versions of the reading were provided, we are using the shorter one because we covered the other verses in a previous week.]

> *1 Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, 2 make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. 3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, (Philippians 2:1-5)*

Paul is making a hypothetical and rhetorical argument by using four "ifs" in the first verse, the idea is "if then." It is rhetorical because the "if" is not really in question, it is assumed. So they "if" could be read as "because." Because there is 1. Encouragement in Christ, 2. Consolation of love, 3. Fellowship of the Spirit, and 4. Affection and compassion then do the following things. First, be unified for God's purpose (v.2). Second, act unselfishly and humbly (v. 4). Finally, as a means of accomplishing unselfish and humble behavior worthy of Jesus Christ, live with the mindset of regarding other's needs as more important than your own (v. 4). An attribute of a person that has been made spiritually alive by faith in God is that they look out for "the interests of others" (v. 4). The high ideals of this passage can only be lived out if we are in Christ. He is the One who empowers us to let go of selfishness and pride so that we can embrace the new life of humility that Christ lived and gives us.

The Gospel lesson is from Saint Matthew Chapter 21. The context is just after Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem riding on a donkey (Matthew 20:7-8), the same way a king would enter a city. Next, Jesus threw the money changers out of the temple in order to purify it (v. 12), healed people (v. 14), and twice contended with the chief priests and scribes in the temple (vv. 15-16, vv. 23-27). An interesting thing happened between Jesus' two visits there. As Jesus was walking by a certain fig tree he saw that it was not bearing fruit so he said to it, "Let no fruit grow in you ever again" (v. 19c). Afterwards Matthew recorded, "And at once the fig tree withered" (v. 19d). The disciples, in response to what Jesus did to the tree said, "[H]ow did the fig tree wither all at once?" (v. 20c). Jesus

said, "Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it will happen. And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (vv. 21-22). Clearly Jesus performed the "miracle" of the killing of the fig tree so that the religious leaders would either see it or hear about it. He was emphasizing the importance of faith that leads to good works. With this context in mind let's read the Gospel passage that Jesus directed squarely at the "chief priests and elders of the people (v. 23a) who had confronted Him while He was teaching.

> *28 But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go work today in the vineyard.' 29 "And he answered, 'I will not'; but afterward he regretted it and went. 30 The man came to the second and said the same thing; and he answered, 'I will, sir'; but he did not go. 31 Which of the two did the will of his father? They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you. 32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him; and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him." (Matthew 21:28-32)*

Jesus said that there are two groups of people, those who believe and do the work of the Father, and those who don't believe and don't accomplish the Father's work. Jesus told them that they did not follow John the Baptist's calling to repent and believe, as did the first son in the story.

This is a story of contrasts between two sons. First, the sons have different degrees of fruitfulness in accomplishing the works of their father. The first one bears fruit and the other one does not, like the fig tree in Jesus' previous story. Truly, both sons at first refused to work when directed to do so by their father. However, the first son repented and accomplished the will of his father. One son is a child of their Father God; the other son is shown through his works to be a child of a different father. Jesus explained this paternal relationship while addressing the Pharisees in John's Gospel. He told them, "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). Though these were harsh words, Jesus was telling them the truth in order for them to have an opportunity to repent of their sin and turn to Him in faith.

As was explained earlier, there are two roads. Jesus said, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13-14). The narrow road is the one on which the godly son who repented of his sin traveled. The broad road is the one on which the ungodly son made his journey.

Finally, there are two ultimate destinations as well. Jesus said earlier in Matthew's Gospel, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter" (Matthew 7:21). Jesus points out that you can have the right theology and pay lip service, but that is not the criteria for being in the kingdom of heaven. The

destination is heaven for the son that repents and becomes a child of Father God, and hell for the son that does not repent and turn to do the will of the Father. Proverbs 14 says, "There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death" (v. 12). This is the broad road, and a person doesn't realize that they are on this pathway until they are confronted with the reality of their sin in light of the Holy Scriptures. God in His grace desires for everyone to repent of their sin and believe in Him for eternal life (2 Peter 3:9).

Let's summarize what we have studied so far this week. As we saw in the first reading, God places a high value upon repentance. In that reading we saw the contrast between a wicked man that repented and another that continued in their sin to the point of death. In the second reading we also saw a study of contrasts, that of a humble believer that looked out for the interests of others and an implied person that did not. In the Gospel lesson we saw a contrast between two sons, one a child of God and the other a child of the world. There were two roads and ultimately two final destinations.

I had an encounter a few weeks ago that helps to illustrate the two paths about which the Scriptures speak. A few weeks ago I attended a funeral for a dear Christian woman and ran into a friend of mine from high school at the luncheon that was held afterwards. I remembered that I had shared with her the plan of salvation through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. As we talked she joyfully told me how she had recently acquired some sort of floating cooler gizmo for her pool so that she didn't have to leave the pool in order to get a new drink. As she was telling me the story I noticed that something clicked in her mind at which point she suddenly began backtracking and downplaying the importance of this new gadget. I wrapped my short visit at her table and wished her well as I left. Even though I never objected to what she was saying I noticed that her conscience seemed to speak to her. I wanted to ask her what she did when she needed to go to the restroom but I held it in. I hoped that she could do the same (pun intended). Instead I thought that it might just be better to excuse myself and continue visiting with people at some other tables.

People everywhere are on one of two paths. The people who are on the narrow path through faith in Jesus Christ exude a certain holiness as they go about their lives which has a certain repelling effect to the ones unknowingly on the other road. As believers we can rejoice in the fact that our ultimate destination is heaven, even if we have to make the hard choices associated with walking along the narrow road. The Scripture is clear that God is "a rewarder of those that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). Those people who honestly seek God **will** find Him. This is clear from a principle found in Jeremiah 29:13 though it's addressed to the nation of Israel.

May you continue to seek God as you journey this week.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the Gospel lesson we talked about two sons, one a child of God and the other a child of the world. Read the following passages and then answer the questions that follow.

> *Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Acts 4:12 "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."

1 John 5:13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Romans 10:9-10 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

A. What does God say about whether or not we are a sinner, regardless if we have faith in Jesus Christ?

B. What does God tell us about how we can be sure that we are on the narrow road since the Scripture said that you are a sinner?

2. Each of the passages help to create a robust picture of true faith. True faith expresses itself in following the will of God out of a repented heart. Spend some time with the Lord asking Him if there are any packets of resistance in your heart about which you need to repent and turn towards God.

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/092814.cfm

First Reading EZ 18:25-28

Second Reading PHIL 2:1-11 or PHIL 2:1-5

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Gospel Reading MT 21:28-32

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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