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 08-15-2021



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. Today we start with a reading from the mysterious Book of Revelation. In the second reading we see Jesus' victory over death and the repeated theme of how He will ultimately overcome His enemies. In the Gospel lesson we learn how Mary exalted in the Lord her Savior as she prepared to give birth to Jesus.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Revelation in which we see a picture of God's ultimate victory over His enemies.

First Reading:

*Revelation 11:19 – 12:7 NAS95 19 And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple, and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm. 1 A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; 2 and she was with child; and she *cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth. 3 Then another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems. 4 And his tail *swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that*

*when she gave birth he might devour her child. 5 And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne. 6 Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she *had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days. 7 And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war,*

Revelation 12:10 NAS95 10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night.

Although the Church has historically seen this vision from John as Mary, the intention of the author is clearly otherwise as the vision of the woman and the dragon is the first and second of three "signs in heaven" in the Book of Revelation (Rev 12:1, 12:3, and 15:1). Granted, Mary appears directly in Scripture in several places as we will see later in the Gospel reading. However, biblical scholars have since understood the limitations of the allegorical interpretation method which led to the historical understanding of Mary in Revelation 19. The understanding of Revelation, at least as much as it is possible until the events portrayed play out during the end times, is tied to having an intimate understanding of the other parts of the Bible. This is not meant to disparage Mary in any way, rather it is to read and understand the Bible in the way that both the author and the Holy Spirit of God intended.

Avid readers of the New Testament will recognize at the hearing of the phrase "as sign in heaven" in Revelation 12:1 the phrase from the eschatological passages from Matthew, within the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24:3-25:46; also, Mark 13:3-37 and Luke 21:5-36). The idea there is that "the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Matthew 24:44). At the chronological end of the Discourse, Jesus said the following. "*But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory*" (Matthew 24:29-30). It is a very similar spiritual sign that is in view in today's reading. However, the woman in Revelation is not Jesus but rather the Nation of Israel. Although Mary gave birth to Jesus, it is Israel that gave birth to the twelve tribes of Israel (from 12:1, a woman wearing a garland of 12 stars). The garland is a symbol of victory, here the Nation of Israel is shown in the future as being victorious over her enemies, the dragon (Satan), the antichrist, and the false prophet (the false trinity). We will see further testimony of God's victory in the second reading, "*For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS* FEET (1 Corinthians 15:27).

The reading showed how Israel, who ultimately gave birth to Jesus the Messiah, would be attacked by Satan who attempted to conquer them through his army of one third of the angels who turned away from God (12:4). In those days God will gather Israel together and divinely protect them (v. 6) from the war in heaven with its far-reaching consequences on earth because of Satan being cast down from heaven to earth after losing the battle with the angel Michael (as we see in the verses beyond today's reading). "*And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him*" Revelation 12:9). Verse 10 in the closing of today's reading affirms this, "for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down."

God is not done with the Nation of Israel and will restore them to their rightful place under the rulership of Jesus at the end of the age as chronicled in the Book of Revelation. As believers in the Lord Jesus, we are called to stand firm and watch for the return of the Lord Jesus, as we know neither the day nor the hour of His return. In our day we continue to see the events portrayed in Revelation begin to play out towards that Day when God will conquer Satan and reverse the fall of Man that began in Genesis 3. God will restore all things but beforehand the time of trouble will overcome the whole world. In the meantime, believers in Jesus are called to testify to the truth of the Gospel that Jesus called us to believe. We are sinners, He calls us to repent of our sins, believe that Jesus died as a payment for our sins, and rose from the dead in victory. He ascended into heaven waiting to return at the time predetermined by God when He will assume His reign over the earth. Until then, we can have hope that God will do what He has promised and will ultimately deliver His people, both the Church and Israel, from their tribulations.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

As we move onto the second reading, we will see more about the Person Jesus Christ, since He was made alive at the resurrection, we too will be made alive when our bodies are resurrected from the dead. The reading is from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. The context is Paul's vigorous explanation of the bodily resurrection of believers, first the Lord Jesus and then all people who put their faith in Him. Paul opens this section with a caution to his readers for them to "hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:2b,c). The main theme that runs throughout the chapter is that the risen Lord Jesus is the hope of all believers, in spite of the fact that some in the church had denied the teaching of the future resurrection of the dead (v.12). Paul said, "But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain" (1Corinthians 15:13-14). He closes the section just before today's reading by saying, "If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied" (1Corinthians 15:19), something which denies the conventional wisdom of our age that would say that the Christian life is a noble way of living. With

these concepts in mind let's move onto today's reading. *Note: Verse 27 which was skipped in the reading was provided in order to provide the full context.*

Second Reading:

20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. 21 For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, 24 then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be abolished is death. 27 For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET. But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. 28 When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all. (1 Corinthians 15:20-28)

Paul said that since Christ **has** been raised from the dead, is the first One to be resurrected (v.20), He is the one through Whom came life and is a precursor of the hope of resurrection for all who believe (v. 22b, 23). As we saw in the first reading from Revelation, Jesus' rulership will be established on earth, which is one of the aspects of the resurrection. Jesus will "come in glory" (Matthew 25:31). Paul quoted from Psalm 8 when he said that Jesus would totally subdue all of His enemies, "put them under His feet" (vv. 25-26), which is almost exactly what we saw in the Book of Revelation. The three evil persons in Revelation will be subdued and judged forever. The greatest enemy that Jesus will conquer is death through the victory of the resurrection, first Himself and then all believers. The culmination of world history will be marked by the end of Jesus' one thousand-year (millennial) reign on earth. This will be concluded with Christ handing over His kingdom to His Father in heaven (vv.24 -28), something that would fall into the category of what Saint Peter called "things that are hard to understand" (2 Peter 3:16). After Christ has handed His kingdom over to the Father, His eternal reign will begin (Revelation 21, 22).

As believers, our greatest hope lies in the hope of resurrection. We can rest in the historical fact that Jesus was the first to rise from the dead, something that is one of the best proven historical events throughout all of history. As our bodies wear out and grow old, we can rest in the fact that one day we will be given a new eternal body that will never grow old. In the same way that Paul comforted the Corinthian believers with these facts, we can find comfort and give comfort to other believers through hope in our future resurrection.

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Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading this week tells the story of Mary the mother of Jesus' visit to Elizabeth who was to be the mother of John the Baptist. The context of the reading is that Mary had just been visited by the Angel Gabriel and told how she would be the mother of God's Son Jesus, the Messiah. This reading is very important for Mary because she had just been told this incredible news about how God was going to bring the Messiah into the world through a supernatural, virgin birth. You can imagine that Mary's heart was both elated and confused. Her visit to Elizabeth would have been a comforting and confirming experience to establish her faith in God's unusual method of bringing the Messiah into the world.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 1:39-56 NAS95 39 Now at this time Mary arose and went in a hurry to the hill country, to a city of Judah, 40 and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 And she cried out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! 43 "And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me? 44 "For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. 45 "And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord." 46 And Mary said: "My soul exalts the Lord, 47 And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. 48 "For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondslave; For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed. 49 "For the Mighty One has done great things for me; And holy is His name. 50 "AND HIS MERCY IS UPON GENERATION AFTER GENERATION TOWARD THOSE WHO FEAR HIM. 51 "He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart. 52 "He has brought down rulers from their thrones, And has exalted those who were humble. 53 "HE HAS FILLED THE HUNGRY WITH GOOD THINGS; And sent away the rich empty-handed. 54 "He has given help to Israel His servant, In remembrance of His mercy, 55 As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and his descendants forever." 56 And Mary stayed with her about three months, and then returned to her home.

When Mary arrived at her relatives' home, Elizabeth was six months pregnant even though she was advanced in age and barren up until that point (Luke 1:36). Elizabeth's greeting would have been confirmation to Mary that God was up to something and her appearance by the Angel Gabriel was not a figment of her imagination. We see a contrast in this passage regarding the response to the Angel Gabriel's messages. Zacharias had not believed Gabriel but instead had asked for a sign (Luke

1:18). Elizabeth said under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that Mary had immediately believed, "And blessed is she who believed" (v. 45a). She was able to encourage Mary's tender heart of belief that God could do the impossible, especially in light of the fact that she herself was pregnant with her own miracle child.

Elizabeth used this opportunity through the power of the Holy Spirit, to pronounce blessing upon Mary. She said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb" (v. 42). She also blessed her for believing what God had spoken to her through Gabriel. You can imagine that these pronouncements of blessing would have been important to Mary as she endured much opposition and suspicion over her unusual pregnancy. Mary may have even questioned whether this was a blessing or a curse when she was almost divorced by Joseph and when they had to travel to Bethlehem when she was great with child. The Christmas story is full of difficulties, but this passage reminds us that being in the center of God's will is to be blessed. Circumstances do not determine our favor from the Lord.

Mary, who from all generations past and present is eternally counted as blessed (v. 49) was obedient to God her Savior (v. 47). Mary played a most important role of bringing about the birth of the Lord Jesus, the One Who is to rule and reign upon His return as the spiritual battles play out in heaven and the physical events on earth as the end time events come to their culmination with His ultimate victory.

Reflection Questions

1. In what ways can you see the current events of today leading up to the grand battles chronicled in the Book of Revelation?

2. How does understanding Jesus' victory over His enemies help us to accomplish the works that God has in our own lives?