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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 8-14-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **8-14-2016**. This week the three readings follow the theme of persecution of believers and the need for us to assess our allegiances and alliances with those other than God. As believers we should expect persecution in light of the fact that others who walked with God before us experienced these things.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The context of the reading is the harsh imprisonment of Jeremiah, for the second time. This was as a result of the administration's "kill the messenger" approach as God brought the truth to southern kingdom of Judah about their certain destruction at the hands of the Chaldeans unless they repented. After he had been held in the dungeon (Jeremiah 37:15-16), King Zedekiah sent for him there and spoke with him before releasing him to the "court of the guardhouse" (v. 21). In the reading we will learn about the increasingly harsh treatment given to God's prophet Jeremiah. In reading the text we can begin to understand why Jeremiah became to be known as the "weeping prophet."

First Reading:

Jeremiah 38:4-10 NAS95 4 Then the officials said to the king, "Now let this man be put to death, inasmuch as he is discouraging the men of war who are left in this city and all the people, by speaking such words to them; for this man is not seeking the well-being of this people but rather

their harm." 5 So King Zedekiah said, "Behold, he is in your hands; for the king can do nothing against you." 6 Then they took Jeremiah and cast him into the cistern of Malchijah the king's son, which was in the court of the guardhouse; and they let Jeremiah down with ropes. Now in the cistern there was no water but only mud, and Jeremiah sank into the mud. 7 But Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, a eunuch, while he was in the king's palace, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern. Now the king was sitting in the Gate of Benjamin; 8 and Ebed-melech went out from the king's palace and spoke to the king, saying, 9 "My lord the king, these men have acted wickedly in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet whom they have cast into the cistern; and he will die right where he is because of the famine, for there is no more bread in the city." 10 Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, "Take thirty men from here under your authority and bring up Jeremiah the prophet from the cistern before he dies."

Zedekiah's ungodly officials advised the king to put Jeremiah to death because of his discouraging words (v. 4). In their wicked eyes Jeremiah committed treason by supposedly weakening the war against the invading Chaldeans by calling for them to surrender rather than to resist. At this point the king surrendered Jeremiah into the custody of the "officials," using the term loosely. Once King Zedekiah surrendered his authority over God's prophet the people then took drastic actions against Jeremiah by lowering him into a cistern, an action obviously intended to bring about his death. It took the actions of a Gentile, Ebed-melech (whose name means "servant of the king") to bring about Jeremiah's rescue.

There are many parallels between the suffering that Jeremiah endured to that of Jesus during His earthly ministry. Jeremiah, a type of Christ, pointed the way to the future suffering of our Lord Jesus as the hands of the officials of His day. Because they persecuted God and His prophets, we should also expect persecution in our lives when we act against the ungodly officials in our day. Stephen said just before his own death, "Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become" (Acts 7:52).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading continues the study in the Book of Hebrews and picks up after the section known as the "Hall of Faith." Today's reading relates to what we read about in Jeremiah concerning hostility against believers of the Lord Jesus.

Second Reading:

Hebrews 12:1-4 NAS95 1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. 4 You have not yet resisted to the point of

shedding blood in your striving against sin;

Taking into account what we learned from chapter 11 ("therefore," v. 1a), we are called to focus upon the ultimate goal of Jesus Christ and forsake our sinful ways (vv. 1-2). We are to do this through using Jesus as our example. By focusing upon Jesus' illustration of resisting sin we too can be faithful in accomplishing the purpose that God has for us. However, in the same way that Jesus and the prophets were persecuted we too should expect to experience trials when we stand up for the things of God. The author of Hebrews makes it abundantly clear that by taking the testimony of Jesus along with the great cloud of witnesses into account we can persist through the inevitable trials that will come upon us. The reading closes by saying that we haven't taken outrageous measures to eliminate sin in our lives (v. 4). This points the way to the subsequent teaching where the author explains how God brings chastening into the lives of believers because as sons of God this correction is for our ultimate good (Hebrews 12:5-11). In the same way that God allowed persecution in the life of Jeremiah, He may also allow it in our lives. As we move to the Gospel reading we will see some similar teaching from Jesus on the need to assess our personal alliances in light of God's plans for us.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading from Luke follows a theme I will call "Forsaking allegiances and alliances for Jesus." Jesus was clear that His ministry would be one of division. For John said in the infamous verse regarding the division of the people over Jesus, "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore" (John 6:66). In today's reading we see another of Jesus' 6-6-6 moments, this time in the teaching to His disciples after Peter drew near to him amongst the crowds to ask Him a question. Peter had asked Jesus regarding His telling of the Parable of the Wedding Feast whether this parable was addressed to just His disciples or to the crowd as a whole. As Jesus was fond of doing he didn't answer Peter's question directly but did so by asking another question, "Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time?" (Luke 12:42). Jesus then provided yet another parable about the absent master and the behavior of the slaves while he was away (Luke 12:43-48). Jesus' teaching at this point culminated with an extremely important principle. The punishment of the wicked will be according the degree of knowledge that the person possessed (v. 48). This was obviously addressed to the Pharisees among the crowd, and Judas the betrayer who would have been among the twelve disciples. By application the teaching leading up to today's reading brings with the idea of everyone's call to exercise godly stewardship of the resources which they have been given. The call to godly stewardship may even involve the forsaking of friends and family for the sake of the Gospel.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 12:49-53 NAS95 49 "I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled! 50 But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished! 51 Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division; 52 for from now

on five members in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three. 53 They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

In the very first season of the television series *Survivor*, Richard Hatch orchestrated the idea of a voting alliance. The "Tagi Alliance" as it was called, was a brilliant strategy that paved the way for future seasons of the program and showed the necessity of working together to accomplish the impossible in dire conditions. One of the most notable things about an alliance in general and this one in particular is that it excludes members outside of it. As viewers saw in the series, the Tagi Alliance resulted in considerable controversy with non-members as the show played out. In this case the issue that comes into play is that as the season winds down the ultimate conclusion requires the banishment of alliance members from the island. In today's reading we see how Jesus warned about the dangers of stubbornly clinging to an alliance which in effect makes a pledge of allegiance to someone other than God.

Jesus told His disciples along with large crowd how from now on families would be divided because of Him. By application, true followers of Jesus are called to examine their alliances and allegiances and be willing to forsake anything that leads them away from following God's plan for their lives. This may include stepping back from any relationship in which the other person attempts to lead you astray spiritually while praying for the opening of that person's eyes to the light of the Gospel.

Muslim background believers (MBB's) are one shining example of a group whom would readily identify with Jesus' teaching as well as what we learned about persecution in the first reading. Many MBB's have been forced to forsake their mother and father and even their own lives in order to follow the true teaching found only in the God of the Bible. Other readers of Mass Notes will also be able to identify with Jesus' teaching when they too found themselves marginalized or even outright reject by family members (and others) for their faith in Jesus. All three of today's readings point to a single verse from the second reading in Hebrews. "For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Hebrews 12:3). God calls us to focus upon Him to the extent that we are willing to assess any alliances or allegiances we may have that call us away from His plan. This may mean leaving the fellowship of a certain church or losing a relationship with a loved one. Through it all God calls us to never lose our focus upon Him.

Would you be willing to share your testimony with us for posting on the web site about the particular alliance or allegiance you were forced to break?

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In what ways does the things that happened to Jeremiah in today's reading mirror the Lord Jesus Christ?

2. What is a particular situation in your life in which you felt called by God to break an alliance or allegiance in order to accomplish God's purpose?

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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/081416.cfm

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 120

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_08-14-2016.pdfDownload

Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 1-31-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **1-31-2016**. This week we open with two passages from

the prophecy of Jeremiah, who served during the time of Judah's spiritual downfall, preparing her for captivity and removal from the land. The second reading is from the familiar but remarkable chapter on love in Paul's first letter to the Corinthian Church. The final reading is from Luke's Gospel and relates the story of Jesus' encounter in a Jewish synagogue where His teaching so enraged the people that they tried to kill Him.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Because of his great sorrow over the sin of the people and impending judgment to come upon them, Jeremiah is sometimes referred to as the "weeping prophet." He was not just a melancholy neurotic, however; his was a soul of deep spirituality and great sensibility. One writer describes Jeremiah as "the most Christ-like character in the Old Testament." The prophet saw the beginning of the nation's Babylonian captivity and the destruction of Jerusalem. In spite of his preaching, he had no converts. He was rejected by his own people, hated, beaten, imprisoned, called a traitor, and forced to flee. Nonetheless, he was faithful to deliver God's message to the people, knowing it would fall on deaf ears.

First Reading:

Jeremiah 1:4-5 NAS95 4 Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, 5 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations."

Jeremiah 1:17-19 NAS95 17 "Now, gird up your loins and arise, and speak to them all which I command you. Do not be dismayed before them, or I will dismay you before them. 18 "Now behold, I have made you today as a fortified city and as a pillar of iron and as walls of bronze against the whole land, to the kings of Judah, to its princes, to its priests and to the people of the land. 19 "They will fight against you, but they will not overcome you, for I am with you to deliver you," declares the LORD.

How reassuring it must have been for Jeremiah to have God speak to him directly and assure him that he was created by God and known by Him before his birth. God had chosen, "consecrated" (that is, set him apart), and "appointed" him to be his prophet to Judah, the remaining southern portion of the former kingdom of Israel.

Jeremiah began his ministry during the reign of Josiah (1:2) and lived through the reformation that Josiah brought about after the discovery of the Book of the Law in the Temple (see 2 Kings 22-23). To see the nation's departure from the faith and their refusal to repent was no doubt the cause for the prophet's great sorrow. His commission from the Lord must have been a great challenge from the very beginning. Although God told him he would make him like a "fortified city" and "a pillar of iron" with "walls of bronze," He also warned him that the people "will fight against you." It would be difficult for anyone to accept such a challenge with enthusiasm and hopeful prospects. The reader might be reminded of Isaiah who, also, was told that his message would be heard but not

understood; the people would see but not perceive; their hearts would be "calloused," their "ears dull," and their eyes "closed" (Isaiah 6:9-10). But God did not leave Jeremiah without hope at all. He assured him that the people would not overcome him and, best of all, He said, "I am with you to deliver you."

Success for Jeremiah was not to see Judah protected from captivity or delivered from the enemy. Nor was it to have the nation respond to his message with repentance, a change of heart and mind, and a return to God in faith and obedience. Success was to be faithful in preaching the message God gave him, to persist in spite of opposition, and to trust God for the outcome. Thus, Jeremiah is a worthy model for us to emulate.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Paul's ministry in Corinth is recorded in Acts 18 toward the end of his second missionary journey. Corinth was a Roman colony, an influential city in its province. In spite of difficulties and opposition in Corinth, Paul remained there "many days," perhaps 18 months. In his first letter to the Corinthians, a few years after his initial visit, the apostle deals with a number of problems, disagreements, and even divisions in the church body. His purpose is to correct the errors and encourage the people to spiritual growth and unity. Sanctification might well be considered the theme, that is, the encouragement to follow Jesus in obedience and life transformation that would set them apart as disciples of Christ.

Today's reading is in the middle of a very detailed discussion of spiritual gifts, which begins in 12:1 and continues in chapters 14 & 15.Perhaps Paul understood that the subject in hand was so controversial and divisive that he needed to introduce a topic of essential importance if there was to be harmony among the believers. Chapter 13 is known far-and-wide as the great chapter on love, and it must be clearly understood if it is to become the standard by which Christ-followers are to be known. (See John 13:34-45).

Second Reading:

1 Corinthians 12:31 – 13:13 NAS95 31 But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way. 1 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. 4 Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, 6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part; 10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. 11 When I was a child, I used to speak like a

child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. 13 But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Paul makes it clear in chapter 12 that spiritual gifts are supernaturally given to the church for the benefit of the body, not for individual pleasure. As he writes in v. 31, believers "should earnestly desire the **greater** gifts, and he proceeds to show a "more excellent way," the way of love. To read chapter 13 is to understand something about the essential element for unity in the body and fruitful ministry. "Love conquers all," as they say.

Verses 1-3 highlight the preeminence of love. No matter how effective we might be in getting our message out, no matter how gifted we may be, no matter how great our faith in God is—without love, our efforts will be fruitless, and our work will be for nothing. We should keep in mind that there are several words for love in the language that Paul used. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul chose to use the word agapé, which is a word of action more than emotion. It means acting toward another person in the best interest of that person. It is unselfish, other-directed, and self-sacrificing. Paul is saying that love is preferred over eloquence, prophecy, mysteries, knowledge, faith—all of which he himself demonstrated in abundance.

The words that describe love in verses 4-7 are indicative of the qualities that the Christian should possess and demonstrate. Many are included in the list of the Spirit's "fruit," in Galatians 5:22-23. We would do well to ask ourselves, "How many of these godly traits do I show to others in my daily life?" Patience, kindness, generosity, humility, goodness, graciousness, confidence, assurance, endurance: are they easily seen in our lives? One of the most convicting truths about love is that it doesn't keep track of wrongs. How difficult it is for many of us to lovingly overlook the wrongs done against us.

The concluding verses of the chapter (8-13) emphasize the permanence of love. Everything else may pass away from our lives and experience, but love will endure. Paul uses a very helpful metaphor to explain how life should reflect our growing maturity. We used to "speak," "think," and "reason like a child," but when we grew up, we "did away with childish things." He goes on to teach us that we have not yet arrived, we see things now only "dimly," but one day it will be "face to face," and then we'll understand fully all that God has planned for us. The concluding sentence (v. 13) is well known, but perhaps not fully appreciated. Faith and hope are essential, of course, and they will continue to be important, but the greatest attribute of the Christian life is the continual demonstration of love. Jesus said that we are to "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matthew 22:37-38).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Luke's Gospel is the result of the careful study of Dr. Luke, a companion of the apostle Paul, who

wanted to present an accurate review of the life and ministry of Jesus. Luke focuses on Jesus as Savior, a divine man. He stresses the humanity of Jesus Christ and his perfection as a human. He makes it clear that the gospel is for both Jews and Gentles. He seeks to confirm what Christians already believed was true and trustworthy. Today's reading details the appearance of Jesus in a synagogue in Nazareth, his hometown. Apparently he attended there regularly. On this occasion he stood up to read from the sacred scrolls. In this passage we read about the conflict between Jesus and the crowd who earlier "were speaking well of him," but changed in their attitude after His reading.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 4:21-30 NAS95 21 And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." 22 And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, "Is this not Joseph's son?" 23 And He said to them, "No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.'" 24 And He said, "Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown. 25 "But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land; 26 and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. 27 "And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." 28 And all the people in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things; 29 and they got up and drove Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff. 30 But passing through their midst, He went His way.

Jesus read a portion of chapter 61 of Isaiah's prophecy, and indicated that it had "been fulfilled in your hearing." At that point everyone responded well to His comment and wondered what it all meant. They identified Jesus with Joseph, Mary's husband, and the presumed father of Jesus. Jesus knows that the people had heard of the wonderful things he had done at Capernaum and knew that the people wondered why he didn't do such things here in Nazareth. Jesus answers with what has become a common expression today, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country."

Jesus then relates two stories that were, no doubt, familiar to his audience. The prophet Elijah had helped a poor widow who was suffering in the midst of a famine of three-and-a-half years. His successor, Elisha, brought healing to the Syrian general, Naaman, a leper. The point of these illustrations from history is that even the greatest of God's prophets did not serve everyone; not every leper was healed; not every widow was cared for. Likewise, although Jesus may have performed miracles in other places, He did not do so everywhere and for everyone. The crowd seemed incensed that He did not do these works in His hometown.

Why was the crowd so upset to the degree that they "drove Him out of the city"? They were so enraged that they had intended to throw Him off a cliff. Only by God's miraculous deliverance was Jesus able to escape "passing through their midst." There are several probable major reasons. First,

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Jesus related two Old Testament stories of the prophets ministering to Gentiles during a time of Israel's unbelief and disobedience. Remember, that one of Luke's purposes in writing his Gospel was to reveal God's great plan to include Gentiles in His redemptive plan. That was an irritant to the Jews.

Second, Jesus seemed to equate Himself with the revered Old Testament prophets. Furthermore, He was making an unambiguous claim that He was the Messiah who fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy that He had read. It was because of the total impact of these claims that we read, "They were filled with rage" and sought to kill Him.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Ask yourself, "Could I, like Jeremiah, remain faithful to teaching God's Word in the midst of strong opposition, endangering my life?" In what ways are you facing opposition to your Christian beliefs and way of life? How has God empowered you to take a stand for Him?

2. I worked for many years with several people who I found out many years later were Christians. I was surprised that they had never approached me to discuss their beliefs, and their bashfulness made me ponder their motives in not doing so. Yet even if they did not speak up I knew that there was something different about them. In what ways is your life characterized by love so anyone who knows you would recognize that you belong to Jesus?

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/013116.cfm

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 10-25-2015

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **10-25-2015**. This week we open with a message of hope from the Prophet Jeremiah. The application is that although we as believers sin God will ultimately fulfill all of His promises to us including restoration and life with Him in a perfect kingdom. In the second reading from Hebrews, we examine Jesus' intercession for us as our eternal High Priest. We conclude the lesson with Mark's story about Jesus' healing of a blind man named Bartimaeus.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from chapter 31 of the Book of Jeremiah. In Books like Jeremiah that combine history and prophecy, understanding the context is crucial to interpreting the text. In the reading Jeremiah finds himself in the midst of the aftermath of the first two exiles of the people of Judah to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. The third and final deportation and destruction of Jerusalem is on the near horizon at which time Jeremiah will find himself carried to Babylon with an intermediate stop along the way in Egypt. In the first and second deportations in 605 and 597 BC, the prophets Daniel and Ezekiel respectively were carried to Babylon to continue their prophetic writings from that far away country. Two chapters before today's reading Jeremiah brought a message of hope to the two previously exiled groups from Judah (the Southern Kingdom) in Babylon. God's instructions to the people through Jeremiah were to live normally and fruitfully in that distant land. They were to "Build houses and live in them; and plant gardens and eat their produce" and "Take wives and become the fathers of sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there and do not decrease" (Jeremiah 29:5.6). The Jews living as exiles in Babylon were to "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare" (v. 7).

First Reading:

Jeremiah 31:7-9 NAS95 7 For thus says the LORD, "Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, And shout among the chief of the nations; Proclaim, give praise and say, 'O LORD, save Your people, The remnant of Israel.' 8 "Behold, I am bringing them from the north country, And I will gather them from the remote parts of the earth, Among them the blind and the lame, The woman with child and she who is in labor with child, together; A great company, they will return here. 9 "With weeping they will come, And by supplication I will lead them; I will make them walk by streams of waters, On a straight path in which they will not stumble; For I am a father to Israel, And Ephraim is My firstborn."

Jeremiah spoke as God's anointed prophet to the southern tribes of Judah and therefore the reading begins with, "For thus says the LORD" (v. 7a). God had warned the people over and over again that unless they repented He would send them into captivity to atone for their sin. This message of hope was important to the exiles but Jeremiah continued his warnings to Judah that unless they repented God would take the rest of the people captive and destroy the city of Jerusalem along with the temple. The message in today's reading is one of hope to all of the exiles that God would one day restore them back to the land. It also provides hope to the exiles of the Northern Kingdom taken back in 722 BC by the Assyrians, although the message was written to Judah. The reading continues Jeremiah's proclamation about this future restoration. Just prior to this Jeremiah told the people, "For behold, days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will restore the fortunes of My people Israel and Judah.' The LORD says, 'I will also bring them back to the land that I gave to their forefathers and they shall possess it.'" (Jeremiah 30:3). Although the third and final exile had not yet happened, this message of hope was written to all of the exiles, as it was a foregone conclusion.

Jeremiah's message concerned hope in the future restoration of the people of Judah to the land. He said that the people "gather[ed] from the remote parts of the earth . . . A great company, they will return here" (v. 7). Although King Nebuchadnezzar had already deported two large groups from Judah to Babylon, the final destruction was due to come very soon with the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. Interestingly, God included the Northern Kingdom in this message about the future regathering and restoration of the Israelite people by mentioning "Ephraim is My firstborn" (v. 9). The Prophet Daniel, who was the first to be exiled to Babylon, said concerning the Southern Kingdom that the period of time which they would be held captive after this final event would be seventy years (Daniel 9:24). After these "seventy sevens" of years, Daniel said that a decree would be issued and that Jerusalem would be rebuilt and restored (Daniel 9:25). Jeremiah said the same thing just two chapters before the reading. "When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place" (Jeremiah 29:10). Ultimately, with the mention of Ephraim and a universal regathering of the Jews we must look to the future restoration of the entire kingdom of Israel under the reign of Jesus Christ that will happen upon His return. The big idea is that although the people had sinned, God would forgive their sin and complete the promises that He had made to them to inherit all of the Promised Land. The terms of His promises to them were confirmed in the various covenants. Although many of God's promises to Israel were tied to their inheritance of material blessings such as the land, the

Bible is full of spiritual promises to them including salvation through their future Savior.

The application of Jeremiah's message for us today is that although "all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23)," "if confess our sins God is faithful and just to forgive our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). We, like the Jews, continually miss the mark. We share in the message of hope that God will complete all of the promises that He has made to us. We cannot make the mistake as some have done by claiming the church has replaced Israel and that since God has forsaken Israel the church will inherit the promises that God made to them. Instead, God will make good both on His promises to Israel and on the promises He made to the church. *For more about God's promises to the church refer to the first study question.*

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Chapter 5 of the Book of Hebrews. The overall message of the Book is the contrast between the Old and New Covenants. The Old Covenant was incomplete and imperfect in the sense that it came through the Levitical priesthood that was passing away because of its connection to mortal high priests. In contrast, the New Covenant is proffered through the eternal priesthood of Jesus Christ who is in the line of Melchizedek. This theme comes out very clearly in today's reading.

Second Reading:

Hebrews 5:1-6 NAS95 1 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; 2 he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; 3 and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself. 4 And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was. 5 So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, "YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU"; 6 just as He says also in another passage, "YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK."

The author explained how God in the Old Testament appointed the mortal, weak and misguided high priests of the Levitical line (Aaron) in order not only to offer sacrifices for other people but also for themselves (v. 3). In contrast, God the Father appointed Christ as our eternal High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, not Aaron (v. 6). It's important to understand the [KS1] man named Melchizedek mentioned in verse 5. The first time we find Melchizedek in the Bible is in Genesis 14:17-20 where we find him bringing out bread and wine to greet Abraham who was returning from battle with the forces that kidnapped his nephew Lot. Hebrews 7:1 says about this, "Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him." Looking at the book of Hebrews as a whole you can see that it's grounded in an explanation of Christ through the perspective of the Levitical Old Testament priesthood, thus the title given to the book "Hebrews" meaning Jews (see Genesis 14:3 where Abram, later called Abraham, the father of the Jews, is called a Hebrew). We see there in Hebrews

7:1 that Melchizedek is three things: 1. the king of Salem, the area we now identify as Jerusalem, 2. A priest of the "Most High God," meaning a priest of the *only* true God, and 3. one to whom Abraham the father of the Jews gave tribute. Today's reading said that Christ is of the "order of Melchizedek (v. 5), which is a quote from Psalms 110:4. According to the Book of Leviticus, all of the Old Testament Priests had to come from the tribe of Levi, but Melchizedek was a priest before the Law even existed! Yet Abraham gave a tenth portion (or tithe) to Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:4) as required under the later Law for all priests (verse 5). What is being explained here is that Melchizedek was one of a class of priests that foreshadowed the coming final, eternal High Priest, Jesus. Melchizedek, whose name means King of righteousness, could not have come from the line of Aaron (Levi) or Judah, because these did not exist during his lifetime. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrificial system, the final sacrifice was Jesus' own death on the cross which did away with the Levitical priesthood (Hebrews 10:11-14). Jesus was from the "order of Melchizedek" (Ps 110:4, Hebrews 7:17), not the line of Aaron. This is new order is made even more clear by reading beyond the quoted section of Psalm 110 to verse 7, "Therefore He will lift up his head." This eternal priest Jesus of the non-priestly line of Judah is and will be exalted by God. Melchizedek was the first biblical personality to picture the reality of a priest/king.

There are numerous implications for our lives relative to Jesus as The High Priest according to the line of Melchizedek. Jesus' ministry to us as the only intercessor between us and the Father (1 Timothy 2:5) is eternal. Second, we will never be subject to the frailties of a human priesthood because Jesus replaced the Levitical Priesthood forever. Since Jesus lived as a Man on earth, He can identify with the things that trouble us in this life. "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus provides all who believe in Him with hope that one day our human weakness will be removed and we will be restored to a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson is from Mark 10 and follows James and John's request to "Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory" (Mark 10:37). Jesus taught them that they would suffer for Him, but it was not for them to choose their position as this was up to the will of His Father (Matthew 10:38-40). This discussion caused the other ten disciples to "feel indignant with James and John" (v. 41). Next, on their way to Jerusalem they stopped along the way in Jericho.

Gospel Reading:

Mark 10:46-52 NAS95 46 Then they came to Jericho. And as He was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a large crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road. 47 When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 48 Many were sternly telling him to be quiet, but he kept crying out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 49 And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him here." So they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take courage, stand up! He is calling for you." 50

Throwing aside his cloak, he jumped up and came to Jesus. 51 And answering him, Jesus said, "What do you want Me to do for you?" And the blind man said to Him, "Rabboni, I want to regain my sight!" 52 And Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him on the road.

The beggar named Bartimaeus is a name that means son of Timaeus, because "bar" means "son of." Blind people in this culture had few resources and were without any sort of social support systems so they frequently had to resort to begging. Bartimaeus took great initiative and jumped up on his own, the text doesn't say that someone else led him there. Twice he called to Jesus using the messianic title "Son of David." This indicated that he had some knowledge about who Jesus was. He recognized that Jesus was the only One that could open the eyes of the blind both in the physical sense but also spiritually as well through his use of the messianic title for Him. The blind man then heard the people calling to him and then threw away his cloak, possibly the only valuable possession that he owned. Bartimaeus not only received his sight but the text says that "his faith made him well" (v. 52), meaning that he also received the forgiveness of his sins as well. Afterwards he became a follower of Jesus, both literally and spiritually (v. 52).

What does this mean for us today? We too have to be willing to talk a bold step of faith and throw away our valuable possessions in order to find spiritual healing through Jesus. As former unbelievers, we too are blind to the reality of sin in our lives. Saint Paul says, "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). There are many reasons that Jesus calls Himself the Light of the World (John 8:12) because as the Light He shines truth upon the spiritual darkness of our hearts. It is only through faith in Jesus that we receive spiritual life (Ephesians 2:8-9). Finally, we can praise God for this tremendous miracle of healing that he provided Bartimaeus in a culture where blind people were on the lowest rung of society. We can praise Him for all of the times that He has healed us and others around us, even if we were not aware of His intervention on our behalf.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the first reading we said that God would make good on both His promises to Israel and His promises to the church. Reflect upon the following promises that God has made to you and how this provides you with hope during the troubled and shorts days of your earthly lifetime.

A. Salvation to all who believe in His Son Jesus. "Romans 1:16-17 NAS95 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.'"

B. God will work out all things for the our good as a believer. "Romans 8:28 NAS95 28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

C. As believers we receive a new life in Christ. "2 Corinthians 5:17 NAS95 17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

D. God promises believers peace when they persist in calling upon Him in prayer. "Philippians 4:6-7 NAS95 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

2. The Book of Hebrews begins with, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe" (Hebrews 1:1-2). In what ways is Jesus as the truly eternal high priest / king (that fulfilled the requirements of the Law) the only possible One who can make intercession for us (1 Timothy 2:5)?

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/102515.cfm

Source(s):

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

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Mass Study Notes for Sunday 3-22-2015

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **3-22-2015**. This week Marla shares the study of the readings beginning with Jeremiah 31 in which we see God's promise of a new covenant with Israel. Then she moves onto the second reading from the Book of Hebrews and then closes with the Gospel lesson from John 12. As we come nearer to the celebration of Good Friday and Easter Sunday the focus of the Bible passages continues to point us towards the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and His resurrection in glory.

The first reading from the prophet Jeremiah is about love, promises, and a special family relationship, broken and restored. I love my family and express my love with affectionate names. I call my husband "Hon," my daughter "Sweets," and my son "Sonnybun." I speak of them with endearing words because we are family, and they mean the world to me.

In the Old Testament God speaks of the nation of Israel in intimate terms. He made a covenant (promise) with Abraham that his offspring would be God's chosen people and the whole world would be blessed through them. God and Israel were bound together much like a husband and wife, and God spoke of her in tender and loving terms as a husband speaks of his bride. But when Israel rebelled and turned away from God, her sin was likened to adultery or whoredom. God had been faithful, but Israel had broken her promise.

The book of Jeremiah records the coming judgment. God's judgment on his people was not intended to destroy them but to restore them to himself. Though they would be taken away into captivity by a foreign power, God would keep his promise, bring them back, and make a new covenant with them. That covenant is still in effect today, and here is the good news—that covenant includes us! The first reading explains it as follows.

First Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-34

31 "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. 33 "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 34 They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

The Old Covenant had a law written on tablets of stone. When Israel disobeyed that law they sinned. The Bible says that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin (Hebrews 9:22). In the days of Israel, sins were covered but not taken away by the blood of repeated animal sacrifices in an earthly temple. But the New Covenant is far superior to that (see Hebrews 10: 1-25). God gave Jesus his Son as the perfect sacrifice for sin. He is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (St. John 1: 29). His death on the cross is the final sacrifice for sin and cleanses the sinner (and we are all sinners, Romans 3:23) completely.

Now we have the law of God not on stones but in our hearts. Each of us can receive Jesus by faith and know him in a personal way. When we accept what Jesus has done for us and believe in Him, our restoration to God is complete, and He can once more call us by His affectionate names—child, friend, and bride (St. John 1:12; 15:15; Rev. 19:7, 22:17).

The second reading takes us to a set of verses in a larger passage that speaks of Jesus as our high priest. In the Old Testament sacrificial system, when someone sinned, he would bring an animal to the priest and the priest would sacrifice it (shed its blood) on the altar in the tabernacle/temple. Behind a heavy curtain was the Holy of Holies (or Holy Place) where God would appear in a pillar of cloud or fire. No one could go in there except the high priest, and he could go in only once a year on the Day of Atonement. On that day the high priest would make a sacrifice for himself (for he is a sinner, too) and for the sins of all the people and carry the blood inside the curtain and present it to God. The sacrifice had to be repeated year after year.
Before we read the second reading, first we want to look at Hebrews Ch. 7 and 9 which tell us that Jesus is a high priest, but one far superior to the human ones we read about in the Old Testament.
Moreover, here's why:

Hebrews 7:26-27

"*For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself."*
Hebrews 9:11-12, 24-26

"But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; 12 and

not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption".

24 "For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; [25] nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own. [26] Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself."
Jesus himself was both the high priest and the sacrifice for sin. His sacrifice was perfect and total, and God accepted it as final. That's why he is the source of eternal salvation to all those who obey him. With that background we come to the second reading. It reveals the anguish Jesus experienced as he faced his impending death for sin.

Second Reading: Hebrews 5:7-9 NAS95

7 "In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him *from death, and He was heard because of His piety. 8 Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. 9 And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation,"*

The day has arrived that Jeremiah spoke about in our first reading: God would "*forgive their iniquity, and …remember [their sin] no more"* (Jer. 31:34). Jesus was going to inaugurate the New Covenant, but to do so would cost Him his life. If we had been walking past the garden on that evening, we would have heard loud cries of anguish coming from deep within the garden. Why was Jesus crying? After all, He knew all along that He had come to die. The Bible says His life was not taken from Him; He willingly laid it down for us. It was in God's good plan before the world began. But the path to accomplishing that plan was so horrible to contemplate that it caused Jesus to cry out with loud cries and tears (Hebrews 5:7). Jesus knew what the prophet Isaiah foretold—that He would be *"pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins" (Isaiah 53: 5 NLT).* And so Jesus prayed, "*Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done"* (Luke 22:42). In this time of suffering and submission, Jesus' obedience was completed, made perfect. By perfect we don't at all mean there were flaws or sins or defects in Jesus that needed to be corrected. No, He was perfect in His being. P*erfect* in this verse has the idea of *being made complete.* You see, it wasn't until God the Son took on a human body that He experienced suffering in the flesh. In His suffering He learned obedience and, in doing so, was made complete.
Enduring the pain of rejection, loss, temptation, and suffering in a body like ours, Jesus became One who can sympathize with each of us in our weakness and suffering. We see this in another section of the Book of Hebrews:

Hebrews 4:15-16

15 "*For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. [16] Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."*
What a comfort to know that the One who saves us from our sins is also the One Who has walked the

path we are walking and will give grace and help in our time of need. We can draw near to Him with complete confidence.

Moving onto the Gospel reading, we see Jesus himself acknowledging that the time has come to fulfill God's plan foretold in our first reading in Jer. 31.

Gospel Reading: John 12:20-33 NAS95

20 Now there were some Greeks among those who were going up to worship at the feast; 21 these then came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and began to ask him, saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." 22 Philip came and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip came and told Jesus. 23 And Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25 He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. 26 If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him. 27 Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. 28 Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came out of heaven: "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." 29 So the crowd of people who stood by and heard it were saying that it had thundered; others were saying, "An angel has spoken to Him." 30 Jesus answered and said, "This voice has not come for My sake, but for your sakes. 31 Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out."

Just prior to the events of this passage, Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. People were flocking to Jesus because they had heard of this miracle, and many, including Jews, were believing in Him. This upset the religious leaders, and they plotted to kill Lazarus and Jesus. They had tried to capture Jesus before, but each time He escaped because "*his time had not yet come*" (John 7:30).

But in this Gospel reading, we see Jesus acknowledging that the time has come to fulfill His purpose and glorify His Father. A grain of wheat fulfills its purpose of producing grain when it falls to the earth and dies. Likewise, Jesus must die in order to accomplish His purpose of providing eternal salvation for all who believe. Though His soul was troubled, He would not hold back His life but would give it as a sacrifice for others. Because of His sacrifice we have been offered eternal life. We can love this life with its worldly pleasures and sin or we can turn from this life and follow Him. One is the wide road that leads to destruction, and one is the narrow road that leads to eternal life (St. Matthew 7:13-14).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. List the primary aspects of the New Covenant and prayerfully thank God for Christ's provision. Jesus came to fulfil the New Covenant that Jeremiah predicted. What aspects of the New Covenant resonate with you and sound like Good News as opposed to the Old Covenant?

2. How does it encourage you to be faithful to Jesus this week knowing that He learned obedience in His life through suffering? In what ways can you see God working through your own suffering? It might be helpful to list one particular issue that keeps coming into your mind. How can you surrender this to God and look beyond these circumstances to see God's sovereign hand?

Readings for the Week

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First Reading JER 31:31-34

Second Reading HEB 5:7-9

Gospel Reading JN 12:20-33

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