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

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 671: 11/09/2025



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 11-9-2014. This week, we open with the first reading from the Prophet Ezekiel, move to the second reading from Second Corinthians Chapter 3, and close with the Gospel lesson from the Second Chapter of John.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Prophet Ezekiel. The context of the reading is Ezekiel's prophecy concerning a restored temple in Jerusalem. The most likely interpretation of this text is that this is the "Millennial Temple" because its construction coincides with the beginning of the Lord Jesus' thousand-year (millennium) reign after the end of the tribulation period. This follows the conclusion of a period of judgment known as the "Day of the Lord," a prominent theme throughout the Old Testament. This period was first mentioned by the Prophet Isaiah who said, "For the LORD of hosts will have a day of reckoning against everyone who is proud and lofty and against everyone who is lifted up, That he may be abased" (Isaiah 2:12). The Day of the Lord, or DOL, is mentioned at least

another 18 times in the Old Testament including Ezekiel 13:5, "You have not gone up into the breaches, nor did you build the wall around the house of Israel to stand in the battle on the **day of the LORD**" (emphasis added). This time, also known as the time of Jacob's trouble (Jeremiah 30:7), is the conclusion of the period of time during which God will pour out His judgments upon the unbelieving world left after the church has been "caught up" from the earth as described by Saint Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. After Jesus returns with His church (Revelation 19:11,14) the world is restored to a time of worldwide peace under the rulership of the Lord Jesus Christ for a period of one thousand years (Revelation 20:4). The reading for today is in the section that describes how life-giving water will flow from the temple to renew the salt-laden Dead Sea. *Note that the omitted verses 3-7 and 10 were included in order to provide the proper context.*

First Reading:

> *1 Then he brought me back to the door of the house; and behold, water was flowing from under the threshold of the house toward the east, for the house faced east. And the water was flowing down from under, from the right side of the house, from south of the altar. 2 He brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around on the outside to the outer gate by way of the gate that faces east. And behold, water was trickling from the south side. 3 When the man went out toward the east with a line in his hand, he measured a thousand cubits, and he led me through the water, water reaching the ankles. 4 Again he measured a thousand and led me through the water, water reaching the knees. Again he measured a thousand and led me through the water, water reaching the loins. 5 Again he measured a thousand; and it was a river that I could not ford, for the water had risen, enough water to swim in, a river that could not be forded. 6 He said to me, "Son of man, have you seen this?" Then he brought me back to the bank of the river. 7 Now when I had returned, behold, on the bank of the river there were very many trees on the one side and on the other. 8 Then he said to me, "These waters go out toward the eastern region and go down into the Arabah; then they go toward the sea, being made to flow into the sea, and the waters of the sea become fresh. 9 It will come about that every living creature which swarms in every place where the river goes, will live. And there will be very many fish, for these waters go there and the others become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes. 10 And it will come about that fishermen will stand beside it; from Engedi to Eneglaim there will be a place for the spreading of nets. Their fish will be according to their kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea, very many. 11 But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they will be left for salt. 12 By the river on its bank, on one side and on the other, will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither and their fruit will not fail. They will bear every month because their water flows from the sanctuary, and their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing." (Ezekiel 47:1-12)*

The water flowing from the temple comes from an elevated position since the temple is where all nations will eventually come to worship. John said in Revelation, "Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy; For ALL THE NATIONS WILL COME AND WORSHIP BEFORE YOU, FOR YOUR RIGHTEOUS ACTS HAVE BEEN REVEALED" (Revelation 15:4). The Millennial Temple will be elevated, both physically as well as spiritually, the place where Jesus reign will be central. As the life-giving fresh water flows from God downhill towards the salt-laden Dead Sea, the water becomes deeper and deeper until it disappears down into the depths of the now freshwater lake. The Dead Sea will become fresh and a source of fish, with water providing nourishment for trees that will also flourish in this formerly dead region. The application of this is that all life is from God, water is life, and this comes from God out of the Millennial temple. God can heal the fallen creation and reverse the curse of Adam. This should encourage us because sin is not the last word written in the history of the world.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Corinthians. The overall context of Chapter 3 is the theological concept of "carnality". Paul addressed the problem of Christians who are immature in their faith, which resulted in the Corinthian believers indulging in the things from their old lives of sin. Paul warned that believers needed to be careful because they would all stand before the Lord, give an account, and receive a reward for what they did for God. What was at stake was not their salvation, but their eternal rewards. *Note: Verses 12-15 omitted from the reading were included to provide the proper context.*

Second Reading:

> *9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. 10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. 11 For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. 14 If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. 15 If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. 16 Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are. (1 Corinthians 3:9-17).*

Paul said that all of the believers were working together to build God's church (v. 9). This project of building for God was something that was empowered by God's variety of gifts given to each believer (v. 10a, "according to the grace given"). Paul said that it wasn't as important as **what** we did, but rather our heart and motivation in **why** we did it (vv. 12-15). Paul reminded us that as believers, we are a temple of God, and we are to use the gifts given to us through God's grace to accomplish the work He has for us. God will test our works against His gold standard, that of perfect knowledge of our motives. This is something that the Corinthian church needed very much to understand, as they were struggling with carnal living in their culture that was filled with idolatry in their crossroads city. Later in this Book Paul explained to the Corinthian believers more about the coming judgment. Believers will be judged at what is called the "Bema Seat Judgment" found in 2 Corinthians 5:10. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." Paul also described it in Romans. "But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God" (Romans 14:10). This judgment is not about salvation, that was something that was determined by Jesus Who died on our behalf (1 John 2:2) and when we trusted in Him (John 3:16). Instead, the point of the Bema Seat Judgment is to reward believers based on how faithful they were in serving the Lord. We see this clearly in the last Book of the Bible where Jesus said, "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done" (Revelation 22:12). The Bema Seat of Christ should provide extra encouragement for us to steward our gifts and talents according to God's value system and not the world's value system. As we go about our lives as Christians, we must remember to test our motives and use our spiritual gifts in the service of the Lord.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from John Chapter 2. The central theme of the Gospel of John is to show that Jesus is the Christ and that Jesus is the incarnation of God, the "logos" or "the Word that became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14a). Jesus declares throughout the Book that He is God, for example John 10:30, "I and the Father are One." Chapter 1 summarizes God's plan of redemption through the birth, life (and eventual death) of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the One Who "came to His own, and His own people (the Jews) did not receive Him" (John 1:11). John showed that God's plan of salvation was for people to find life through Jesus' giving of His own life, not as a victim (John 10:18) in a sacrificial offering but as One who willingly offered Himself as a final sacrifice for the sin of the world once and for all (Hebrews 10:12). John said, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13). The first chapter of John also introduced the person of John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, who was God's appointed forerunner who came in the spirit of Elijah to fulfil the Old Testament prophecy in Malachi 4:5-6. John the Baptist came "to bear witness of the Light, that all through Him might believe" (John 1:7).

Finally, the opening chapter of John's Gospel introduced Jesus' ministry by revealing His calling of the first disciples. Peter the Rock was first and was given this new name by Jesus (1:42), followed by Philip (v. 43) and finally Nathanael (v. 45). Jesus' first recorded miracle was shared in the closing section of the chapter when Jesus revealed to Nathanael how He had seen him standing under the fig tree. Since Jesus wasn't in close enough proximity for this to have occurred naturally, Nathaniel received this as a miracle (John 1:48). This impressed Nathanael so much that he declared the Rabbi Jesus to be the Son of God, which was the first affirmation of Jesus' divinity in this Gospel.

Chapter 2, from which today's reading is found, opens with the miracle of Jesus turning the water into wine at the wedding in Cana in the region of Galilee near the Sea of Galilee (John 2:1-11). After Jesus did this miracle, John recorded that "His disciples believed in Him" (John 2:11c). After the wedding celebration concluded, which according to Jewish tradition would have gone on just short of a week, Jesus traveled with His mother, brothers, and disciples to Capernaum. This brings us to the reading for today.

Gospel Reading:

> *13 The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. 15 And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; 16 and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a place of business." 17 His disciples remembered that it was written, "ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME." 18 The Jews then said to Him, "What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?" 19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20 The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" 21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body. 22 So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken. (John 2:13-22)*

The first point from the text is that Jesus's actions revealed his high reverence for God and correct worship in the temple. This is the first of three Passover celebrations that are mentioned in the Gospels (v. 13, John 6:4, John 11:55). The first of two times that Jesus drove the money changers from the temple (v. 14, Matthew 21:12). The money changers were in the outer courts of the temple, preying on the Jewish pilgrims coming from various countries to observe the Passover. This

pilgrimage was required for every adult over 12 years old (Exodus 23:14-17). One reason that Jesus was angry, in addition to the fact that commerce was being conducted in the temple that included the sale of sacrificial animals, was that the money changers swindled their clients and took advantage of the fact that they had no other choice but to buy their sacrifices from these temple crooks. Jesus called this a "robbers' den" in Matthew's Gospel. On that occasion Jesus proclaimed to them, "It is written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER'; but you are making it a ROBBERS' DEN" (Matthew 21:13). In the reading Jesus told them, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a place of business" (v. 16b). (John 4:24). Jesus would not tolerate commerce in the temple, especially that of crooked money changers. Again, Jesus' actions of driving out the money changers from the temple indicated His reverence for His Father God.

The way Jesus drove the shady currency exchange merchants from the temple gives us an insight into the second point that arises from the text: Jesus' supernatural power and inherent authority. John said, "And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables" (v. 15). The Passover was a hectic season in Jerusalem with the arrival of thousands of pilgrims from around the Roman world. A large contingent of Roman soldiers would have stood guard outside the temple. Jesus must have driven out the money changers with such power that they could not raise any objection with the Roman authorities, who would have responded quickly to the situation. John said, ''His disciples remembered that it was written, 'ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME,'" a quote from the Messianic Psalm 69. Even Jesus' disciples didn't realize all of these things right away, but they were humble enough to insert this insight into the record once they did. The way Jesus drove the money changers away revealed the tremendous power He wielded from His Father God and His inherent authority as the author of true worship.

The third and final point from the text is the introduction of Jesus' "parabolic" teaching method. The parable in the reading today is more indirect than the "kingdom parables" in Matthew 13. Jesus told the Jews in the temple, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (v. 19). Even though the temple repair project had been ongoing for 46 years, the renovation had still not been completed. The Jewish historian Josephus writes that the renovation continued all the way up until the siege of Jerusalem that began in the year 67 and concluded with the destruction of the temple in 70. Instead of meaning the Temple building, Jesus was referring to His own body, which would be given over to death, and then would be resurrected in three days. The Jews misunderstood Jesus; something that we find out later in Matthew's Gospel was His intention by teaching this way. In that text when His disciples came to Him and asked Him why he taught the people in parables He answered them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted" (Matthew 13:11). Jesus' reason for obscuring the truth to those who won't believe is that it shields them from further judgment when they will stand before the Lord.

The first two chapters of John mark a series of firsts: the first disciples, the first miracles, the first display of Jesus' power, and the first use of His marvelous teaching method in parables. We can rejoice that we can model Jesus' reverence for His Father God when we worship God. We can minister to others through the same power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus Himself possessed. Finally, we can meditate and learn from Jesus' teaching in the Gospels. Something about Jesus' teaching method makes us understand the concept even more clearly than if He had told us the truths directly.

Have a great week.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In all three readings, we see a display of God's power:

Ezekiel shows us that God's life-giving water will resurrect the Dead Sea

Paul shows us in 1 Corinthians that all Christians will face a time of giving an account for what we have done with the gifts and talents entrusted to us.

John records a display of power when Jesus cleansed the Temple and predicted His resurrection power.

As you think about these three passages and the incredible display of power, what areas of your life need God's resurrection power? How do you respond to God's power?

2. Jesus had a zeal for worship to be pure, not tainted by selfish motives. This theme was also discussed in 1 Corinthians, since our motives will be laid bare at the Bema Seat of Christ. What do you want God to change in your life to purify your worship and your motives, so that you will not be ashamed at the Bema Seat of Christ? Talk to Him about this area that you would like Him to purify and cleanse—and ask Him what your role is in making life-giving changes.

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

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 6-21-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **6-21-2015**. This week the three readings may seem to be unrelated, but a closer study helps the Christian to get a much clearer picture of who God and Jesus are—above and separated from man, their creation—and the awesome power they possess and exercise on behalf of mankind. The theologians say that God is transcendent, that is, He is way above and beyond His creation. In fact, we could know nothing about God at all, if He had not chosen to reveal Himself to mankind—through creation, through His Word, and through His Son. Jesus came to make God known in a personal way by His presence as a man among men. Immanuel, the name given Him in Matthew 1:23, means "God with us."

Job, the ancient Old Testament believer, was visited by the awesome God, and was dumbstruck. When Jesus spoke to Saul from heaven (Acts 9:3), the church's chief persecutor fell to the ground in recognition of who Jesus was. Afterwards, in his New Testament writings, then known as Paul, the Apostle shares much about the purpose of Jesus' coming and how it affects those who come to faith in Christ. The Gospels reveal the life of Jesus, who certified that He was the promised Messiah through the demonstration of His miraculous power over the physical, natural, and spiritual constraints of life.

The first reading is from what many consider to be the oldest book in the Bible. *Note: Verses 2 – 7 which were omitted in the original reading are included here in order to provide the full context and meaning.*

The story of Job is familiar to most Christians. He was a righteous man who honored God and served his fellow men by helping in their times of distress or need. Satan approached God and wanted to test Job, claiming that he was faithful to God only because he was richly blessed in material and physical ways. God allowed Satan to test Job and the patriarch suffered the loss of crops, possessions, and his children. It's difficult to imagine the pain and suffering of this saint, and what made it worse was the counsel he received from his so-called friends. They accused him of some failure or sin that brought God's judgment upon him. He remained true, however, claiming "I know that my redeemer lives," (Job 19:25).

In the midst of his suffering, Job lamented, "If only there were someone to mediate between us, someone to bring us together" (Job 9:33). His plea is answered in the New Testament, where Paul wrote, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). Little did Job understand that God's plan was to ultimately redeem lost mankind.

Today's reading presents the end of the Job's story. God appears to him and asks a series of rhetorical questions, which Job couldn't answer. Instead, he responds as anyone would in the presence of almighty God: "I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer—twice, but I will say no more" (Job 40:4-5) and "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes (Job 42:5-6).

What should we take away from this reading? In the presence of God, we mortals are sinful and undeserving. In contrast, God is the great Creator, the almighty God who is worthy of worship. The next reading will reveal God's plan to restore sinful man to Himself.

First Reading

Job 38:1-11 NAS95 1 Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said, 2 "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? 3 Now gird up your loins like a man, And I will ask you, and you instruct Me! 4 Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding, 5 Who set its measurements? Since you know. Or who stretched the line on it? 6 On what were its bases sunk? Or who laid its cornerstone, 7 When the morning stars sang together And all the sons of God shouted for joy? 8 Or who enclosed the sea with doors When, bursting forth, it went out from the womb; 9 When I made a cloud its garment And thick darkness its swaddling band, 10 And I placed boundaries on it And set a bolt and doors, 11 And I said, 'Thus far you shall come, but no farther; And here shall your proud waves stop'?

The second reading is from one of the Apostle Paul's letter to the church in the city of Corinth. *Note: Verses 18 – 21 which were omitted from the original reading are included here in order to provide the full context and meaning.*

Paul emphasizes that Jesus died for lost mankind with the purpose that redeemed men would not live for themselves (which is the natural instinct of men), but would live for Christ. He is worthy of

such commitment because He suffered humiliating death, paying the awful price for our sin, and rose from the dead as proof positive that God's demand had been paid fully.

The Apostle goes on to emphasize the significant transformation that occurs when a sinner confesses Jesus as Lord and Savior. It isn't that the convert has merely changed, but he is a new creature; he has been transformed. That's a word that describes the change that occurs when a chrysalis becomes a butterfly. Wow! It's a radical difference in nature. And because the believer has been changed, his whole life is changed. He no longer yearns for the things of his former, unconverted life. Rather, he finds everything is new, and his affections, motivations, and actions are now committed to Jesus.

What's more, the Christian now becomes an official representative of Christ on earth. Just as the sinner was reconciled to God by faith, he now is to be an ambassador for Christ, a minister of reconciliation to the lost world. God desires to use the Christian as His spokesman to share the good news of God's grace.

Paul concludes the paragraph with a startling statement about what it cost Jesus to become a satisfactory sacrifice for sin. It's hard to think of Jesus as becoming sin for us, but that's what the text says. Only by His accepting all our sin (He had none of His own) could that sin be washed away by the sacrifice of His life. As a result, by faith, we can "become the righteousness of God in Him." Praise God!

Second Reading

2 Corinthians 5:14-21 NAS95 14 For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; 15 and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. 16 Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. 17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. 18 Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Today's final reading is from the Gospel of Mark. Jesus had been teaching the multitude, using parables—stories that illustrate truth. Everyone likes stories, and Jesus could teach deep, spiritual realities by using familiar scenes and events. He had spoken of the sower whose seed fell on various kinds of soil with differing results. As he told His disciples, many hearers would not understand but He explained the teaching to them. On this occasion he used many parables and explained them to the Twelve (Mark 4:33).

No doubt, tired from the day of teaching (after all He was human), He instructed the disciples to go with Him to the other side of the lake. As they sailed, Jesus went to the back of the boat and slept. A terrible storm arose, and the disciples, fearing for their lives, awoke Jesus. We don't know what they intended Him to do, but He rebuked them for their lack of faith. Then, He performed a powerful miracle, ordering the wind and the sea to be calm. Immediately, the storm died down and everything became completely calm. Who could imagine that anyone could stop a storm by merely speaking to it?

Wondering among themselves, the disciples asked each other, "Who is this?" "Even the wind and the sea obey Him." As in the reading from Job and 2 Corinthians, we are faced once again with the all-powerful God. Jesus was not only 100% human, He was 100% God. He did not give up His deity when He was born on this earth. Jesus performed miracles of healing, raising the dead, casting out demons, and ordering the weather—all of which were the proof that He, indeed, was the promised Messiah who was to come to redeem His people, giving signs of His authority by the miracles He performed. When we read the Gospels, we are not merely reading exciting stories, we are being introduced to the very Creator God who sent His Son to save us.

Gospel Reading

Mark 4:35-41 NAS95 35 On that day, when evening came, He said to them, "Let us go over to the other side." 36 Leaving the crowd, they took Him along with them in the boat, just as He was; and other boats were with Him. 37 And there arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up. 38 Jesus Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" 39 And He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Hush, be still." And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm. 40 And He said to them, "Why are you afraid? How is it that you have no faith?" 41 They became very much afraid and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. How would you react if God were to appear to you as He did to Job? Would you be proud that He spoke to you or would you respond with reverent fear and repentance?

2. The miracle-working Jesus has paid the supreme sacrifice to reconcile you to God through faith. Have you acknowledged Him as Lord and Savior?

3. Have you accepted your role as an ambassador for Christ, trying to bring others to reconcile with God?

Readings for the Week

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

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

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/062115.cfm

First Reading JB 38:1, 8-11

Second Reading 2 COR 5:14-17

Gospel Reading MK 4:35-41

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 6-14-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **6-14-2015**. This week we open with Ezekiel 17: 22-24. The prophet uses a metaphor to show how God sets up kings and takes them down and will eventually establish a King who will reign over all. Then we move to St. Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5: 6-10, encouraging the use of our earthly bodies for eternal purposes. Finally we conclude with St. Mark 4: 26-34, as Jesus uses parables to teach about the kingdom of God.

Introduction to the First Reading:

When an F5 tornado struck Joplin, Missouri, on May 22, 2011, 158 people died and countless others were injured. Tornado warnings had been issued and the sirens activated, but many did not seek shelter soon enough. One study found that only 10 percent of the population respond immediately when a tornado warning is given. The others respond with what the researcher called, "denial." * Lives are lost when people don't believe and heed the warnings.

Ezekiel was a prophet of God sent out to warn God's people of impending destruction. God had always been their shelter in a time of storm, but they had strayed far from Him. If they didn't turn back to Him destruction would surely overtake them. Ezekiel and many of the other prophets were sent to sound the alarm, but sadly, many did not heed the prophets' warning.

The people of God were composed of twelve tribes descended from Abraham's grandson Jacob, (renamed Israel in Genesis 35:10). These descendants and the land God gave them for a home were called Israel. From them, the Messiah Jesus would come, and through the salvation He would bring, all the nations of the world would be blessed.

Despite their privileged position in God's plan for the nations, Israel rebelled against God and went after the false gods of the surrounding nations. They forgot the Lord's commands and worshiped idols. This was the fate of King Solomon when he ruled in Israel after his father David's reign. At first he followed God, and God gave him great wisdom to rule justly. But when Solomon married foreign women, he began to follow after their gods. Because of his idolatry, God would take ten of the tribes from his rule and leave his posterity the tribes of Benjamin and Judah only. The ten tribes became known as the Northern Kingdom and were called Israel. The remaining two tribes formed the Southern Kingdom and were called Judah. It was to Judah that God sent Ezekiel with His warnings.

God had already sent an invading army from Babylon to take Judah into captivity. Ezekiel was with the first wave of captives taken to Babylon. Some of God's people, however, still remained in Jerusalem, Judah's capital. If they didn't repent and turn back to God, they would face a similar fate as their brothers. They ignored the warning, and instead of seeking God, they sought an alliance with Egypt. That failed, and Babylon conquered Jerusalem taking most of the people who resided there into captivity.

In the First Reading, Ezekiel uses trees as a metaphor for rulers God sets up and takes down. When kings abandoned God and led the people far away from Him, God sent prophets like Ezekiel to call them back to God and warn them of impending destruction. When the king and his people persisted in their rebellion, God sent conquerors to come and take them captive.

Ezekiel looked forward to the time when God will set up another king. God will take a twig from the lofty top of the cedar and plant it on the mountain of Israel, and it will bear fruit and birds of all kinds will come and prosper there. This tree is a reference to Jesus who will be established in Israel

and will bring salvation to all who come to Him. And someday He will reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords in a heavenly kingdom that has no end.

Another prophet sounds the warning for us. St. John tells us:

16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. 18 He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (Gospel of St. John 3: 16-18)

Those who believe in Jesus have eternal life. Those that don't, stand judged already. Are you going to heed the warning and believe?

* http://www.mprnews.org/story/2012/05/09/storm-ready-human-reaction#gallery accessed 5/18/15

First Reading:

Ezekiel 17:22-24 NAS95 22 Thus says the Lord GOD, "I will also take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and set it out; I will pluck from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one and I will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. 23 "On the high mountain of Israel I will plant it, that it may bring forth boughs and bear fruit and become a stately cedar. And birds of every kind will nest under it; they will nest in the shade of its branches. 24 "All the trees of the field will know that I am the LORD; I bring down the high tree, exalt the low tree, dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will perform it."

Introduction to the Second Reading:

1 and 2 Corinthians were written by St. Paul the Apostle to the church in Corinth. There were sin issues in the church, and Paul had addressed them frankly in 1 Corinthians. Now in his second letter, he wanted to reassure the Corinthians that he did this, not out of anger, but out of love. In 2 Corinthians 2, Paul encourages the Corinthian church to forgive and restore the one who had caused the problems. He goes on to discuss practical matters of Christian living such as financial giving and caution regarding relationships with unbelievers. But often his thoughts turn from earthly matters to eternal blessings.

In the proclamation of the gospel, St. Paul had undergone extreme persecution which he recounts in 2 Corinthians 4. He testified, *"We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed."* Encouragement came from knowing that these "light troubles," as he called them, were producing eternal results—people

were hearing about and believing in Jesus. His focus was not on the temporary suffering but on eternal rewards. He continued this focus in chapter 5.

In the first five verses, St. Paul compares our bodies with an earthly tent. Tents are fragile and temporary and subject to destruction. So are our earthly bodies. While we are in this "tent" we groan and are burdened, Paul tells us. We long for a heavenly body, which is like an eternal house not a fragile tent.

In the Second Reading (v. 6-10), Paul acknowledges that it would be much better to be away from this body and home with the Lord in heaven. But until then, Paul tells us to do what is pleasing to the Lord. God has ministry for us to do, and it would be pointless to waste this time by wishing we were in heaven. But on the other hand, knowing that we are going to heaven someday will give us courage and perseverance when we face persecution and hardship in this life.

In addition, St. Paul reminds us we will someday have to give an account to Christ for what we have done in this life as Christians. Did we serve Him well? Did we tell others about Christ? Will He someday be able to say to you and me, "*Well done, good and faithful servant*"? He will if we faithfully use these earthly bodies to accomplish his eternal purposes.

Second Reading:

2 Corinthians 5:6-10 NAS95 6 Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord– 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight– 8 we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. 9 Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Wherever Jesus went, a crowd of the curious gathered. Often He spoke to them in parables. A parable is a simple, everyday story that represents a spiritual truth or moral principle. It usually compares a spiritual concept with an earthly object or event.

In the Gospel Reading, two parables are given. The first one begins, "*The kingdom of God is like a*

man who casts seed upon the soil." Stories like these are often told to illustrate or illuminate a truth. But Jesus spoke in parables not to clarify the truth but to obscure it. It was a judgment on those whose hearts were hard. To the unbelieving, the parables were incomprehensible riddles, but to those who wanted to understand the truth, Jesus would give them understanding. He said to His disciples and His true followers, "*To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables, [12] so that while seeing, they may see and not perceive, and while hearing, they may hear and not understand….*"*

In the first parable, the kingdom of God is compared to a man who plants seeds. While he goes about his daily routine and without any further help from the man, the seed sprouts and matures. So it is with us. We plant the seed of the gospel in people's hearts when we teach or preach or proclaim the truth of the Bible to our friends, neighbors, and relatives. Then God causes the implanted truth to take root and grow. A mature Christian is the result.

The second parable says that the kingdom of God is like a tiny mustard seed which grows into a large plant with branches capable of providing shade for birds of the air. The church was small in the beginning–just a little band of disciples. But when those men were empowered by the Holy Spirit to be witnesses of the Gospel to the whole world, the church grew rapidly. Many have found comfort and salvation there. If we plant the seed of the Word of God in people's hearts, God will cause that seed to spout and the church to flourish.

*Information gleaned from a sermon by John MacArthur accessed 5/20/15.
http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/90-464/the-purpose-for-parables

Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson is from Mark 4: 26-34:

Mark 4:26-34 NAS95 26 And He was saying, "The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; 27 and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows–how, he himself does not know. 28 The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. 29 But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come." 30 And He said, "How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it? 31 It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the soil, 32 yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches; so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR can NEST UNDER ITS SHADE." 33 With many such parables He was speaking the word to them, so far as they were able to hear it; 34 and He did not speak to them without a parable; but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

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

1. What would you need to do differently in order to live your life for eternal purposes? List two areas in which you will write down on a card or in your personal journal.

2. If we plant the seed of the Word of God in people's hearts, God will cause it to grow. What are some ways you can plant more "seeds" this week? Give at least two ways in which this could be done.

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/061415.cfm

First Reading EZ 17:22-24

Second Reading 2 COR 5:6-10

Gospel Reading MK 4:26-34

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Keywords: tree, body, judgment, seeds, plant, kingdom, parable

---

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 7-27-2014

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



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 7-27-2014. This week we open with the Old Testament reading that describes King Solomon's prayer for wisdom. Our New Testament reading describes God's vision for each follower to be conformed to the image of His Son, Jesus. This is truly wise living. In the Gospel lesson we continue with more of Jesus' teaching on parables from last week. He provides short stories of wise people who valued the Kingdom of Heaven above all else and inherited life eternal.

The context for this story is after the death of King David. Israel was in its "golden era" having subdued its enemies and established itself as a nation. Solomon was David's son by Bathsheba and succeeded David on the throne. We catch a glimpse of his heart as he begins his reign over Israel.

> *5 In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream at night; and God said, "Ask what you wish me to give you." 6 Then Solomon said, "You have shown great lovingkindness to Your servant David my father, according as he walked before You in truth and righteousness and uprightness of heart toward You; and You have reserved for him this great lovingkindness, that You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. 7 Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king in place of my father David, yet I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. 8 Your servant is in the midst of Your people which You have chosen, a great people who are too many to be numbered or counted. 9 So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?" 10 It was pleasing in the sight of the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing. 11 God said to him, "Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice, 12 behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you*

> *arise after you. (1 Kings 3:5-12)*

These verses show us the beginning steps of King Solomon. Some important observations include:

- God came to Solomon in a dream
- God invited Solomon to ask Him for whatever he wished
- Solomon recognized God's great loving-kindness (fiercely loyal love) before answering
- Solomon also recognized his finiteness and sense of inadequacy for the important role that he was being placed in
- Solomon asked for an understanding heart to judge the people of Israel and to discern between good and evil
- God granted this request and blessed him with wisdom

If you know the rest of the story, you may be confused with how a person could be granted a wise and discerning heart and yet end up being led astray by all of the women (700 of them) he was married to (1 Kings 11:3). I wonder if his great wisdom came through the school of hard knocks. For at the end of his life he confesses: "The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). No matter how much wealth, power and status, the wisest man on earth concludes that fearing God is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10).

You may not be a king, but we can all come to God and ask Him for wisdom. James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him." We all have roles in life that are challenging. We can follow Solomon's lead and recognize God's fiercely loyal love and our inadequacy. This should lead us with humility and desperation before the true King of kings as we ask our Heavenly Father for what we really need: wisdom.

The second reading is from the New Testament, Saint Paul's letter to the Romans, which is a continuation of what we read last week. Paul is in the middle of declaring the victory that believers have through Christ. But the victory comes through the back door of recognizing our weakness as humans. This echoes King Solomon's prayer for wisdom in the earlier reading. For it is in our weakness that we find help from the Holy Spirit, who is interceding for us according to the will of God the Father (Romans 8:27).

> *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. 29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. (Romans 8:28-30)*

This passage, in its context, casts an inspiring and hopeful vision for followers of Christ. For it declares that God uses all things for His good purposes. While not all things that happen in this life are good, God is able to use every circumstance (pleasurable and painful) to accomplish His

predestined will: to conform us to image of His Son. He wants us to look like Christ. That's what this life is all about. That is God's vision for us as His followers. The question for us is, how badly do we want His vision for our lives? Are we willing to let God conform us to the image of His Son and work all things together for good, or are we wanting to just "get enough of God" in order to go to heaven when we die? There is a foundational condition for having all things work together for good: this comes to one who loves God and allows Him to work out His good purposes in his or her life. What this implies is trust and surrender to God's bigger purposes. He knows what is best for us. Someday we will agree wholeheartedly with Him.

In the Gospel lesson this week we continue with Jesus' teaching to His disciples through parables that we looked at the past two weeks.

> *44 "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. 45 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, 46 and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. 47 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind; 48 and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away. 49 So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, 50 and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 51 Have you understood all these things?" They said to Him, "Yes." 52 And Jesus said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old." (Matthew 13:44-52)*

Jesus is away from the crowds (Matthew 13:36) and now teaches His disciples in parables, something which He previously did only when the crowds were present. The main subject is the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus paints a few broad brush strokes to entice His followers to continue their costly pursuit of being a disciple of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus likens the Kingdom of Heaven to a hidden treasure and a pearl of great price. In the parable of the hidden treasure the man isn't searching for it, in contrast the man in the parable of the pearl is on an active search to locate valuable peals. Both parables, though, require a sacrifice on the part of the would-be owners of the precious goods. But the sacrifice is insignificant for the joy of obtaining the truly valuable treasure. Jesus is helping us to see that the Kingdom of Heaven is worth every seeming sacrifice that is made in order to walk with Him in this world. Jesus' kingdom is only partially here, and these parables illustrate the great value of this down payment on the full kingdom, the mystery of life eternal.

The apostle Paul understood clearly the surpassing value of a discipleship relationship to Jesus: "I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things" (Phil. 3:8).

The last illustration of the Kingdom of Heaven is very striking. It is that of a dragnet that is tossed out to catch fish. In the end of the age, the fish will be sorted out. The good will go to containers and the bad will be thrown out. Jesus gives the explanation clearly. The wicked will be sorted out from the righteous and will be thrown into the furnace of fire (referring to a literal Hell). The prospects of an eternity with weeping and gnashing of teeth is almost too much to fathom. But Jesus, in His kindness, gives us insight into eternity. In this life we have a lot of choices to make, but the most important one is where we will spend eternity. Based on our sin, we have only one label that we can claim: wicked. "There is none righteous, not even one" (Romans 3:10). We cannot claim the label "righteous," no matter how good we try to be. But Jesus, who was righteous came to give us the label and identity of "righteous" by taking the punishment of our wickedness on the cross and giving us His righteousness. "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). So while we don't deserve the label of righteous, we can choose to have it, if we will receive God's gift of eternal life. It's a gift, though. It doesn't count until you receive it. Have you placed your faith in God's gift of eternal life through Christ? Are you counting on this for your salvation?

If so, you are a disciple of the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus said that each one who is following Him into His Kingdom brings out treasures that are new and old. This means that we have a growing testimony of God's valuable work in our lives. We can speak of the current work that He is doing and the past work that He has done. We are cooperating with His vision to conform us into the image of His Son, for we know that the Son is our most valuable treasure indeed.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. What does it mean to be a disciple of the Kingdom of Heaven?

2. What "sacrifices" have you made to be a disciple of the Kingdom of Heaven? How do these parables help you to know that it is worth it?

3. How does the story of Solomon asking for wisdom illustrate the parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price? In what areas do you want God to help you become wise and discerning about your own life and pursuits? Spend some time in prayer, asking Him for His perspective and wisdom for your life. Let Him know that you want to surrender to His vision for conforming you to the image of His Son.

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/072714.cfm

First Reading 1 KGS 3:5, 7-12 (plus skipped verses)

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

Second Reading ROM 8:28-30

Gospel Reading MT 13:44-52

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 7-20-2014



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 7-20-2014. This week we open by briefly looking at the responsorial Psalm from the first reading and then move onto the second reading in which we study some deep truths from Paul's Letter to the Romans. Finally, we move to the Gospel lesson in which we continue Jesus' teaching of the parables in Matthew 13 that we looked at last week.

The first reading is from the Apocrypha; you can read and study that for yourself at the link provided at the end of this study (we don't have permission to reprint that text due to copyright protection). The main idea from that is given in the responsorial Psalm that follows this reading. This is from Psalm Chapter 86 and we have included verses 5-7:

> *5 For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, And abundant in lovingkindness to all who*

> *call upon You.*
>
> *6 Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer; And give heed to the voice of my supplications!*
>
> *7 In the day of my trouble I shall call upon You, For You will answer me. (Psalm 86:5-7)*

God forgives those who call upon Him (v. 5), listen to their prayers (v. 6), and answers them during times of distress (v. 7). It is good to know that God is above our problems (He is not wringing His hands in worry), yet He is not aloof to us in our neediness. There are two terms that help us to understand these important facets of God's character: transcendence (God is above His creation and rules over it) and immanence (God draws near to His creation and desires to be with us). These few verses teach us that He not only has the power to help us, He is interested in answering us; God's transcendence and immanence. What an amazing God who is powerful and uses His power in good and loving ways. His loving power is most clearly seen in the cross, as He gave His Son as a sacrifice for our sin debt.

The second reading also has a theme of prayer, only this passage teaches that the Holy Spirit Himself is praying for us. This passage from Paul's Letter to the Romans reinforces God's transcendence and immanence as well.

> *26 In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; 27 and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:26-27).*

In this reading, Saint Paul revealed a marvelous mystery about God the Holy Spirit. He said that God the Holy Spirit prays on our behalf (v. 26), and intercedes for us (v. 27). God is transcendent above the believer, knowing what our real needs are and working towards His end goal of glorifying Himself in our transformation. Yet, He also comes alongside us as the Helper who lives inside of us (John 14:6), praying with "groanings" too deep for words. He is not a cosmic policeman trying to enforce the rules. Instead this passage teaches that God the Holy Spirit is moved by our helpless estate and He desires to accomplish the Father's will in our lives. He prays for things that we ourselves may not value yet and may not see need to be accomplished in our lives. Maybe one important take away is to begin to listen to God's heart for our lives as we read the Bible and see if He may be answering His prayers for us when we don't see Him answering our prayers the way we desire. God's vision for our lives is much bigger than our small hopes and dreams. Saint John of the Cross said it well:

> *How will a person*
>
> *Brought to birth and nurtured in a world of small horizons,*
>
> *Rise up to you Lord*

If you do not raise him by your hand which made him?

The text doesn't say whether or not God changes our existing prayers to coincide with His will, or if He makes new petitions for us. Regardless, each person of the Holy Trinity intercedes with the other on our behalf. This is extremely important because Paul said, "we do not know how to pray as we should" (v. 27). We know from Jesus' prayer in John Chapter 17 that He prays for us. Because this prayer is recorded in Scripture, we can be certain that Jesus continues ministering on our behalf. Later on in Romans 8:34, Paul assures us that "Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us." Again, God's transcendence (knowing what we need) and immanence (being with us in our need) are important truths that should warm our hearts in our daily lives. We are not alone. God is with us.

The Gospel lesson this week includes three parables from the continuing study in Matthew 13. The first is the parable of the weeds and the tares and this provides some extremely important insights into the nature of the kingdom, both in the near term and looking on into eternity. It also gives important insight into those who will be locked out of the kingdom. Like the parable of the sower we looked at last week, Jesus went on to explain the meaning to His disciples. The second parable is the parable of the mustard seed, and the final one covered this week is the parable of the leaven.

Some specific cautions are in order about the interpretation of these particular parables as well as that genre in general. First, each parable must not be construed in such a way as to make it "walk on all fours" by taking terms literally when used within without fully considering the context. For example, though the word "leaven" (Matthew 13:33) is almost universally a negative term in the Bible, for example the "leaven of the Pharisees" (Matthew 16:6), it is also a very good thing when used in the context of baking bread. A second word in the reading today about which we take note of is the word "birds." In the Old Testament many, but not all birds were unclean animals and therefore bad in the Jewish context. John, the author of Revelation, used this association when he described the future religious and civil empire of the Antichrist Mystery Babylon as the home for every "unclean and hateful bird" (Revelation 18:2). However, as we will read in a moment, Jesus used this word to describe the rapid growth and size of His kingdom, not necessarily the nature of the kingdom (although some will debate this point). A large and fast growing kingdom is a good thing, though we need to take caution in believing that everyone who appears to be inside the kingdom may not be what they appear, as we will see in the parable of the wheat and the tares. We have to focus upon the main point of the parable and lay aside the word studies unless they change the meaning of the main point.

Here is an example of a modern "parable." In our day and age we know what we mean when we say: "People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones." We would never say this means that people should literally not throw stones while living inside that type of house, whether or not that was true. Instead, what we mean is that people should not criticize others for having the same faults that they have. That is the main point of this modern parable, which brings us to a second caution about interpreting parables.

Second, parables in the First Century Jewish context were used to prove one (or sometimes two) main ideas by "laying alongside" a story that was easy for the hearers in an oral culture to grasp. Although there is usually only one main **meaning** in a parable there are multiple **applications**. With these things in mind let's read the Gospel lesson.

> *24 Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25 But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. 26 But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. 27 The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' 28 "And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' The slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' 29 "But he said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. 30 'Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.'"31 He presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; 32 and this is smaller than all other seeds, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR come and NEST IN ITS BRANCHES." 33 He spoke another parable to them, "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened." 34 All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable. 35 This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: "I WILL OPEN MY MOUTH IN PARABLES; I WILL UTTER THINGS HIDDEN SINCE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD." 36 Then He left the crowds and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field." 37 And He said, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, 38 and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; 39 and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. 40 "So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, 42 and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear." (Matthew 13:24-43)*

Jesus taught the crowds and the disciples by giving them three parables. First, let's examine the parable of the wheat and the tares. This is a very important parable that provides essential insights both into the nature of Jesus' holy kingdom as well as some into the nature of the place where those excluded from it will be assigned for eternity. Many points arise from Jesus' teaching, here are a few.

- The picture provided of the separation of the wheat and the tares is what will occur in Revelation Chapter 17 at the end of the Great Tribulation when believers will be welcomed

into Jesus' kingdom reign on earth and all unbelievers will be removed.

- There are two literal destinations, heaven and hell. Hell is a real, literal place which is eternal and everyone that doesn't go to heaven goes there. Jesus taught more about hell than He did about heaven. In Matthew 13 he clarifies by saying, "The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (vv. 41-42).
  The author of Hebrews said, "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this to face judgment" (Heb. 9:27).
- The weed plants grow, seemingly out of control, alongside the wheat during their natural lives. But when the weeds die they are subjected to the control of the Master who rounds them up to be burned. It is at this point that their true nature becomes evident. Jesus said, "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).
- The nature of the seeds is different. Only God knows which one will grow into a wheat plant, and another into a weed. The doctrine of predestination is tied directly to God's foreknowledge. Romans 8:29 says, "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestinedto becomeconformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified." God wishes that none would perish but all would come to the knowledge of eternal life (1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9).
- Angels serve God in a unique ministry of gathering souls, bringing them to their rightful eternal destinations. The destination of the person's soul being transported is known to the angels at this point, even before God affords them justice through a trial. (Revelation 20:12). For "nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Revelation 21:27).
- The "church age" is a mystery, one not seen even by the disciples and Old Testament Prophets (Ephesians 5:32).

Second, Jesus told the parable of the mustard seed (vv. 31-32). Anyone that has ever seen a mustard seed knows of its tiny size, but how could a mustard seed grow into a tree and what does that have to do with the kingdom of heaven? The plant becomes so large that even birds can lodge in it, something that no normal mustard plant could ever hope to achieve. The kingdom of heaven is **like** a mustard seed, and when it is full grown it becomes so large that it brings refuge to people in the entire world.

Finally, Jesus told the parable of the leaven. As we said in the introduction, although leaven was equivalent to sin in the minds of a Jewish audience, the context makes it clear that this wasn't the meaning that Jesus intended. Instead, what Jesus said was that His kingdom would grow and expand in a mysterious way **like** leaven (v. 33) placed in dough. The leaven is hidden in the bread and its work is a mystery. In the same way the church is a mystery hidden in the world (Ephesians 5:32), and unseen by the Prophets and even the disciples.

What do these parables mean for us today, what are some possible applications? First, since the weeds are not uprooted we are called to be discerning. We must know the Word of God and be willing to provide our testimony, the hope that we have (1 Peter 3:15). Second, Christians are called to provide salt and light in their workplaces consisting of a mix of believers and nonbelievers including a variety of other faith groups. Finally, we can take courage in the fact that God will continue to build His kingdom into a large web, regardless of persecution and the political happenings of the age. The Word will spread as leaven through dough, and the tiny seed will become as large as a tree.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. The parables in Matthew 13 give us teachings about the Kingdom of Heaven. Since Jesus was from heaven, He speaks with authority of what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. His goal was to transform people from being citizens of earth to citizens of heaven, even while living here on earth. How does Jesus' vision for Kingdom living compare and contrast with your present vision for life? Where is your life in line with His vision and where is your life out of line with His vision? Spend some time talking to Him about what you would like to see Him do to move you closer to His vision.

2. The first two readings pointed out God's transcendence (He is above creation) and immanence (He draws near to His creation). What difference does God's transcendence and immanence make in our everyday lives? How might you (and others) know that you are growing in internalizing these truths?

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/072014.cfm

First Reading WIS 12:13, 16-19

Second Reading ROM 8:26-27

Gospel Reading MT 13:24-43

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB