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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 108: 07-20-2025



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we are studying a reading from Genesis in which Abraham meets the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus, who provides him with an important confirmation of a promised blessing. We also look at a reading in Colossians and close with the story about Mary and Martha in the Gospel of Luke.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The context of the first reading from Genesis is the Lord's appearance to Abraham when he was ninety-nine years old, just after he had obeyed God's order to be circumcised (Genesis 17:24) along with his son Ishmael (v. 13), born through his handmaid. Just before this, God reconfirmed His promise of a son through Sarah by saying, "But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year" (Genesis 17:21).

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Note how the reading opens with "Now the LORD appeared" (v. 1) and then says in the next verse, "three men were standing opposite him" (v. 2b). In order to understand what is happening in these verses, we must look beyond the verses covered in the reading. Later in this chapter, we see that "the men" (plural) departed, and Abraham was left standing with the LORD (Genesis 18:22), at which point Abraham did his famous reasoning with God about whether there were any righteous men in Sodom (Genesis 18:23-32). Next the text says, "As soon as He had finished speaking to Abraham the LORD departed, and Abraham returned to his place" (Genesis 18:33). If the men departed, but Abraham was left standing with the LORD, what was happening was that Abraham was standing face to face with the preincarnate Jesus Christ. God appeared as a man to Abraham through what theologians call a "Christophany." As Abraham rushed around to prepare a meal for the group of two men (who were angels as stated in Genesis 19:1) and the Lord Jesus, the Lord provided yet another confirmation of His promise to him as they ate together. Sarah also heard the promise as she listened from the tent door while the "men" ate outside (v. 10). The Lord told him, "I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife will have a son" (v. 10).

For Abraham and all of those who walk by faith, this passage tells of God's story of redemption. Abraham is called the father of faith because it was through him that the Messiah would come. He looked forward to redemption, while we look back in history at the cross, where the transaction took place. Jesus paid the price for our redemption and provides the way for us to be reconciled to the Father, resulting in eternal life. This re-confirmation of God's sending of a promised son delivered by none other than The Promised Son Himself provided an important foreshadowing of how God's promises may be trusted in the sending of the ultimate, final, only Son, Jesus, to the earth some two

thousand years later.

God understands what we need in terms of confirmation of His promises when we may be in doubt. In the same way God understood Abraham's need to confirm His promise, we, too, may turn to God for the confirmation of the promises He has made to us. We do this first by understanding His promises and then turning to the Scriptures to renew our understanding of the promises that we find there. We affirm those promises in prayer and learn to stake our lives on what God has said. Daily, we learn to walk by faith in God, trusting His character and knowing He will make good on His promises.

As we transition to the second reading, we will see the importance of understanding Jesus' true humanity in light of the false teachings in the early church. Although Jesus appeared to Abraham in the form of a man, as we saw in the first reading, the Bible states that Jesus was born in the flesh through Mary to live a perfect, sinless life and then gave Himself as the final offering for sins forever.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Colossians. It is vital to understand the context in which Paul is writing to the church at Colosse. Today's reading is from the book's opening chapter, which is concerned with correcting the heretical beliefs of some in the Colossian church, including elements of Gnosticism. This belief system taught that matter is evil, God is good, and in the case of the Colossians, that Jesus was just another emanation of God and not fully God Himself in the flesh. They also taught that a special secret high knowledge (gnosis) was required for true salvation and spiritual enlightenment.

Second Reading:

> *Colossians 1:24-28 NAS95 24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. 25 Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, 26 that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, 27 to whom God willed to make known what is the*

> *riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.*

Paul affirmed how Christ's body is the church for which he rejoices in his suffering (v. 24). The core of his message to the Colossians was how God had revealed through the church the mystery "which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints" (v. 26) which is "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (v. 26b-ff). Through the reception and understanding of this mystery, believers are made complete in Christ.

A question that we must ask ourselves, based on this text, is whether Christ's sacrifice was sufficient, or do we need to do something to add to it to make up what is lacking? What was Paul referring to when he said that his suffering filled up "what is lacking in Christ's afflictions "?

The Scriptures are clear that God's work of redemption was finished on the cross when Jesus declared, "It is finished" (John 19:30). Hebrews 10:12 says, "But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God" (ESV), which further verifies that redemption was finished at the cross by Jesus' sacrifice. Paul himself affirms in various places and in various ways that Christ's work is sufficient to cover our sins. Cite numerous verses here.

God calls us to serve Him through our good works that flow out of a heart changed by God. This is clear from these verses in Ephesians:

> *Ephesians 2:8-10 NAS95 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.*

James, in the Book by his name, described the nature of saving faith as that which produces good works for God (James 2:17). Rather than thinking that by doing God's work, we are earning our salvation, God calls us to seek His will for our lives and accept the blessing of Jesus' finished work for us. In this way, we may be presented to God as "complete in Christ" (Colossians 1:28), as we read in today's reading.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading from Luke picks up from last week's message regarding the Good Samaritan. This time, instead of relating a story about a traveler on a road, Jesus and His disciples traveled on a road. We know from the context that the village where we will read about them entering is Bethany. This small city was located very close to Jerusalem.

Gospel Reading:

> *Luke 10:38-42 NAS95 38 Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word. 40 But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me." 41 But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; 42 but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."*

The reading is a story about priority and motive. It's about the energy with which we do something. Martha busied herself with the dinner preparation while Mary sat at Jesus' feet listening to Him. This contrasts with how we saw Abraham and Sarah work together to prepare the meal for the Lord and then listen to Him during the meal (except Sarah listened from a distance). Here, Mary allows Martha to serve while sitting down and listening to Jesus. This bothered Martha, who then spoke up to Jesus about the situation. Jesus gently corrected Martha's misunderstanding of Mary's motives, thinking that she was being lazy and neglecting in the serving of their important guest. Jesus told Martha that Mary had chosen to sit and listen at Jesus' feet.

It's not bad that Martha desired to serve Jesus, but there can be a service devoid of relationship. This is inferred by the way that Martha talks to Jesus about Mary. Her service was no longer about meeting the needs of Jesus, but was about keeping score and trying to validate herself. Mary, on the other hand, was willing to appear culturally inappropriate by sitting at the feet of Jesus with the rest of the men. She felt comfortable sitting at the feet of Jesus, which is the usual place for a disciple in that cultural context. Mary seems to be the only one who truly understood that Jesus had to die. We know that the Gospels record how Mary anointed Jesus that evening. Jesus could likely smell Mary's anointing while He was hanging on the cross, which would serve as a small comfort and blessing.

The main point of the reading is not that Jesus is reprimanding Martha for serving Him but that He is saying that our serving needs to be connected to the relationship (sitting at Jesus' feet). Mary showed true devotion to Christ, not just by serving Him a meal but by being present and listening to Him. She understood that Jesus' time on earth was drawing to a close, something that Jesus' own disciples failed to understand (Luke 18:34).

Reflection Questions

1. Abraham is the father of faith and needed confirmation of God's reliability. What promises of God are you standing on, and how is God reconfirming your faith to trust Him? How can others support you in your journey to walk by faith?

2. In the Gospel reading, we see Mary sitting and listening to Jesus while Martha busies herself with the preparation of the meal. In what ways was Martha jealous of Mary? Was Mary lazy? Why or why not?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 07-21-2019

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