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 5-3-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **5-3-2015**. This week we open with the first reading from the Book of Acts in which we see the newly converted Saul of Tarsus testifying to the Jews in Jerusalem who then try to kill him. Then we cover the second reading from First John in which we learn about the heart of the child of God. Then we conclude with the Gospel lesson from John 15 in which Jesus shares an analogy of the believer being a branch of the true vine of Jesus with God as the vinedresser.

The first reading is from the Book of Acts. The context is just after the conversion of Saul of Tarsus to Christianity, who is now called Paul. The chapter opened with Saul viciously attacking the church and after visiting the high priest, "asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem" (Acts 9:2). As Saul was on the way to Damascus, he experienced the Lord Jesus in a voice from heaven (v. 5) as well as a light flashing from heaven (v. 3). Next, Saul found himself to be blind and was led by the hand into Damascus (v. 8) to await further instruction from the Lord (v. 6). Once in Damascus he was still blind and didn't eat or drink for three days (v. 9). At this point God directed a disciple of Jesus named Ananias to go meet with Saul even though he had heard about his treachery against the followers of Jesus (vv. 10 – 16). Ananias did as God directed and laid his hands upon his "enemy" Saul for healing.

It is instructive for us to include the verses in Acts 9 leading up to today's reading in order to better understand the full context. Here we encounter a humbled and blind Saul fresh from his encounter with the Lord Jesus on the Damascus Road.

Acts 9:18-21 NAS95 18 And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized; 19 and he took food and was strengthened. Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus, 20 and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." 21 All those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, "Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?"

As we move to the reading for today, Saul had continued staying in Damascus and testifying about the truth of the Lord Jesus as the Messiah (v. 22). This provoked the Jews to hatch a plot to kill him, so the believers snuck him out by lowering him down from the city wall in a basket (v.25).

First Reading

Acts 9:26-31 NAS95 26 When he came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus. 28 And he was with them, moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord. 29 And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews; but they were attempting to put him to death. 30 But when the brethren learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus. 31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.

This was the first occasion that the Jerusalem church met the newly converted Saul. In spite of their fear of him, the disciples listened to Barnabas' testimony about him. Saul then went on with his business of ministering to the Jews. They didn't receive his message very well since they began to attempt to kill him (v. 29). Thankfully, the disciples heard about it and moved him to Caesarea, then sent him back to his home town of Tarsus. Interestingly, once Saul departed from the region the church enjoyed a time of peace and continued to grow (v. 31).

What can we take away from the reading? Imagine how Saul must have felt when, just a short time before he would have been openly received by the Hellenistic Jews, yet now they tried to kill him. This was all because of his newfound relationship with Jesus Christ Whom he encountered on the Damascus Road. As believers, we should expect that those people who we knew us before we came to believe in the Lord Jesus may not warmly receive our new beliefs. This certainly shouldn't keep us from sharing it with them, to the extent that they are open to it. Jesus warned that "in this world we will have trouble" (John 16:33).

The second reading is from the Letter of First John. The context is John's teaching on the characteristics of the child of God, meaning true believers in Jesus Christ. John opened the chapter by saying, "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him" (v.

1). The world is at odds with the children of God, because unbelievers are by nature children of the father of this world, the devil (John 8:44).

Second Reading

1 John 3:18-24 NAS95 18 Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. 19 We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him 20 in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things. 21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; 22 and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. 23 This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. 24 The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

In this reading, John is describing the nature of godly love of a believer. This type of love results in action motivated by the truth of the Gospel message (v. 18, "in deed and truth"). The clear conscience of a believer testifies that they are walking in the truth because God, who knows all things, testifies through their conscience (v. 21). The true child of God is in good standing with Him such that when they pray God hears and answers them (v. 22a). The author of Hebrews said about this, "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" Hebrews 4:16). Finally, John said, "The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him" (v. 24a). This means that God hears our prayers because of our special relationship with Jesus Who gave us a new spiritual heart at the moment we believed (John 3:3, "born from above"). God doesn't hear us just because we keep His commandments, but because of this special relationship that is founded upon abiding love. The love that believers express is something that God modeled when He sent Jesus Christ to die on our behalf. The believer benefits from what is called the "double imputation." This means that our sins were imputed to Christ (the first imputation), and the righteousness of Christ was then imputed to us (the second imputation).

The application of John's message is that godly people act like it by expressions of deeds motivated by the truth of God. They model the love of God that was imputed to them through Jesus' death and resurrection. They do so with a clear conscience since God testifies in their heart that they are indeed a child of God. On the other hand the person that is not yet in right standing with God through the only way possible, belief in the Lord Jesus, will have their conscience pricked by the testimony of the Gospel. Others who are unresponsive to the Gospel have had their conscience's seared, and turn away from the good news (1 Timothy 4:2). If our conscience is grounded in the truth, it can tell us a lot about our heart's true status with God.

The Gospel reading is from John 15. The context is Jesus' parting instructions to His disciples before the events that happened during the last week of His earthly ministry. The reading today includes several uses of the phrase "I am" which Jesus' disciples would have understood as a strong

statement of His divinity. In chapter 8 Jesus had told the Pharisees, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am" (John 8:58). They rejected His claim of being equal with God (John 10:30, "I and the Father are One"). In this reading, the disciples are privileged hearers of Jesus' instruction into some deeper truths about God.

Gospel Reading

John 15:1-8 NAS95 1 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples."

There are several key points that Jesus is making in this reading. First, Jesus is the true vine. A vine is the life-giving conduit to the branches. Jesus makes this parallel to emphasize that life is only found through a relationship with Him. Second, He states that the Father is the "vinedresser" (v. 1), meaning that He is the person Who planted and cultivated the vineyard. The Father is the Person who sovereignly nurtures the growth and productivity of each person who is connected to the vine. Third, the Father takes an active rule in the pruning process in the lives of believers. This is done through His love with the goal of producing more fruit. A key word that is repeated throughout this passage is the word "abide." We don't tend to use that word very much in English, but in this context it means to remain, dwell, or live in Jesus. Fruit bearing is evidence of our right relationship with Jesus, and this glorifies the Father. We tend to think of fruit as good deeds or proper choices, but Scripture actually gives us an indication of the type of fruit that should be the evidence of God at work in our lives. Paul said, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23). Bearing this type of fruit definitely takes a work of God's Spirit in us, which goes beyond the outward appearance of good deeds and requires a changed heart.

How does one abide in Christ's love? Jesus actually answers that later in verse 10. "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." Jesus summed up the commandments in Matthew's Gospel when he answered the question about the greatest commandment. He said, "'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40). Therefore, we find out that we can't keep the law just by keeping the law, because the law

is to love. One reason Jesus correlates keeping God's commandments and loving Him is because it takes a trusting relationship to obey God and to keep His commands from the heart. To do things God's way does not come naturally to us. The only way we can truly keep His commandments is by being deeply connected and dependent upon Jesus.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. How have you experienced rejection or hardship as a result of your faith in Jesus Christ? How does reading about Paul's opposition encourage you to persist in your pursuit of spiritual things?

2. The second and third readings dealt with abiding in Christ and keeping His commandments. Is there a way to be "obedient" without abiding in Christ? Why do you think Jesus made such a strong connection between abiding, obedience, and bearing much fruit?

3. Why it is important for the vinedresser to prune the branches? Have you or are you experiencing any type of pruning that this passage can help you to understand God's ways and love for you during this time?

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/050315.cfm

First Reading ACTS 9:26-31

Second Reading 1 JN 3:18-24

Gospel Reading JN 15:1-8

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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Mass Study Notes for Sunday 6-29-2014



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 6-29-2014. This week we open with a reading from Acts 12 in which Peter was locked in prison by evil King Herod. Then we move to the second reading from Saint Paul's Second Letter to Timothy which is Paul's last written statement to the world just before his martyrdom. We conclude with this week's Gospel lesson in which we will look at Peter's confession of Jesus as the much awaited Messiah. We answer the question, what did Jesus mean when He said, *"you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it" (Matthew 16:17)?*

The first reading is from Acts 12 and the context is just after the apostles had heard that the Gospel had gone out to the Gentiles and that they also were being saved (Acts 11:1). Barnabus had found Saul (Paul) in his hometown of Tarsus (v. 25) and brought him to Antioch where he spent a year with him there (v. 26). It was in Antioch that Saint Luke reported that the believers were first called "Christians" (v. 25), likely a term of derision given to them by the pagans in the region. At the close of the chapter, God revealed through Agabus that there would be a worldwide famine and subsequently the church in Antioch took up a collection to send to the "brethren living in Judea" (v. 29). From the end of Chapter 12 Peter's ministry faded from view and Paul became the prominent leader of the church whose focus at that point also shifted from the Jews to the Gentiles. Paul later called himself "a prisoner of Christ for the Gentiles" (Ephesians 3:1) while Peter was the one who had been entrusted with the Gospel to the Jews (Galatians 2:8).

> *1 Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them. 2 And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword. 3 When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread. 4 When he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people. 5 So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God. 6 On the very night when Herod was about to bring him*

> *forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison. 7 And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and woke him up, saying, "Get up quickly." And his chains fell off his hands. 8 And the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." 9 And he went out and continued to follow, and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. 10 When they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself; and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel departed from him. 11 When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting." (Acts 12:1-11)*

The story revealed how God responded to the prayers of the church (v. 5) in a powerful way in order to secure Peter's release from prison. Peter testified that the Lord had sent an angel in order to rescue him from the King who had just killed his friend and fellow disciple James (v. 2). The events of that evening were so mystifying to Peter that he wasn't even sure that they were really happening (v. 9). It was only after Peter had "[come] to himself" (v. 11) that he realized that his release was had really occurred.

This story in Acts gives many reasons to fear God, not man. Hebrews 13:6 reminds us, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" When we are in situations where someone in power is misusing their position in order to try to hurt the cause of Christ, we can have confidence to stand up for our beliefs and do the right thing, even if we are punished for it. Peter's life was in danger and God delivered him. And for some reason, while God spared Peter's life at that time, He did not spare James' life. So we don't always know the outcome of our faith, but we do know that God is our helper and we can turn to Him in the midst of our fear and trust Him for the outcome. Ultimately, evil people are not in control. Even their evil is used by God for His redemptive purposes (Romans 8:28-30).

The Book of Acts is a story of transitions. As we close today's reading from Chapter 12 the focus in Acts shifted from Saint Peter to Saint Paul. In the same way that Peter was bold in sharing the Gospel to the Jews, Paul spread the Gospel message to the Gentiles and to the ends of the Roman world. He endured many hardships and as we move to the second reading, we will see the closing chapter of his adventurous life of faith as he prepare for his own transition to eternal life in heaven.

The second reading today is from Paul's Second Letter to Timothy. In this address, Paul recorded one of his last statements to the church before he met his death as a martyr. We have included verses 9 – 16 which were skipped in the reading in order to provide the full context.

> *6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; 8 in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous*

> *Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing. 9 Make every effort to come to me soon; 10 for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. 11 Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service. 12 But Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. 13 When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments. 14 Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. 15 Be on guard against him yourself, for he vigorously opposed our teaching. 16 At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. 17 But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth. 18 The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (2 Timothy 4:6-18)*

Paul alluded to the practice in Jewish Law in which drink offerings were made (Exodus 29:40). The drink offering in the Old Testament was something that pointed to the finished work of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. When we celebrate communion we commemorate Jesus' finished work on the cross for our salvation through the pouring out of His blood for us. Paul used this terminology to say that like Christ he too would soon be offered up to God. Next, Paul asked for provision of some practical things including a cloak and some reading materials (v. 12). He warned his readers of Alexander the coppersmith in order to prevent them from also coming into contact with him (vv. 14 – 15). Sadly, Paul commented that nobody stood by him in his first trial except for the Lord who strengthened him so that he could finish his proclamation of the Gospel to the Gentiles (vv. 16 – 17). He knew that at any instant he could be sent to heaven (v. 18).

When we see the close of Paul's life, it is a good time to reflect on our own lives and the legacy we will leave. Paul was used by God in some amazing ways, but isn't it true that God wants to use all of us for His good work in the world? We may not have a worldwide ministry like Paul, but God wants us to be able to come to the end of our lives and be able to look back and say with Paul, "*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.*" What does it mean to love or long for his appearing? How might our lives be marked by this value system? What do you need to be doing today and tomorrow so that you can say this at the end of your life?

As we move onto the Gospel lesson let's pause to remember the great sacrifices that Paul made for us as members of his future Gentile church.

The Gospel reading this week is from Matthew 16. The context of the reading is just after Jesus fed the 4,000 alongside the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 15:33-39). Next, He had gone by boat to Magdala (v. 39) and then right before today's reading Jesus explained to His disciples about what had happened regarding the feeding of the two large crowds, first the 5,000 and then the 4,000. After He did this Jesus warned them to beware of "the leaven of the Pharisees" (Matthew 16:11) and then He

traveled with them to the region known as Caesarea Philippi. It is in this region that as we will see in today's reading, Peter made his famous confession that Jesus was the Christ, the much awaited Messiah.

> *13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" 14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." 15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16:13-19)*

Several significant points jump out of the text. First, Peter, the uncontested leader or the disciples, made the marvelous statement through the help of God the Father that Jesus was indeed the Messiah (v. 16). Jesus affirmed his confession and went on to build upon Peter's statement. What did Jesus mean when He told Peter, "upon this rock I will build my church" (v.18b)? Jesus' meaning is clear when we look one level deeper into the plain meaning found in the original language. Peter, whose name in Greek is "Petros", literally means "rock." However, the foundation on which Jesus spoke about building the church is a different Greek word "petra" which means a mass or rock. In context, what Jesus said was close to this paraphrase: "Simon, I am changing your name to Petros, and upon this petra (foundational mass of rock) I will build my church." Jesus said that He would build His church upon the foundation (petra, meaning mass of rock or many large rocks), which, in context, is Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ. Peter clarified this meaning in the Book of First Peter. Peter said, "you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). Although Peter used the word "lithos" for stone, he stated how the individual stones are built up into a holy priesthood of believers "through Jesus Christ." The church is the collection of spiritual rocks that are built on the "petra" or foundation that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16) through whom is the only way to eternal life (John 14:6).

Saint Paul used a similar analogy in explaining how God empowered him as the leader and builder of the church among the Gentiles (Ephesians 3:1), in the same way that Peter was the builder of the church among the Jews (Galatians 2:8). Paul said, "According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:10-11). In Ephesians Paul clarified how Jesus intended the church to interpret this passage by pointing out that our faith has "been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone" (Ephesians 2:20).

Paul used the symbolism of Jesus as the Rock or foundation in First Corinthians:

> *1 For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; 3 and all ate the same spiritual food; 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. (1 Corinthians 10:1-4)*

When Paul said the "they were drinking from the spiritual rock" and "the rock was Christ" (v. 4) both times he used the word "petra." Jesus was the foundation stone, the One Who provided sustenance to the Hebrews escaping from the Pharaoh.

Jesus Himself explained the necessity of a sure foundation in Luke Chapter 6:

> *47 Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: 48 he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. 49 But the one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house on the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great. (Luke 6:47-49)*

When Jesus said, "he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock" (v. 48) the word in the original was "petra" The giant rock that was rolled to seal Jesus' tomb was a "petra" (Matthew 27:60). Peter **was** one of the foundational stone**s** (the apostles and prophets), but Jesus **is** the Chief Cornerstone, the Foundation of the Church. "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:40).

Second, Jesus said that He "will give you the keys of the kingdom in heaven, and that whatever he bound on earth would be bound in heaven and whatever was loosed on earth would be loosed in heaven. We previously discussed this in the June 8, 2014 edition of Mass Notes. In summary, we said that the keys of the kingdom is salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The binding and unbinding of sin is found in the gift of faith (Ephesians 2:8-9) when a person comes to the knowledge of Jesus Christ as their Savior. Peter and the other apostles were being sent out with authority to preach the Gospel (Matthew 28:18-20), which would be the entry point of faith. In a certain sense, they were being commissioned to open the doors of the Kingdom of God to others by their obedience in proclaiming the Good news and making disciples. We then see Peter is Acts 2:14-40 fulfilling this call by preaching a message of repentance and salvation in Jesus Christ. This is in line with Jesus' teaching when He said, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" (John 3:36). Later, Jesus instructed the group of ten disciples (eleven less Thomas) gathered together in the upper room after His resurrection that anyone who believes in Him through the preaching of the Gospel will be saved. The keys of the Kingdom were being entrusted to this group of men who had been with Jesus in a personal way. They were going to be His hands and feet in the world from now on. And the story of the Gospel continues to penetrate lives because we are all commissioned to be his ambassadors, representing

God's love and truth to the world with our lives and our proclamation of the Good news (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Finally, Jesus said, "the gates of Hades will not overpower it" (v. 18c), meaning that all of the evil will not be able to overcome the God-ordained movement of the church. This is an important statement that no matter how awful the world may become, the power of Satan will never destroy God's church. We can rest in the fact that Jesus has overcome the world (John 16:33, 1 Corinthians 15:57) and through Him alone we can find the power to continue His commission of making disciples and teaching (Matthew 28:16-20).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. All three passages for this week involve the opposition that Christians have had to face in order to be true to God. In what areas of your life have you faced opposition because of your faith? How can these passages strengthen your faith and give you truth to hold onto in times of opposition?

2. Jesus asked his disciples a very pointed question: "Who do you say that I am?" At some point, each of us has to answer this question. How does Peter's response resonate with you? Is this the foundation you are building your life on? If so, how does your life reflect this? If not, what foundation are you building your life on? Would you like Peter's response to be your response, too? You can pause and ask God to change the direction of your life so that you can build on the Chief Cornerstone, Jesus Christ.

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/062914-day-mass.cfm

First Reading ACTS 12:1-11

Second Reading 2 TM 4:6-8, 17-18 (plus skipped verses)

Gospel Reading MT 16:13-19

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB