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, 3-6-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **3-6-2016**. This week we open with a reading from Joshua. The successor to Moses, Joshua was one of only two of the original multitude that left Egypt who entered the Promised Land. The conquest of the land was accomplished under his leadership with victories, defeats, and noted events. The Apostle Paul's second letter to the church in Corinth is the source for the second reading. These verses reveal God's wonderful plan of reconciliation (a big theological term) in its twofold aspect: for ourselves and through us for others. The final reading from Luke's Gospel includes stories of losses, a sheep, a coin, and a wayward son. The emphasis is on what we refer to as the "Prodigal Son." From all three readings we can learn a lot about God and His loving relationship with His people.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first five books of the Bible are sometimes referred to as Law. The sixth book introduces the historical books, capturing the continuing story of Israel from their entrance into the Promised Land (under General Joshua) to their captivity and removal from the Land. In this first history book, Israel is taken into the Land, experiences ultimate victory (with significant defeats along the way), and comes into a period of rest. Chapters 1-4 detail the crossing of the Jordan River and the initial arrival in the land of Canaan. Today's reading reports on a divine encounter with God and the renewal of certain rituals.

First Reading:

Joshua 5:9-12 NAS95 9 Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of

Egypt from you." So the name of that place is called Gilgal to this day. 10 While the sons of Israel camped at Gilgal they observed the Passover on the evening of the fourteenth day of the month on the desert plains of Jericho. 11 On the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. 12 The manna ceased on the day after they had eaten some of the produce of the land, so that the sons of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate some of the yield of the land of Canaan during that year.

God appears to Joshua in this passage to encourage him. Having completed the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, Joshua is fully aware that only he and Caleb were among the original emigrants from Egypt. The long wilderness journey was as a result of the sin and disobedience of God's people, particularly their refusal to enter the Land when they first arrived there. What a tragedy! Literally hundreds of thousands of Israelites died on the journey. God in verse 2 seems to be telling Joshua that now the reproach of Egypt's opposition and the sin of the people were all in the past. The name "Gilgal" in the Hebrew language sounds like "roll." So their formal reproach was rolled off. This was a new, fresh start for His people.

Two startling events occur next. First, the people observe Passover. The Passover celebration is a vivid reminder of the deliverance of the people from Egypt. You can read about it in Exodus 12. God sent the death angel to kill the firstborn of the Egyptian families and their cattle. The Israelites were *passed over* if they splashed a bit of the blood of a slain lamb on the door posts and lintels of their houses. It's a magnificent illustration of the ultimate sacrifice that Jesus would make as the Lamb of God when He gave His life for the salvation of all who will by faith accept His work on their behalf and commit their lives to Him.

The second startling event occurred on the very next day. You will recall that for their entire wilderness journey, the people were provided manna (and later quail) for their daily food. It was a marvelous provision for the people, but how tedious it must have been to have the same diet day after day after day! So, here the people are finally in the Promised Land that was said to be a land of "milk and honey." On this day they were able to eat of the fruit of the land they were given. After that, the manna ceased, and from then on they could enjoy the produce of their new homeland.

How wonderful is God's provision for those who trust Him! More than mere physical food, He offers a personal relationship with Him that is made possible by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. Trust Him!

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians dealt with numerous problems that had arisen in the young church: disunity, sin, false teaching, to name a few. This second letter, in part, is a defense of his apostleship, for there were some who questioned his authority. He also writes to encourage the faithful and to strengthen their faith. The earlier portion of chapter 5 includes important teaching regarding the trials of life now for the Christian but the wonderful expectation for the future. Although we may struggle and ultimately die, he notes that "to be away from the body [is to be] at

home with the Lord" (v. 8). Then today's passage takes us into some deep but precious truths.

Second Reading:

2 Corinthians 5:17-21 NAS95 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.

Paul's statement that anyone in Christ is "a new creature" is astounding! He goes on to explain why that is true. The person who is "in Christ" is one who has confessed Jesus as lord and has by faith accepted His finished work on the cross as sufficient to cover his sin and make him right with God. Elsewhere Paul wrote, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." So, the believer is not only "in Christ," but Christ is in him. The born-again Christian (John 3:3) discovers that the things of his old life are no longer of dominant interest. Everything is seen in a new light; everything has changed.

As mentioned earlier, the next verses reveal God's wonderful plan of reconciliation (a big theological term) in its twofold aspect: for ourselves and through us for others. The term is more easily understood if we think of the frequent practice of reconciling our bank statement. The bank reports our balance is X number of dollars, but our checkbook may show a different number. We have to bring those figures into balance; that's called reconciliation. Verses 19 and 20 tell us how it has happened when we are reconciled with God. He did it through Christ. We had a debt to pay because of our sin. ("All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," Paul wrote in Romans 3:23). Jesus paid that debt by accepting the punishment due us and satisfying God's demand for justice, so that he is "not counting [our] trespasses against [us]." So, we can be reconciled with God when we accept God's gracious provision.

Paul continues to show us that, having been reconciled to God, we now have the responsibility of taking that message of reconciliation to those who have not yet been restored to God by faith. He says that message has been "committed" to us. In fact, he calls us "ambassadors for Christ." When we share God's truth with others, we are officially representing God; we are authorized and commissioned to do so. It is not a responsibility we can shirk or take lightly.

The final statement in today's reading is mind-boggling. The whole matter of reconciliation (or salvation in the broader sense) is because of the willingness of Jesus to "be sin on our behalf." It's beyond human imagination: the perfect, sinless, holy Son of God, who experienced life as we do but without sin, was willing to take our sin, bear it and its penalty for us so we can experience God's

righteousness. If you have not yet accepted this gracious gift of God, do so now and begin living as that new creature he spoke of earlier.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Luke 15 includes three parables, all about lost things. Parables are stories with familiar images and characters that illustrate important truths—truths that are made clear by the telling of a simple story. Often, no interpretation is necessary; the application is obvious. At other times Jesus uses parables that are understood by His disciples but are not clear to hearers who are not sincerely looking for truth. Note that in this instance, Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees and scribes who were complaining that Jesus "receives sinners and eats with them." They were the audience that Jesus taught using these three stories.

Gospel Reading:

Note: Verses 4 – 10 that were omitted from the reading are included below for context.

Luke 15:1-32 NAS95 1 Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. 2 Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." 3 So He told them this parable, saying,

4 "What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? 5 "When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 "And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' 7 "I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. 8 "Or what woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? 9 "When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!' 10 "In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

11 And He said, "A man had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them. 13 "And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. 14 "Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. 15 "So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 "And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him. 17 "But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How

many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! 18 'I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men."' 20 "So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21 "And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 "But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; 23 and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate. 25 "Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 "And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. 27 "And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.' 28 "But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him. 29 "But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; 30 but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.' 31 "And he said to him, 'Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 'But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.'"

The first parable is simple to understand. For a shepherd to lose one of his flock is disastrous. He will go to almost any length to find that single sheep. When he finds it, he rejoices and calls his friend together to rejoice with him. Jesus makes an interesting application to the story. He likens it to the rejoicing in heaven when a single sinner repents and is reconciled to God.

The second story has a very similar concluding statement: "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." In this story a woman has lost one of her ten coins, perhaps the total of all her assets. Like the shepherd, she goes on a serious search, checking every nook and cranny of her house until she finds the missing coin. She, also, calls her friends to come and celebrate the find.

One can readily conclude from these two stories that God is in the search-and-rescue business. As Peter put it, God does not want "anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). All of heaven's beings rejoice when a rescue is successful and a lost one repents and returns to God. But Jesus tells one more story, this one in great detail that emphasizes God's great love for a lost one. It is commonly referred to as the story of The Prodigal Son.

The reader is probably familiar with the story. The younger of two sons asks his father for his inheritance. He doesn't give a reason, but the succeeding events indicate that he wanted out from the confining influences of home so he could live life as he wanted to. Surprisingly, perhaps, the father gives him what he asks and does the same for his older brother who remains at home and continues his usual life working the homestead with the father. The younger son goes far from home

geographically and in every other sense, as well. He spends his inheritance in "loose living," wasting it all on his selfish desires. His dream of fun and fulfillment was burst by his wastefulness that became acute in the midst of a famine in the land he had fled to. Life became a nightmare, and he was disgraced to take a job feeding pigs (exceedingly distasteful to faithful Jews).

"When he came to his senses," he realized that the servants at his father's house had it much better than he was experiencing life, so he vowed to return home, humble himself, and beg to live as a servant. Apparently, he had come to a full appreciation of what he had lost and that it was his own sinful pride, greed, and desire for the "good life" that had brought him down to the gutter. We can't be sure about what he expected of his father. Surely, he hoped for acceptance back onto the farm as a lowly servant, but he probably would not have anticipated the response of his father to his return.

What follows is an amazing illustration of the unfathomable love and grace of God. It seems that the father had been on the lookout for his son, and he hastened to greet him, to welcome him, and to present him with multiple tokens of his love and forgiveness. And like the first two stories, a celebration follows the son's return, and there are a banquet, gifts, forgiveness, and rejoicing. Oh, but there's a catch—not everyone rejoices. Now we are re-introduced to the elder son, who, perhaps, is the real prodigal. He has been faithful in his work for the father, but apparently, his heart is not open to receive or forgive his brother. The elder brother had enjoyed his home and work, and he had his inheritance. Why should he be upset? Why couldn't he rejoice at the return of his brother? Perhaps Jesus was drawing a verbal picture of some in His audience that day. Was He thinking of the Pharisees and scribes, who like the older brother were deceived in their own self-righteousness?

The three parables clearly illustrate the value of every human being. Like the sheep, the coin, and the son, God highly values the lost ones, and he deeply loves those who have not yet repented and accepted His gracious offer to reconcile them to Himself.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. With which of the sons in the story of the prodigal son do you identify with most, the elder or the prodigal himself? Why?

2. How do you feel about the reaction of the father upon the return of his youngest son? Do you feel that the youngest go what he deserved, or what he didn't deserve? In what ways does the father's love for his son(s) emulate the characteristics that we see of God the Father in the Scriptures?

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/030616-fourth-sunday-lent.cfm

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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 6-7-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **6-7-2015**. This week we open with the Old Testament book of Exodus and learn about the giving of God's Law and the people's response to it. Then we move to Hebrews in the New Testament, where Jesus is shown to be our high priest, fulfilling the role pictured in the Old Testament offering of sacrificial blood to cover sin. Finally we conclude with the Gospel of Mark, and learn about the Last Supper, where Jesus clearly spoke of the significance of Communion, the offering of His body and blood. Look for a common theme in these readings.

The first reading is from the second book of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. As the name implies, it records the story of Israel's deliverance after 400 years of slavery in Egypt and the long journey of forty years to the Promised Land. After the exodus from Egypt and during the long journey through the wilderness, God appeared to Moses on Sinai Mountain and delivered to him the Law. The summary of it, the Ten Commandments, is in chapter 20, and the next several chapters explain more fully the covenant God is making with His people. Laws and regulations relating to worship, offerings, sacrifices, and the building of a tabernacle for His dwelling place are given in

great detail.

First Reading

Exodus 24:3-8 NAS95 3 Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do!" 4 Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. Then he arose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. 5 he sent young men of the sons of Israel, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the LORD. 6 Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and the other half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. 7 Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!" 8 So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

We have read now about the people's response to the giving of God's Law. When Moses came down from the mountain and revealed the Law the people unitedly agreed to obey the Law completely. Moses built an altar and sacrifices were made as God had commanded, including the sprinkling of blood on the altar. It was the beginning of many years of offering such sacrifices and picturing the ultimate sacrifice of blood to be made by the Messiah centuries later. When Moses read the "book of the covenant" to the people they once again vowed to be obedient to the Law. Obedience ought to be the response of every Christian when they hear God's Word: "I will obey."

Second Reading

In the First reading, reference was made to God's covenant with His people, Israel. In this passage we read of a "new covenant." The old covenant was sealed with the blood of sacrificed animals, and the new covenant was sealed with the blood of Jesus. He is seen here as the high priest who offers the acceptable sacrifice (His death burial, and resurrection) to atone for our sin.

Hebrews 9:11-15 NAS95 11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; 12 and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? 15 For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

The Old Testament priests had to repeat the sacrifices in the Tabernacle and the Temple, which were mere symbols of the dwelling place of God, for "the Most High does not live in houses made by

human hands" (Acts 7:48). But Jesus entered into "the greater and more perfect tabernacle"—into the very presence of God—to present the sufficient sacrifice of His blood. So, not only has Jesus paid the price for our sin, He has also become the one mediator between man and God (1 Timothy 2:5). Therefore, Christians can rejoice that through the work of Jesus on our behalf, we have the "promise of the eternal inheritance," ever to be with Jesus in heaven.

Gospel Reading

The three readings for today all make mention of a covenant. In Exodus it was God's covenant with man that required the keeping of the Law, including blood sacrifices as a picture of cleansing. In Hebrews the writer reminds us of a new covenant that God offers to people through the sacrifice of Christ's blood that satisfied God's demands for justice. In the Gospel reading we have the account of the Last Supper with its deep, significant teaching of essential truth.

Mark 14:12-26 NAS95 12 On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb was being sacrificed, His disciples said to Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare for You to eat the Passover?" 13 And He sent two of His disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him; 14 and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is My guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"' 15 "And he himself will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; prepare for us there." 16 The disciples went out and came to the city, and found it just as He had told them; and they prepared the Passover. 17 When it was evening He came with the twelve. 18 As they were reclining at the table and eating, Jesus said, "Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me–one who is eating with Me." 19 They began to be grieved and to say to Him one by one, "Surely not I?" 20 And He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who dips with Me in the bowl. 21 For the Son of Man is to go just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born." 22 While they were eating, He took some bread, and after a blessing He broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take it; this is My body." 23 And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. 24 And He said to them, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. 25 Truly I say to you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." 26 After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

The Passover supper provided clear illustrations of God's grace and mercy to sinful men. First, it points back to the delivery of Israel from Egypt. When the angel of death fell upon the Egyptian households, their firstborn children died. But the Jewish children survived because the families had sprinkled the blood of a sacrificial lamb (representative of Jesus, the Lamb of God) on their doorposts. The celebration of Passover for the Jews is a vivid reminder of deliverance by blood. Now, on this special night in Jerusalem Jesus uses object lessons to demonstrate that it is essential to identify by faith in His blood and body in order to receive the offered gift of salvation and a personal

relationship with God. In stark contrast to this gracious offer, Jesus points out that one of the Twelve, who had walked and worked with Him, would betray Him. In fact, before the night was over, all of the disciples would fail the Master, but eleven repented and returned. We must be aware that being near Jesus is not enough; one must put His full trust and faith in Him lest he, like Judas, fall away. We must identify with Christ in His passion and ministry to fully enjoy the grace and mercy He offers.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the second reading we saw some powerful statements about both the identity and the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ towards believers. Study the text of this reading again and answer the questions that follow.

Hebrews 9:11-15 NAS95 11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; 12 and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? 15 For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

A. The author of Hebrews described how Jesus as the eternal High Priest entered not into the tabernacle built by Moses but into a far different place. Describe the attributes of the "more perfect tabernacle" (v. 11) into which Jesus entered. In what ways was this tabernacle different from the one built by Moses?

B. Verse 15 begins with the phrase, "For this reason." For what reason is the author or Hebrews referring?

2. In the Gospel lesson we read about Jesus' last supper with His disciples and His call to the disciples to reflect upon whether they would be the one who betrayed Him (v. 18). How does what you learned today about the eternal nature of the ministry of Jesus as our highly priestly King enable you to better answer a question about your own ability to take a stand for our Lord?

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/060715.cfm

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First Reading EX 24:3-8

Second Reading HEB 9:11-15

Gospel Reading MK 14:12-16, 22-26

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 3-29-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **3-29-2015** – Palm Sunday. This week we open the reading with the procession of the palms. Then we move to the first reading that gives us a glimpse of the Suffering Servant, the Messiah. The second reading shows the humility of Jesus, who came to fulfill the Old Testament prophecy of the Messiah having to suffer. Finally, we conclude with the Gospel account of Jesus' passion, our Messiah, Who paid the penalty for our sin.

The Gospel reading with the procession of the palms is from Mark 11. This is Saint Mark's telling of the preparation for Passover supper and Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. As you read, imagine that you were a believing Jew among the crowd and spread your own palm branches on the road for

the King.

Mark 11:1-10 NAS95 1 As they approached Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples, 2 and said to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, on which no one yet has ever sat; untie it and bring it here. 3 "If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' you say, 'The Lord has need of it'; and immediately he will send it back here." 4 They went away and found a colt tied at the door, outside in the street; and they untied it. 5 Some of the bystanders were saying to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" 6 They spoke to them just as Jesus had told them, and they gave them permission. 7 They brought the colt to Jesus and put their coats on it; and He sat on it. 8 And many spread their coats in the road, and others spread leafy branches which they had cut from the fields. 9 Those who went in front and those who followed were shouting: "Hosanna! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; 10 Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David; Hosanna in the highest!"

The time around Passover was a season of messianic expectancy, and there were many pilgrims in the city for the celebration. One of the issues that was fresh in the mind of the people was Jesus' raising of Lazarus from the dead just shortly before this last Passover. This would have played into His sudden popularity and for the people's desire to see Him. In messianic form, Jesus directed His disciples with exact precision, and when they followed His orders, everything worked out exactly as Jesus had said. Jesus asserted His authority over Jerusalem by riding into the city on a colt (v. 4), not a mighty stallion as would have been done by kings. This was in fulfillment of a prophecy from Zechariah (Zechariah 9:9).

The procession of the palms dealt with Jesus' first coming. As we look forward to the celebration of Jesus' resurrection on Easter Sunday, let's look briefly at Jesus' second coming. The Book of Revelation revealed some of the details about Jesus' physical return to the earth at the end of the Great Tribulation period. Jesus entered Jerusalem during His First Advent on a donkey. Read what the Scripture says about how He will return the second time.

11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. 12 His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. 13 He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. 15 From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. 16 And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS." (Revelation 19:11-16).

Jesus came the first time as a humble, unblemished Lamb (Revelation 13:8). However, Jesus will return the second time as the glorious Lion of the Tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5). He will return as

the Almighty Warrior on a white horse, not a donkey as happened the first time. At His First Coming, many people missed His appearance. According to John, at His Second Coming He will not be missed. John said, "BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen" (Rev 1:7). When the "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" (v.16b) returns, He will come in judgment to a people living "as in the days of Noah" (Matthew 24:37) expecting things to continue as they always have in the past. Since God has given us this warning, we must ask ourselves "How now shall we live?" While ignorance seems to be bliss, it does not lead to eternal life.

This Sunday as we celebrate Jesus' triumphal entrance in Jerusalem at His First Advent, we can celebrate that we are among those that did, in a sense, welcome Jesus to Jerusalem as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We can celebrate that we are not among those who missed His first coming. As we hold our palms, we can proudly celebrate our belief that King Jesus will one day return to the earth he created. In our waving of the palms, we can lift them up as white flags of surrender to the King who deserves our whole lives.

The first reading after the procession of the palms is from Isaiah 50. The context is just after Isaiah told about how God had disciplined the northern tribes of Israel (Isaiah 50:1-3). We see that God judged Israel's sinfulness, but then also provided a way for salvation in this prediction of the Messiah. The picture painted in the verses leading up to today's reading is one of temporarily setting aside this group of God's chosen people until they come to believe in God's sending of the Messiah. The prophecy shifts to the personalization of the Messiah's suffering, which we will also be reading about in greater detail during the Gospel narrative covering the Passion of Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 50:4-7 NAS95 4 The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of disciples, That I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple. 5 The Lord GOD has opened My ear; And I was not disobedient Nor did I turn back. 6 I gave My back to those who strike Me, And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting. 7 For the Lord GOD helps Me, Therefore, I am not disgraced; Therefore, I have set My face like flint, And I know that I will not be ashamed.

In this reading, the Prophet Isaiah speaks of himself as a "type" of Christ. Christ the Messiah has been given the Word of God, something that "sustains a weary one with a word" (v. 4). The Messiah is obedient (v. 5), even giving His back to those who strike Him and His "cheeks to those who pluck out [His] beard" (v. 6). God darkened the skies during the spiritually dark event of Jesus' suffering, and Jesus "set [His] face like flint" and wasn't ashamed (v. 7) to fulfil God's will in giving His life for us. Later in the Gospel lesson, we will read about the fulfillment of the suffering of God's servant (Is. 50:6 "scourged" and "spat upon") in great detail.

The predicted suffering from Isaiah is also the backdrop for the second reading, which was probably sung as a hymn in the early Church about the great lengths that Jesus went to in order to fulfill the Father's plan for our salvation. This second reading is from Philippians 2:6-11:

Philippians 2:6-11 NAS95 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This passage continues the sharp contrast that the Bible portrays between Jesus' first Advent and His second coming. The first advent He came as a humble servant. In this act of the incarnation and His death, He not only served His Father, but he served us. Humankind was in desperate need of a Savior, owing a sin debt beyond the ability to repay. So He became the suffering Servant "for the joy set before Him" (Hebrews 12:2), paying our debt on the cross. By being obedient to the Father, He will come again in exaltation and power (as we saw in Revelation earlier). The second coming will be very different from the first Advent. In addition to every eye seeing his second coming, this passage informs us that every knee will bow, voluntarily or involuntarily. The choice is ours to make. We can voluntarily bow our knee to the Messiah now, or we can harden our hearts against Him, only to involuntarily bow when He returns.

The Gospel Reading is Mark's account of the passion, which includes the betrayal, arrest, trial, torture, humiliation, crucifixion, and burial of Jesus.

Mark 14:1 – 15:47 NAS95 1 Now the Passover and Unleavened Bread were two days away; and the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to seize Him by stealth and kill Him; 2 for they were saying, "Not during the festival, otherwise there might be a riot of the people." 3 While He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His head. 4 But some were indignantly remarking to one another, "Why has this perfume been wasted? 5 "For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor." And they were scolding her. 6 But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a good deed to Me. 7 "For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them; but you do not always have Me. 8 "She has done what she could; she has anointed My body beforehand for the burial. 9 "Truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her." 10 Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went off to the chief priests in order to betray Him to them. 11 They were glad when they heard this, and promised to give him money. And he began seeking how to betray Him at an opportune time. 12 On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb was being sacrificed, His disciples said to Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare for You to eat the Passover?" 13 And He sent two of His disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him; 14 and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is My guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"' 15 "And he himself will show you a large upper room furnished and

ready; prepare for us there." 16 The disciples went out and came to the city, and found it just as He had told them; and they prepared the Passover. 17 When it was evening He came with the twelve. 18 As they were reclining at the table and eating, Jesus said, "Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me–one who is eating with Me." 19 They began to be grieved and to say to Him one by one, "Surely not I?" 20 And He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who dips with Me in the bowl. 21 "For the Son of Man is to go just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born." 22 While they were eating, He took some bread, and after a blessing He broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take it; this is My body." 23 And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. 24 And He said to them, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. 25 "Truly I say to you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." 26 After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. 27 And Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away, because it is written, 'I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP SHALL BE SCATTERED.' 28 "But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee." 29 But Peter said to Him, "Even though all may fall away, yet I will not." 30 And Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you, that this very night, before a rooster crows twice, you yourself will deny Me three times." 31 But Peter kept saying insistently, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" And they all were saying the same thing also. 32 They came to a place named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, "Sit here until I have prayed." 33 And He took with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be very distressed and troubled. 34 And He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch." 35 And He went a little beyond them, and fell to the ground and began to pray that if it were possible, the hour might pass Him by. 36 And He was saying, "Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will." 37 And He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? 38 "Keep watching and praying that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." 39 Again He went away and prayed, saying the same words. 40 And again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to answer Him. 41 And He came the third time, and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough; the hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. 42 "Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!" 43 Immediately while He was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, came up accompanied by a crowd with swords and clubs, who were from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. 44 Now he who was betraying Him had given them a signal, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him and lead Him away under guard." 45 After coming, Judas immediately went to Him, saying, "Rabbi!" and kissed Him. 46 They laid hands on Him and seized Him. 47 But one of those who stood by drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear. 48 And Jesus said to them, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me, as you would against a robber? 49 "Every day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me; but this has taken place to fulfill the Scriptures." 50 And they all left Him and fled. 51 A young man was following Him, wearing nothing but a linen sheet over his naked body; and they seized him. 52 But he pulled free of the linen sheet and escaped naked. 53 They led Jesus away to the high priest; and all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes gathered together. 54

Peter had followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the officers and warming himself at the fire. 55 Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, and they were not finding any. 56 For many were giving false testimony against Him, but their testimony was not consistent. 57 Some stood up and began to give false testimony against Him, saying, 58 "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.'" 59 Not even in this respect was their testimony consistent. 60 The high priest stood up and came forward and questioned Jesus, saying, "Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?" 61 But He kept silent and did not answer. Again the high priest was questioning Him, and saying to Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" 62 And Jesus said, "I am; and you shall see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING WITH THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN." 63 Tearing his clothes, the high priest said, "What further need do we have of witnesses? 64 "You have heard the blasphemy; how does it seem to you?" And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death. 65 Some began to spit at Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him with their fists, and to say to Him, "Prophesy!" And the officers received Him with slaps in the face. 66 As Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came, 67 and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Nazarene." 68 But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you are talking about." And he went out onto the porch, and a rooster crowed. 69 The servant-girl saw him, and began once more to say to the bystanders, "This is one of them!" 70 But again he denied it. And after a little while the bystanders were again saying to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean too." 71 But he began to curse and swear, "I do not know this man you are talking about!" 72 Immediately a rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had made the remark to him, "Before a rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times." And he began to weep. 1 Early in the morning the chief priests with the elders and scribes and the whole Council, immediately held a consultation; and binding Jesus, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate. 2 Pilate questioned Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And He answered him, "It is as you say." 3 The chief priests began to accuse Him harshly. 4 Then Pilate questioned Him again, saying, "Do You not answer? See how many charges they bring against You!" 5 But Jesus made no further answer; so Pilate was amazed. 6 Now at the feast he used to release for them any one prisoner whom they requested. 7 The man named Barabbas had been imprisoned with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the insurrection. 8 The crowd went up and began asking him to do as he had been accustomed to do for them. 9 Pilate answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" 10 For he was aware that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy. 11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to ask him to release Barabbas for them instead. 12 Answering again, Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?" 13 They shouted back, "Crucify Him!" 14 But Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify Him!" 15 Wishing to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas for them, and after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified. 16 The soldiers took Him away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium), and they called together the whole Roman cohort. 17 They dressed Him up in purple, and after twisting a crown of thorns, they put it on Him; 18 and they began to acclaim Him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 19 They kept beating His

head with a reed, and spitting on Him, and kneeling and bowing before Him. 20 After they had mocked Him, they took the purple robe off Him and put His own garments on Him. And they led Him out to crucify Him. 21 They pressed into service a passer-by coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), to bear His cross. 22 Then they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull. 23 They tried to give Him wine mixed with myrrh; but He did not take it. 24 And they crucified Him, and divided up His garments among themselves, casting lots for them to decide what each man should take. 25 It was the third hour when they crucified Him. 26 The inscription of the charge against Him read, "THE KING OF THE JEWS." 27 They crucified two robbers with Him, one on His right and one on His left. 28 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And He was numbered with transgressors." 29 Those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads, and saying, "Ha! You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, 30 save Yourself, and come down from the cross!" 31 In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes, were mocking Him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. 32 "Let this Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the cross, so that we may see and believe!" Those who were crucified with Him were also insulting Him. 33 When the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour. 34 At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "ELOI, ELOI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" which is translated, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" 35 When some of the bystanders heard it, they began saying, "Behold, He is calling for Elijah." 36 Someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink, saying, "Let us see whether Elijah will come to take Him down." 37 And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last. 38 And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. 39 When the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" 40 There were also some women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the Less and Joses, and Salome. 41 When He was in Galilee, they used to follow Him and minister to Him; and there were many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem. 42 When evening had already come, because it was the preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, 43 Joseph of Arimathea came, a prominent member of the Council, who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God; and he gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. 44 Pilate wondered if He was dead by this time, and summoning the centurion, he questioned him as to whether He was already dead. 45 And ascertaining this from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. 46 Joseph bought a linen cloth, took Him down, wrapped Him in the linen cloth and laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. 47 Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses were looking on to see where He was laid.

Let us pray. Dear God, as we move forward to the Holy Week, we pray that many would hear the message of the good news of the Gospel. We ask that their hearts would be opened for them to be able to receive the gift of Jesus' sacrifice He made for them. May we live in light of this gift that we have been given as well, so that all who come into contact with us can see Christ in us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. The week before Jesus' crucifixion, the people applauded Him as their Messiah. They probably thought that Jesus was going to overthrow the Romans and set up His earthly Kingdom. When He was arrested and tried, the people rejected the concept of a Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53). They had no idea the importance of His death as the payment for their sin. Instead, they wanted a Messiah who would give them political deliverance. We need to learn from their mistake, and ponder whether we want the real Messiah that God sent (the One who acts for our spiritual deliverance) or do we want a Messiah of our own making (a powerful ruler who makes our circumstances more comfortable)? He will one day set the record straight and deliver us from physical oppressors, but now He is working on our hearts to deliver us from spiritual oppressors.

The question is, will we let Him do this good work in us, or will we reject Him, as the people did before Pilate, not recognizing His rightful place in our lives? How may Jesus be working in your life, even if it is not what you expected from God?

2. What is one thing from these readings that helps you to trust in how Jesus is working in your life?

3. All of the readings from this week portray a running contrast between Jesus' first coming and His second coming. His first Advent already came, but His second coming is yet to happen. How can bowing your knee to King Jesus now prepare you for the Second coming? What areas of your life need to reflect His kingdom values in order for people to see Christ in you?

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/032915.cfm

Reading with the Procession of the Palms MK 11:1-10

First Reading IS 50:4-7

Second Reading PHIL 2:6-11

Gospel Reading MK 14:1—15:47

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 3-8-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **3-8-2015**. First, this week we discuss the Old Testament reading from Exodus in which we will take a substantial look at the Ten Commandments. Because of the importance of this topic, we will dedicate most of this week's study to it. During that study you will see how wise God was to establish His chosen people with these foundational rules for living. We will also learn how many of these are repeated in the New Testament and expanded upon by Jesus. Then we look at four very profound verses from the opening chapter of Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians before we discuss Jesus' first Passover celebration with His newly gathered group of disciples. Finally, as we look forward to celebrating Easter in just a few weeks, we reflect upon the importance of Jesus' celebration of the Passover as we study the Gospel lesson from John 2.

The first reading is from the Book of Exodus in which we see God giving the Ten Commandments to Moses. These statements are essentially a restatement of the Jewish Law. We often think of rules in a negative light. Instead, we should consider God was gracious to His people in giving them these elements of the Law, which was for their benefit. This is because if they followed these with their whole heart it would help them to live life according to His design and accomplish the basic calling that He had given to them. This would be their greatest joy. After Noah and his family had landed and departed from the ark God said, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Genesis 9:1b). As you read the Commandments, meditate upon how keeping them helps you to accomplish God's purposes for your life and can help you to live according to the Designer's specifications.

Exodus 20:1-17 NAS95 1 Then God spoke all these words, saying, 2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 3 You shall have no other gods before Me. 4 You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, 6 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. 7 You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain. 8 Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. 11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy. 12 Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you. 13 You shall not murder. 14 You shall not commit adultery. 15 You shall not steal. 16 You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. 17 You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

Before we enumerate the Commandments, the question may arise, are Christians in the Church Age bound to the Ten Commandments? To understand the answer we must remember that there were three types of Law in the Old Testament: civil law, ceremonial law, and moral law. As Christians we live not under the Law but under grace (Romans 6:14), and are not citizens of the Theocratic Kingdom as were the Jews in the Old Testament. Christians are not bound to Jewish ceremonial law, but are bound to aspects of the civil law to the extent that they follow either biblical absolutes or biblical principles repeated in the New Testament. In fact, a total of nine out of the Ten Commandments are clearly repeated in the New Testament with the exception of the Sabbath Day, which we will discuss below. As Christians, we also pledge to uphold the moral law found in the Old Testament because this stems from the holiness of God and does not change. In fact, Jesus Himself taught on and expanded these Ten Commandments in His Sermon on the Mount (found in Matthew 5-7). Mt 5:17-20 records Jesus' opening thoughts from the Sermon on the Mount: "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." So, the answer to the opening question is "yes;" New Testament Christians are wise to follow the moral law found in the Old Testament, including the Ten Commandments. But as Jesus stated, our righteousness must exceed the outward appearance of righteousness, as was displayed in the Pharisees. Instead, our righteousness must come from the inside out, the fruit of a changed heart that is surrendered to God's will (Ezekiel 36:26).

The following is a list of the Ten Commandments from the reading along with some notes about each, including a reference to the respective verses in the New Testament. The number of the commandments has historically been stated as ten throughout the centuries (the Decalogue), including the use of that number in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint or LXX). However, there have been differences among theologians in the numbering and ordering. In this study, we follow the numbering and ordering developed by Saint Augustine.

1. *I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 3 You shall have no other gods before Me (vv. 2-3). You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, 6 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments (vv. 4 – 6).*
   Some theologians have broken this section into two between verses 3 and 4, but such a split is immaterial because if a person makes an idol then they are also worshiping a different god. A definition of idolatry is the assigning of godlike power to anything or anyone other than God. Another way of thinking about idolatry is when we hold something or someone as more important than God. In Matthew 4:10, Jesus reaffirmed this teaching when He said: "YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY." As a corollary, Scripture is clear that people are to pray to God alone and to no one else. The Hebrews, to whom this commandment was given, were thoroughly immersed in a culture of idolatry. If you read further in Exodus you will see that after Moses went up on Mount Sinai to meet with God the people assumed he was dead and then commenced to build an idol of a golden calf (Exodus 31:1-6). It is important to recognize the forbidding of creating idols in verses 4 – 6. This teaching is clearly repeated in the New Testament. Paul warns the Corinthians about worshiping idols in 1 Corinthians 6:9, "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor **idolaters**, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals" (shall enter the kingdom of heaven). He also did this in Galatians 5:19-20 saying, "Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions." In our day, many religious societies such as Hinduism are built around the worship of idols representing false gods. The bottom line is not to worship a false god, whether it is in the shape of an idol or not. We need to be careful to place our focus on God, not on other things or people.
2. *You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain (v. 7).*
   This means that a person is not to use the Lord's name in an irreverent manner. Jesus said in the Lord's Prayer, "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name'" (Matthew 6:9). This admonition is repeated in Matthew 5:33-37.
3. *Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. 11 For in six days the*

LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy (vv. 9 – 11).
This commandment is not found in the New Testament, although there is a strong biblical **principle** in the Bible about observing one day of rest and focused worship unto the Lord. We will discuss in detail later in this study after we finish the listing of the Commandments.

4. *Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you (v. 12).*
This is the only commandment with a promise and is repeated in Ephesians 6:2, "HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise).
5. *You shall not murder (v. 13).* This is repeated in Matthew 5:21-22 "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell."
6. *You shall not commit adultery (v. 14).* Jesus affirmed this and expanded on it by saying: "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY'; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Mt 5:27-28). This is repeated in Hebrews 13:4, "Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge."
7. *You shall not steal (v. 15).* This is repeated in Ephesians 4:28, "He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need."
8. *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor (v. 16).* Simply stated, you are not to tell a lie. This principle is repeated in Revelation 22:8.
9. *You shall not covet your neighbor's house; (v. 17a).* For the NT teaching see below.
10. *you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor (v. 17b – ff).*
This principle is repeated in Hebrews 13:5, "Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge," and again in Colossians 3:5 in which it is called idolatry. "Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry." If we as Christians were honest we would agree that covetousness is present in our own lives.

Concerning the Sabbath, there is a biblical principle about setting aside one day a week to worship the Lord and rest from work following the examples of believers in the New Testament. Even in the wording of the original commandment, God provided the principle of a day of rest. "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day" (Exodus 20:11). Obviously, God isn't the One Who needs to rest, instead the seventh day was created for humans because of their physiological and psychological needs. In addition to resting on one day of the week, both the Jews and the early Christians set apart this day of rest for worship. In

the Book of Acts we see how Paul met on Sunday (the first day of the week) with the believers in Troas (Acts 20:7). In First Corinthians, Paul commended the people to take up a collection on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:2). It was on Sunday (the Lord's Day) that John received the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ in his glory in heaven (Revelation 1:10). The Bible teaches that this day of rest isn't obligatory to Christians. In Second 2 Timothy a list of some 18 sins is given, but not one of them is the breaking of the Sabbath (2 Timothy 3:1-4). Again in Galatians a list of 15 more are given (Galatians 5:19-21), and in Romans some twenty more are given (Romans 1:29-32), however none are the breaking of the Sabbath. But, before we run ourselves ragged by not resting, we must pay attention to what the author of Hebrews says: "and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near" (Heb 10:24-25). He commends believers who continued to make meeting together a priority, for some had stopped joining together with other believers on a weekly basis. It is clear from the New Testament teaching that the keeping of **a** "sabbath" day is a matter of principle, not a matter of law. When you set Sunday aside for rest and worship, or some other day of the week, you are following a solid biblical principle ordained by God.

Understanding the Commandments of God is of profound importance for Christians today for a variety of reasons. First, following God's Commandments provides us with God's protection for our lives. The law is a safety net, a framework through which God can bless us and protect us throughout our lives. There is something inherently destructive to us when we break the Commandments. While we live in God's grace we are free to continue to pursue the work that God has preordained for us (Ephesians 2:10). God gives these to us in His grace to show us what abundant and true living is all about. Second, one of God's purposes in giving the Ten Commandments was to show us that we couldn't obey His Laws and therefore, we need a Savior. Paul put it this way when he explained the role of the Law: "What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COVET'" (Romans 7:7). The demanding and exacting nature of the Law is to point out our flaws and to let us know that there is something inherently wrong with our moral compass. The inability we have as humans to live up to the Ten Commandments (especially defined by Jesus), was to point to our need of a beautiful Savior. Because Jesus kept the Law from the heart, He is able to provide us with a righteousness that surpasses the scribes and the Pharisees. His righteousness is applied to our account (2 Corinthians 5:21). We are set free from the consequences of breaking God's commands and do not reap the end result of spiritual death (Romans 6:23).

Following the Ten Commandments will not guarantee a person's entrance into heaven. Instead, they point us to faith in Jesus Christ because they reveal how nobody can perfectly keep them. Paul said, "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). He also said about the entirety of the Jewish Law, "Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith" (Galatians 3:24). We don't keep the commandments by trying harder. Instead, our obedience flows out of a heart that has been changed by God, what Jesus called being "born from above" (John 3:3) This mystery of the second birth comes about when a person comes to

believe that they are a sinner and unable to earn their own forgiveness of sins before God. When they place their trust in the Lord Jesus as their substitute, their "Passover Lamb" slain for their sins (1 Corinthians 5:7), then they can begin to walk in true obedience of God. This is in contrast to following their natural human inclination to strive to try harder in their own strength.

As we move onto the second reading from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, let us place ourselves in the proper context in the First Century Church. The context is the opening of the Letter that Paul wrote to address some specific concerns that he had about things happening in the Corinthian Church. Corinth was a city filled with idolatry, and as Paul ministered to the church there, he opened his First Letter to them with a high-level summary of the prevailing theological positions of the two main opposing forces to Christianity. The first group were the Jews who were thoroughly immersed in the Greek culture. Just as had happened during Jesus' ministry (as will see later in the Gospel reading), the Jews sought to be convinced by miraculous signs before they would believe in God. Then even when signs were given, they still did not believe. The second group were the Greeks who searched endlessly for wisdom and new things. For example Luke said in the Book of Acts, "Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new" (Acts 17:21). As you read the second Mass reading for today, notice how the unbelievers disregarded the truth of the Gospel message.

1 Corinthians 1:22-25 NAS95 22 For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Paul shows in this passage how God's value system is upside down in contrast to these two opposing, worldly ways of thinking. Paul stated how Christ is the "power of God" which contrasts with the Jewish idea of power being displayed through miraculous signs and victorious displays of political rulership. He also said that Christ is the "wisdom of God" appealing to the Greek's desire for wisdom in which wisdom was personified in the scholars of the golden era of Socrates and Plato. In our world, Jesus Christ can be an offensive term to those who do not know Him. We must decide whether we let the world intimidate us or whether we will continue to trust in His Name.

The Gospel lesson is from John Chapter 2 in which we see Jesus' cleansing of the temple during the Passover. The celebration was an important feast which commemorated the "passing over" of the death angel of the houses marked by the blood of the sacrificial lamb just before the Jews' Exodus from Egypt (Exodus 12). The Lord struck the firstborn of every family and animal in households throughout the land of Egypt that did not mark their doorpost with the blood of the lamb as God required. It is foundational for every Christian to understand the Passover feast because of the fact that Jesus is our sacrificial Lamb, the One whom we commemorate during the Easter season. Jesus is the "Lamb slain since before the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). As you read, remember that Jesus' disciples did not yet understand these things about His coming death that atoned for the sins of the world.

John 2:13-25 NAS95 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. 23 Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing. 24 But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, 25 and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.

In the reading, the Jews asked Jesus, "What sign do you show us as your authority for doing these things" (v. 18). This corresponds to what Paul said in 1 Corinthians that the Jews ask for a sign. Jesus in His grace provided them with a sign, but they still did not understand about the analogy between the destruction of the temple and Jesus' death and resurrection. It wasn't until after He resurrected that the disciples understood that Jesus had an authority beyond any earthly power.

Why did Jesus take such drastic measures to cleanse the temple during the preparation for Passover? The system that was supposed to point people towards worship had been corrupted into a crime syndicate in which the ruling Jewish powers sold sacrificial animals and exchanged currencies for outrageous profits. Very likely any sacrificial animal that was brought in by the people would have been deemed unworthy and would need to have been replaced by one provided by the syndicate for a very high price. The religious leaders were exploiting the people and abusing their power. This touched Jesus in a tender spot, for His passion was for God's glory. Clearly, God's glory was not the passion of those who were in charge of the religious system of that day. Instead, their self-serving passion echoed the indictment of the Old Testament prophets who vehemently opposed the exploitation of the "sheep" by the shepherds of Israel (Ezekiel 34). Once Jesus opposed this system, he in effect signed His death warrant. But Jesus did not cower to the corrupt religious leaders; instead He surrendered Himself to His heavenly Father. It is this ability to separate ourselves from the need for approval of others that Jesus now gives us. Jesus stood up for what is right so that we can now stand up for what is right in our age. May our passions be directed for God's glory.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the first reading we studied an aspect of the Old Testament Law, which is God's standard for righteousness under His Theocratic Kingdom rule. His standards for righteousness have not

changed, which would be daunting for us if we did not have Christ. The bad news is that "we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). The Good News is that Christ died for our sins so that when God looks at us He sees Christ's perfect righteousness. This is a gift that you can receive if you "confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9). Have you made this transaction in your heart with God?

2. As you grow in your Christian walk, you might wonder what to do with your ongoing guilt that you have when you are disobedient. Nobody can perfectly keep the Ten Commandments or the other principles that are stated in the New Testament. Reflect on this cycle that all of us have experienced. You sin, then you feel guilty, then you promise to never sin again, then you try really hard not to sin, and then at some point, you commit that same sin again. Why would God not just make us perfect, once we give our heart to Him? Well, maybe it's because He wants us to live in dependence of Him (not independently of Him). Our pre-converted response to sin is to try harder. Our converted response to sin should be to run to our Savior. Guilt should lead you to a renewed place of surrender and dependence, convincing you of your ongoing need for a Savior. When you recognize throughout the weeks ahead that you have been disobedient to God's Command, let the guilty feelings remind you of Christ's sacrifice and provision of righteousness provided for you through faith in Him. You can take yourself down off the cross while remembering that Jesus placed Himself there for you. When you experience guilty feelings talk to Jesus about your ongoing need for His saving grace. Let your guilt and shame bring you back to a place of brokenness and dependence on Him.

List one thing with which you are struggling that you can turn to Jesus to carry for you this week.

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/030815-third-sunday-lent.cfm

First Reading EX 20:1-17

Second Reading 1 COR 1:22-25

Gospel Reading JN 2:13-25

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 6-22-2014



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 6-22-2014. The focus of the readings this week is on the background and importance of communion. We open with a reading from Exodus in which Moses recounted God's provision of manna to the Hebrew people during their desert wanderings. Then we move to Saint Paul's Letter to the Corinthians with some teaching on the communion meal and then conclude with the Gospel lesson from John in which Jesus taught the people that He was the "bread that came down from heaven" (John 6:51). As you study this week keep in mind Saint Paul's admonition to examine ourselves before we partake of communion that will be covered in the reflection questions.

The first reading is from Deuteronomy 8. The context is God's giving of the Law to Moses after they had escaped from the wrath of the Pharaoh and struggled for forty years in the desert. The main audience whom Moses addressed were those who were either born during this 40-year period or those who were under twenty when it began. This was because all of the adults where were 20 years and older at the time of the Exodus perished except for Moses, Joshua, and Caleb (Numbers 14:29). The context of the reading today is Moses final address to the people about to enter the Promised Land. "Then Moses summoned all Israel and said to them: 'Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the ordinances which I am speaking today in your hearing, that you may learn them and observe them carefully'" (Deuteronomy 5:1). He continued in the next chapter, "Now this is the commandment, the

statutes and the judgments which the LORD your God has commanded me to teach you, that you might do them in the land where you are going over to possess it (Deuteronomy 6:1). He then proceed to recount the main points of the Law.

The reading that follows includes all of the verses that were skipped in order to provide the full context and to illuminate the complete meaning of the text.

> *2You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. 3 He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD. 4 Your clothing did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. 5 Thus you are to know in your heart that the LORD your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son. 6 Therefore, you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him. 7 For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills; 8 a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; 9 a land where you will eat food without scarcity, in which you will not lack anything; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. 10 When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you. 11 Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; 12 otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, 13 and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, 14 then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 15 He led you through the great and terrible wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water; He brought water for you out of the rock of flint. 16 "In the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end. (Deuteronomy 8:2-16)*

Moses purpose of this address was to remind the people of God's miraculous provision and protection of them during their desert wanderings (v. 2). First, Moses recounted God's provision of clothing that did not wear out (v. 4a) as well as protection from injury (v. 4b). Second, Moses reminded the people that they were disciplined by a loving God in the same way that a father disciplines his child (v. 5). He reminded them of the manna that God provided (v. 2) a food that pointed to God's supernatural provision as well as to looking forward to His coming Son the Lord Jesus who called Himself the "Bread of Life" (John 6:35) that we will talk about later in this study. Next, Moses gave the people some insights into the nature of the Promised Land that they were about to enter (vv. 7-9) and warned them about the dangers of forgetting the Lord and His commandments (v.11). He said that if they forget the Lord by not keeping His commandments their

hearts would become proud in spite of His supernatural provision (v. 14). Finally, he reminded them of how God had delivered them from the fiery serpents (v. 15) provided water for them in the desert (v. 15), and fed them manna from heaven (v.16). Both the manna and the incident of the people with the fiery serpents prefigured the Lord Jesus Christ. The latter incident was recorded in Numbers 21 in which Moses instructed the people to construct a bronze image of a fiery serpent and place it on a stick. When the people looked in faith to the healing power provided by God through the symbol, they were saved from the danger inflicted by the snakes (Numbers 21:8). Jesus said about Himself, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up" (John 3:14). People who looked at the bronze serpent with faith in God were healed. In a similar way, those who look to Jesus in faith are forgiven of their sin and given eternal life as a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-9). In both cases the people were (or are being) saved by God's grace through faith in God.

As we saw in the first reading, the Old Testament provided many important parallels for the disciples and first Christians as they understood Jesus as the fulfillment of God's predictions concerning Jesus Christ. As we move to the second reading, we will see how Saint Paul spoke against the idolatry that was prevalent among the people of Corinth in the First Century. Paul reminded the people about the curse that was placed on them for grumbling against God as recorded in the Book of Exodus from which we read in the first reading (Exodus 16:2). Paul said, "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction" (1 Corinthians 10:11) and urged the people to flee from idolatry (v. 14), "Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry." The issue that he was confronting here was the objection that some had to eating food that had been sacrificed to idols (1 Corinthians 10:18-33). The reading today is sandwiched right in the middle of this important discussion.

> *16 Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? 17 Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread. (1 Corinthians 10:16-17)*

Paul said is that in order to partake of the communion service we must be in unity together and in fellowship with God. Matthew Henry said it this way. "By partaking of one broken loaf, the emblem of our Saviour's broken body, who is the only true bread that came down from heaven, we coalesce into one body, become members of him and one another." Unlike the pagan sacrifices which were repeated and never brought and redemption to those participating, Jesus' single sacrifice resulted in salvation for all those who believe (1 Peter 3:18). Also, unlike the continual sacrifices offered by the Jews that looked forward to Jesus, Jesus can never be sacrificed again because after he made one sacrifice for sins forever He sat down at the right hand of God (Hebrews 10:12). "By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10:10). When we celebrate communion we remember the single, final sacrifice that Jesus made for us on the cross (Luke 22:19). We celebrate the fact that when we share in the communion cup and the bread we unite in the belief that Jesus poured out His blood and allowed His body to be broken to pay the penalty for our sin.

The Gospel lesson is from John Chapter 6. The context of the reading is after Jesus went from

Jerusalem where He had healed a paralyzed man to the "other side of the Sea of Galilee" (John 6:1). It was here on the east coast of the lake that Jesus went up on the mountain near Bethsaida to teach His disciples and was followed by a large crowd (v. 2). He evidently ended up teaching this discourse in the synagogue in Capernaum (John 6:59). Jesus opened this section of teaching with a bold statement regarding His deity. He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life" (John 6:47). This is the core of the Gospel message, the Good News, that anyone who believes in Jesus as his or her Savior has eternal life. Next, Jesus made another of His bold statements that He was God in the flesh, the manna sent from heaven when He said, "I am the bread of life" (v. 48). The Jews would have clearly understood His use of the Greek phrase "ego eimi," translated in English "I am." Jesus is the eternal God, the preexistent One, the "bread of life" sent from God the Father (John 6:46) as the supreme and final sacrifice for sin (Hebrews 10:12). Both of these statements resulted in the objection of some of the Jews (John 6:52).

As you read, notice Jesus additional use of the "I am" phrase, and how Jesus used this to confirm His identity as God in the flesh.

> *51 "I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh." 52 Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" 53 So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. 54 "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. 55 "For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. 56 "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. 57 "As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me. 58 "This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever." (John 6:51-58)*

Jesus again affirmed His divinity when he said, "I am the living bread that came down out of heaven" (v. 51a). Next He said that the way to eternal life was by partaking of His body (v. 51b), something which was a stumbling stone to the religious Jews and Pharisees (v. 52b). Jesus answered their objection by telling them that although their forefathers ate the bread of God (manna, see Exodus 16:1-36) and later died (v. 58b), anyone that partook of belief in Jesus would have eternal life. Jesus said, "he who eats this bread will live forever" (v. 58c). In the Jewish world there was a high emphasis given upon the value of community that occurred around a meal. What Jesus said he was in part that in order to partake of Jesus, the bread of life, you must commune with Him. One of the ways that we as believer commune with Jesus is through the communion meal.

The celebration of the Lord's Supper is a very important ordinance given to us by the Lord Jesus before He returned to heaven. Each time we celebrate communion we commemorate Jesus' death on the cross for us on which He gave his body and poured His blood for us. Jesus instituted the communion celebration during His Last Supper with the disciples on the eve of the Jewish holiday known as Passover. This important feast commemorated the Jews deliverance from the final plague

brought against the Pharaoh as recorded in Exodus 12. On the solemn even many millennium ago, the Hebrew people were instructed to slaughter a lamb and mark their doorway with its blood. On that evening the Death Angel passed through the land and killed the firstborn of every living thing, both humans beings and animals, except those whom had followed God's commandment in faith by marking their doorways with the symbol of the Lamb of God. The Feast of Unleavened Bread in which the Jews eat bread without the yeast rising agent follows Passover. The absence of leaven is symbolic of the Jew's rapid flight from Egypt immediately after that Passover evening in which the lamb was slaughtered in obedience to God command for the salvation of each household. The absence of leaven also came to be associated in later Jewish thought with the purification from sin, i.e. leaven is sin, such as Jesus noted when He said to be on watch for the "leaven of the Pharisees" (Matthew 16:6). The symbolism is clear; Jesus is *our* Passover Lamb, the Lamb of God that takes away our sin. John the Baptist said about Jesus, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Jesus is the "Lamb slain since before the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8).

Saint Paul said about the celebration of communion, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26, emphasis added). This teaching placed a clear time limit on the celebration of this important ordinance. As we look forward to the return of the Lord we, like the Jews on the evening of the Passover, walk in obedience to the Lord's commandment to celebrate communion *until* He returns.

What do the teachings from the readings and Gospel lesson mean for our lives? First, God calls us not to forsake the assembly together in the communion service (Hebrews 10:25). As we celebrate communion from now until the day the Lord Jesus returns we look back to the one sacrifice that He made for our sins. Second, we can recognize that we are saved by grace through faith in God (Ephesians 2:8-9) the same as Moses and the other believers in the Old Testament. They looked forward to Jesus through the symbols of God's supernatural provision through manna and the healing by faith in God by humbly kneeling before the bronze serpent. The elements of communion are the way in which we remember Jesus' body broken for us and His blood shed to pay the debts for our sin. "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In First Corinthians 11 beyond what we read in the second reading today, Saint Paul called for believers to make a serious self-examination before the partook in communion. "But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup" (1 Corinthians 11:28). He warned, "Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord" (v. 27) and even went so far as to say that "For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep" (v. 30).

If you take communion this week, as yourself the following questions.

A. What does it mean to "examine yourself" before communion? List two or three things that you could bring before God in prayer this week prior to communion?

B. Read the following quote from Jesus that He said in the Sermon on the Mount.

> *"Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. (Matthew 5:23-24).*

What are some ways in which this verse speaks to the practice of examining ourselves before communion?

2. Saint Paul said the following about the communion meal:

> 1Co 11:24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me."
>
> 1Co 11:25 In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

Read the following verses and answer the questions that follow. As you read, mark any repeated words since repetition of words, phrases and ideas in a narrow context is important to understand the meaning of the text.

> Hebrews 7:26-27 NAS95 26 For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; 27 who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.
>
> Hebrews 9:12 NAS95 12 and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.
>
> Hebrews 9:26 NAS95 26 Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.
>
> Hebrews 9:27-28 NAS95 27 And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, 28 so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.
>
> Hebrews 10:1-4 NAS95 1 For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. 2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased to

> be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? 3 But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. 4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.
>
> Hebrews 10:10 NAS95 10 By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.
>
> Hebrews 10:10-12 NAS95 10 By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. 11 Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; 12 but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD,

A. In contrast to the continually repeated sacrifices offered by the Jews according to the Law, how many times did Jesus offer His body as a sacrifice?

B. How many times did you count the repetition of the words "one" or "once" in this section of Hebrews? Why do you think that God placed so much emphasis upon the single sacrifice of Jesus by repeating this concept over and over again in the Book of Hebrews?

C. In light of what you learned from the Book of Hebrews, can Jesus ever be offered as a sacrifice again? How does this impact your understanding of the communion meal?

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/062214.cfm

First Reading DT 8:2-3, 14B-16A (Plus skipped verses)

Second Reading 1 COR 10:16-17

Gospel Reading JN 6:51-58

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB