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

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 10-16-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 10-16-2016. This week we learn about what is called a "type of Christ" in the first reading and much about prayer in the Gospel reading. We begin this week's study with a story from another Gospel passage that provides some important insights into faith and prayer that are relevant to the Gospel lesson.

Once upon a time there was a woman who enjoyed an abundant life with many friends and material blessings. Even the weather smiled on her as she lived in a region where it was nice most of the time. This lady went to worship services every week and enjoyed fellowshipping with her friends from the community. One of the things that she enjoyed most was shopping at the market near the largest and most beautiful lake in the country. This person felt loved and accepted and was very thankful for all that God had granted to her.

One day, things began to change. This blessed woman started getting very weak and was troubled by a wound that no matter what she did just wouldn't stop bleeding. She went to the local doctor and when he couldn't find a cure she spent more money and went to all of the doctors in the region. However, no doctor was able to solve her chronic medical condition. This was very troublesome for her because as time went by it became common knowledge around town that she was sick from this certain disease. Because her faith community considered blood to be unclean those with whom she worshipped began to consider *her* unclean. In fact, the leaders prohibited her from even entering the worship

center until she could find a cure. The people in her faith community wouldn't help because remember, she was considered unclean. She longed to go down to the market and buy the things that she used to. To make matters worse she had spent so much on the doctors that she didn't have much money left to buy food there anyway. She had no one to turn to except God. Every day she poured out her heart in prayer and begged Him to heal her. Years passed yet she continued to slide deeper into despair.

The situation for the women in the story was dire. If we consider our own lives, how bad do things have to get before we pray? What circumstances would have to arise in order for us to pray for others? We shared the story because it helps set the stage for the Gospel lesson later in this week's study.

The story of the woman with the incurable disease is found in the Bible in the Gospel of Saint Luke, Chapter 8.

43 And a woman who had a hemorrhage for twelve years, and could not be healed by anyone, 44 came up behind Him and touched the fringe of His cloak, and immediately her hemorrhage stopped. 45 And Jesus said, "Who is the one who touched Me?" And while they were all denying it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing in on You." 46 But Jesus said, "Someone did touch Me, for I was aware that power had gone out of Me." 47 When the woman saw that she had not escaped notice, she came trembling and fell down before Him, and declared in the presence of all the people the reason why she had touched Him, and how she had been immediately healed. 48 And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace." (Luke 8:43-48 NASB)

The Bible says to pray without ceasing (1 Thess 5:17) regardless of the circumstances. How hard do you think the woman in this story prayed for help? Since she had nowhere else to turn it's easy to imagine that she was very persistent in her calling upon God for help. Certainly, God allowed these dire circumstances in the woman's life in order to bring her to faith in the Lord Jesus for the forgiveness of her sins. Perhaps the woman was always faithful to pray, even before she became afflicted with the disease.

How bad do things have to get before we pray? What about praying for the needs of others, how are we to sense that their needs are serious enough for us to pray for them? Regardless of the seriousness of the circumstances, *God has called us not to wait until troubles come our way, but to be faithful and pray in order to obey.*

Introduction to the First Reading:

The woman in Luke 8 was a person who turned to Jesus in faith. Another great person of faith in the Bible was Moses. The Scripture says that he, "chose to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Hebrews 11:25). Let's move to the first reading to see an instance of how this godly man prevailed through a close walk with God in prayer. The context was a battle with the Amelekites just after God's provision of manna for food and water from a rock in the Wilderness of Sin, an appropriate title for the way the people had been behaving! "Why now have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst" (v. 3)? Did the Hebrew exiles really believe that God didn't know that they needed water to drink and for their animals?

First Reading:

Exodus 17:8-13 NIV 8 The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. 9 Moses said to Joshua, "Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands." 10 So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. 11 As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. 12 When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up– one on one side, one on the other– so that his hands remained steady till sunset. 13 So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.

In the story Moses acted as what is known as a "type" of Christ. A "type" is a theological term for people, statements, or events prefiguring or superseded by antitypes. In this case, Moses' actions through praying with his staff and outstretched arms prefigured the *antitype* Jesus Christ, the one to whom people would eventually look to for their ultimate victory of sin and the devil. During the battle the people were compelled to look to Moses for victory or face certain annihilation. Moses was a type of Christ who acted as an intercessor between the people and God. In Deuteronomy 18 Moses said, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him (v. 15, emphasis added). Moses knew to whom this verse pointed, the future Savior that we know as Jesus. Moses acted as God's appointed leader for His chosen people during this tremendous time of trouble. As long as the people of God looked to Moses with his outstretched arms calling out to God they were victorious in battle. However, when they shifted their focus away from Moses (and God) the advantage moved to the enemy. In the same way we must focus our attention upon God, both in prayer and through the dedication of our thoughts and actions. Prayer and reading of the Bible are the two main ways in which we communicate with God.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Moving onto the second reading for today we find some remarkable truths about the source and

value of Scripture. Understanding Scripture is important for us because the more we know the Bible, the better we understand God! Prayer is about deepening our relationship with God. Memorizing is also important because we don't always have a Bible available at the times when we may need it. Let's read from Saint Paul's Second Letter to Timothy.

Second Reading:

2 Timothy 3:14 – 4:2 NIV 14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 15 and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 1 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: 2 Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage– with great patience and careful instruction.

In the reading today Paul provided some foundational principles for living as a Christian. He said that the source of Scripture was from God the Holy Spirit, the breath of God (v. 16a). He affirmed that salvation was through faith in Jesus (v. 15). The result of learning the Scriptures was that they "are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (v.15), and "so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (17a). Paul called believers to minister to people through the Word of God, whether it was convenient or inconvenient, and said to do so with "great patience and careful instruction" (4:2b). Paul's foundational teaching was very important to the church at this time because it revealed the great value of Scripture, something for which believers in the early church had to be willing to die.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Let's move onto the Gospel lesson from Luke 18:1-8. This is another in a series of parables and happened after Jesus' return to Jerusalem from Samaria where he had healed a group of lepers that we discussed last week. As you read, see if you can catch the rhetorical method Jesus used known as "arguing from lesser to greater."

Gospel Reading:

Luke 18:1-8 NIV 1 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. 2 He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. 3 And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' 4 For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!'" 6 And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. 7 And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? 8 I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

Let us back up a bit and briefly look at how Jesus taught using parables. His method for teaching through this genre was to provide a simple story in order to illustrate a significant spiritual truth. We have to be careful to try to make a parable "walk on all fours." Instead, our objective must be to search for the single intended meaning. There may be multiple applications in our lives with the single meaning gleaned from the parable. In this particular story, Jesus made it very easy for us in that he stated the spiritual meaning before he told the story. "Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up" (v.1). Jesus call was to be persistent in prayer while waiting on God's timing. The theological application of this spiritual truth was that God is faithful by teaching us the necessity of prayer.

Examine the parable more closely. The story was about a widow who through her constant pleading finally convinced the "unjust judge" to agree to her request. Widows were one of the lowest of people of all the social classes in the Bible. God has commanded throughout the Scripture to care for people in this lowest of social classes, along with orphans and aliens (not people from Mars). Jewish Law included many provision for widows including the right to glean crops from the corners of the field left un-harvested for this purpose. The fact that someone with no social standing could convince a judge to rule in their favor provides evidence just how persistent this particular woman must have been! Jesus didn't mean that God was an unjust judge. Instead he used a rhetorical method of arguing from lesser to greater. Jesus used a very similar method in another parable in Matthew. "If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (Matthew 7:11 NIV). What Jesus meant in Luke's parable was that if the unjust judge was able to be swayed by the persistent pleading of someone from the lowest level of society, how much more would God delight to grant answers to our prayers as believers in Jesus and part of the family of God?

A second but very important point arose indirectly from the parable, something that was often repeated in the Bible. God not only called us to be persistent in prayer but also to wait for His timing. Psalm 37:7 says, "Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him." Psalm 27:14 said, "Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord." Paul said in Philippians 4:6, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." Hebrews 4:16 said, "Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." Patience is essential in prayer, as only God knows the best timing to answer our requests!

What are some practical ways that we may improve our level of persistence in prayer? Here are some methods that have worked for me, although they may not be suitable for everyone.

1. Write your prayer requests down on a 3×5 card. Carry this with you and as you find time pray throughout the day. It's helpful to categorize your requests, such as "Healing" or "Come to Faith in Jesus."
2. Consider if you construct a kind of "prayer maize" in your head by assigning the people for whom you are praying to a geographical map of where they are located. For example, you could begin with praying for people in your home town, then move on to prayers for those

located in the western part of your state, then to the north, east, and so on. This has proven very helpful to me since many times I pray for people during my daily exercise where I would not have access to cards on which I had listed prayer requests.

3. Finally, pray! Ask God to show you ways to improve your prayer life. Remember what we discussed several weeks ago in the section on Luke 16:1-13. The application of this text was that God has called us to use our talents and ingenuity in order to lead people to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Pray and ask God to energize your prayer life through the use of your time, talents, and materials possessions. This includes using our technological devices like smart phones and computers.

I bet that some of you are mighty prayer warriors and that your prayer lives came about because of certain circumstances that God allowed. Others may just need a bit of encouraging from time to time about keeping up with the discipline of prayer. Remember, God has called us not to wait until troubles come our way, but to be faithful and pray in order to obey. We shouldn't do this out of guilt or obligation, but to deepen our relationship with the Father.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Ask God to reveal to you the spiritually lost people in your life. Who are the lost causes in your life whom only God could change? Write down their names and as God leads pray for them like the persistent widow.

2. We said that prayer and reading of the Bible are the two main ways in which we communicate with God. What are some others ways that God communicates with us?

Going Deeper:

Do you have a story to share about the power of persistent prayer? You can email me at jim@christiansforchrist.org.

Recommended Readings on Prayer:

"A Journey to Victorious Praying" by Bill Thrasher (Moody, 2003)

"Prayer" by Ole Hallesby (Augsburg, 1994)

"The Way of the Heart" by Henri Nouwen (Ballantine, 1981).

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/101616.cfm

Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

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Lectionary: 147

Sources: 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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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 10-9-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **10-9-2016**. The week in the Gospel reading we will discuss the topic of faith through the story of the ten lepers Jesus healed on His way through Samaria. This week I include in the addendum to the story some teaching on how to find God's will.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading today is from the Book of Second Kings and is the story of the foreign warrior

Naaman's miraculous healing from leprosy. Leprosy is a disfiguring and possibly fatal skin disease that plagued the ancient world. The cause was only discovered in the late 1800's as certain bacteria. A cure was developed after 1940 and subsequent resistant to the treatment required the development of new therapies that only became available in the 1980's. The Jewish Law contains very detailed procedures (Leviticus 13 and 14) for dealing with those afflicted or possibly afflicted with leprosy. A portion of Leviticus 13 is as follows.

Then the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, "When a man has on the skin of his body a swelling or a scab or a bright spot, and it becomes an infection of leprosy on the skin of his body, then he shall be brought to Aaron the priest, or to one of his sons the priests. And the priest shall look at the mark on the skin of the body, and if the hair in the infection has turned white and the infection appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is an infection of leprosy; when the priest has looked at him, he shall pronounce him unclean. But if the bright spot is white on the skin of his body, and it does not appear to be deeper than the skin, and the hair on it has not turned white, then the priest shall isolate him who has the infection for seven days. And the priest shall look at him on the seventh day, and if in his eyes the infection has not changed, and the infection has not spread on the skin, then the priest shall isolate him for seven more days." (Leviticus 13:1-5 NASB)

The text continues for many verses. It is very significant that nowhere in this chapter or anywhere in the Bible does it say that leprosy could be treated or cured outside of a miracle. Once it was determined a person had leprosy they were pronounced unclean. "And the priest shall look, and if the scab has spread on the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean; it is leprosy" (v.8). Once the pronouncement of being unclean was made another whole set of Laws kicked in. They would have been considered ceremonially unclean but also physically unclean and as such would have been subject to quarantine which meant that they would have to live outside of the city. Lepers were required to live alone and announce to everyone, "Unclean! Unclean!" (v. 46) while they were still at a distance. Some lepers in Syria were evidently treated differently as we will see in the case of Naaman in the first reading today from 2 Kings. Naaman, perhaps because of his position as a valiant warrior, wasn't quarantined and forced to live outside the city gate.

Since today's reading is the climax of the story, here are the events leading up to that point. "Now Naaman, captain of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man with his master, and highly respected, because by him the LORD had given victory to Aram. The man was also a valiant warrior, but he was a leper" (2 Kings 5:1). The context is that Naaman was instructed by the Prophet Elisha, a renowned man of God, to go and wash seven times in the Jordan for the purpose of being cured of his leprosy. The whole idea of the healing began through the plea of a little Israeli girl that had been taken captive and had become a servant to Naaman's wife. This little girl, someone who was on the bottom rung of the social ladder, told her master about Elisha and that he could cure his leprosy. "And she said to her mistress, 'I wish that my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! Then he would cure him of his leprosy.'"(v. 3). This little Israeli child believed that Elisha could heal her master's husband Naaman. Next the King of Aram sent a letter along with a large sum of money to the King of Israel King Jehoram, and he made the arrangements for Elisha to intervene on Naamaan's behalf.

Now, let's read the first reading for today which is the story of the healing of Naaman in 2 Kings 5:14-17.

First Reading:

2 Kings 5:14-17 NASB 14 So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child and he was clean. 15 When he returned to the man of God with all his company, and came and stood before him, he said, "Behold now, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel; so please take a present from your servant now." 16 But he said, "As the Lord lives, before whom I stand, I will take nothing." And he urged him to take it, but he refused. 17 Naaman said, "If not, please let your servant at least be given two mules' load of earth; for your servant will no longer offer burnt offering nor will he sacrifice to other gods, but to the Lord.

It is likely that Naaman expected something of a royal treatment when he arrived in Israel for his healing appointment since he came with a large sum of money and a letter from a very important foreign king. Perhaps he expected a religious ceremony with the waving of hands, pronouncements made to a god, animal sacrifices and whatever else would have been the norm back in Aram. Naaman was likely very surprised when we was instructed to go wash in the swirling, swift waters of the Jordan. "What good would that do," he may have thought. Nevertheless, he responded in faith and began the baptismal process as instructed by Elisha. One dip, two dips, three, four. On he went. He could have stopped at that point but being a warrior he was probably good at following instruction. Five, six, and finally seven. Whoosh, he came up out of the water and was healed! Naaman responded in faith by following Elisha's instructions and God provided the miracle of healing.

The New Testament says in the Book of First John:

14 And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him (1 John 5:14-15).

Meditate upon this for a moment. If we ask anything according to God's will He hears and we may have confidence that our prayer will be answered. God's answer may be yes, no, or wait. But we, like Elisha, and even a person outside of the Jewish race like Naaman, may have faith that our prayers will be answered. However, how do *we* know God's will? We will examine that in the Going Deeper section at the end of today's study.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from 2 Timothy 2:8-13 in which we find a call to walk in faith. Paul continues his instructions to young Timothy concerning critical matters of the Christian faith.

Second Reading:

2 Timothy 2:8-13 NASB 8 Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel, 9 for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned. 10 For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory. 11 It is a trustworthy statement:

For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him; 12 If we endure, we will also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us; 13 If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.

The "trustworthy statement" at the end was the basis for a hymn in the early church and is a an excellent verse which to memorize. "For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him; 12 If we endure, we will also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us; 13 If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself." The statement is in the form of a series of cause and effect phrases:

If we died with him, meaning that we are born from above spiritually (John 3:3) through belief in Jesus, **then** we participate in the life of Jesus through his Holy Spirit living in us.

If we endure **then** we reign with him. This has the sense of "already, not yet." We enter the kingdom of heaven through belief and are born from above as found in John 3:3, "You must be born again to enter the kingdom of heaven." Therefore, in a sense we reign as a believer on earth. Yet we will reign with Jesus in the future when we go to heaven, this is the sense of "not yet."

If we deny him **then** he will deny us, meaning that we are free to reject his free gift of eternal life (Ephesians 2:8-9).

If we are faithless **then** Jesus remains faithful because it is a logical impossibility for Him to neglect someone who belongs to him.

The big idea in this text is that perseverance isn't an option but is a quality of a true believer.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The context and background of the reading from Luke 17 is that that Jesus was traveling through Samaria on his way to Jerusalem. Along the way, he encountered a group of ten lepers and at least one of them was a Samaritan. There are two cultural conflicts in this story that would have created tension in the minds of the Jewish disciples of Jesus. First, there is the whole issue of leprosy as we discussed in 2 Kings. Second, there is the issue of the Samaritan race. These were inhabitants in the region of the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. This mixed race consisted of two groups; the first was foreign immigrants brought there from the Assyrian empire after the deportation of the Jews to Assyria in 722 BC. The second group was those Jews left behind during that Assyrian invasion. Over the centuries, these groups intermarried in defiance of the Jewish Law and adopted their own unique worship practices. The Samaritans were considered "half breeds" and therefore

unclean according to Jewish Law. They had 800 years to develop aberrant theology. Jews that needed to journey through this region would often go many miles out of their way to avoid them.

Gospel Reading:

11 While He was on the way to Jerusalem, He was passing between Samaria and Galilee. 12 As He entered a village, ten leprous men who stood at a distance met Him; 13 and they raised their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" 14 When He saw them, He said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they were going, they were cleansed. 15 Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, 16 and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan. 17 Then Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine—where are they? 18 Was no one found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner?" 19 And He said to him, "Stand up and go; your faith has made you well." Luke 17:11-19 NASB

It seems that this group of lepers had heard about Jesus' miraculous ability to heal. The ten men set out with some amount of faith that they would be healed because as we saw in the Law they could only present themselves to the priests *after* they had been healed. Next, the men were healed as they walked on their way to wherever the priests were located. At least one of them was a Samaritan, considered a half-breed and unclean by the Jews. A person with leprosy would have been on the lowest rung of the social scale and a Samaritan man with leprosy on the absolute bottom. It seems possible that the other nine men were more concerned about restoration of their social standing in the community and keeping the Jewish Law than in returning to thank Jesus for the miracle. The officials in the synagogue would have been very surprised to meet ten men who had been healed from leprosy. Even though the Law contained provisions for the procedures to be taken in such a case it's almost certain that none of the priests would have encountered anyone that had ever been healed from that awful disease.

However, one man, a Samaritan, turned back to thank Jesus. It's very likely, as in the other cases of Jesus healing people, that Jesus healed more than just this man's physical condition. This person seems to have received salvation and healing, evidenced by his "glorifying God with a loud voice" (v. 15c). His natural response to this gift that he knew could only have come from God was to praise Him! This is what set him apart from the other nine. He evidently had no other choice than to turn around and praise God for this mighty miracle. His heart and his body had been healed and his natural reaction was praise.

There are three key points of this Gospel teaching. First, Jesus isn't a respecter of persons, he offers saving faith to anyone from any race or position of life, even those at the very lowest position on the social scale like the Samaritan lepers. Second, if we expect God to act we must ask in faith and then walk according to God's instructions. For us, God's instructions are primarily contained in His Word, the Bible. We should only trust our conscience if it aligns with the will of God revealed in biblical absolutes and principles. We may obtain verification of our intended decision through godly counsel. Finally, we are called to consider all that God has done for us and to praise Him! Our

rightful response any time we consider all that God has provided for us should be praise. The outward manifestation of the inward reality of faith is glorifying God.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Consider this key point: Jesus offers saving faith to everyone.

A. If we are going to live like Jesus, consider the society and socioeconomic strata of the region where you live. What are two groups of people that are on the lowest rung of society, the Samaritan lepers of the age?

B. Consider the biblical decision making process outlined in the study today. What are some biblical absolutes and biblical principles in the Bible that speak to how you could minister to people in the two groups you listed above?

C. While I was in middle school, I succumbed to peer pressure, looked down upon and said mean things to a certain unattractive, poor girl in our class. I began to call her names without regard to her feelings. At some point, our paths diverged and I moved on with my life of college and a new career as an engineer. In my middle thirties God began working on my heart to look up this woman and apologize to her. With the advent of the Internet, the task was quite easy so I connected with her on Facebook and begged for her forgiveness. I was pleased to find out that she was a Christian and was willing to forgive me! As I looked back, I wish that I had the insight to "adopt" this woman as my friend. After thinking about her, I issued this challenge to my nephew. I challenged him to think about some unfortunate classmate that he had been looking down on, picking on, or others were doing such things. I asked him to set down his pride and come alongside that person as a friend.

Is there someone that needs you as a friend?

2. Consider this key point:: If we expect God to act we must act in faith and the walk according to God's instructions.

A. In what areas of your life and you being called to exercise faith?

B. What biblical instructions do you need to obey in order to walk in faith?

3. Consider this key point: Praise is the outward manifestation of the inward reality of faith.

A. Make a list of some of the way in which God has worked on your behalf.

B. Thank Him for these things and share your praise with others.

Readings for the Week

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

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/100916.cfm

Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 144

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Going Deeper

It was a dark, moonless night as I looked around my campsite out in the middle of a forest in an area known to have a decent population of bears. I had driven up to the north country to get away from the city in order to come to an important decision about a sense that God was calling me into ministry. How could I make this life changing decision in light of all of the obstacles that I faced?

Back in 2004, I sensed that God was placing a calling upon my life to enter the ministry. I began a period of intense prayer and fasting. The Bible was full of biblical principles which I seemed to meet (see 1 Timothy 3) that I found through my own Bible study and the reading of the book "Decision Making and the Will of God" by Maxson and Friesen (which I recommend). Though the biblical principles were clear regarding this I met with several Christian men with whom I had been close to over the recent years. They agreed to pray about it and counsel me. God had been orchestrating my circumstances by bringing a clear exit to me at my work. The company at which I worked had just lost a major contract and was being forced to cut back. After much debate and prayer, I decided to make some applications at various seminaries in the region. I continued in prayer and fasting, and was accepted at two seminaries. Then the day came to make a decision. I wish I could say that I had the peace of God in my life at that point, but I was pretty entangled in the world. I owned a house in a large city and an airplane that I needed to sell. Going to seminary meant moving to a different state several hundred miles away. In desperation, I packed up my truck and headed out to camp in the forest a couple of hundred miles north, completely away from civilization. It was a moonless, overcast night and if I didn't have a flashlight I could have easily become separated from my campsite if I wandered away very far. The threat of running into a bear was running through my mind as well. As I sat around my campfire that night without all of the distractions of the city, I came to an amazing realization. The door was open either way; the decision was up to me! At that point, I just weighed my options and decided on the most prudent course of action. Once I made up my mind doors began opening and I began to sense that I was walking in God's will. *I had the peace of God after studying the counsel of God, listening to the people of God and the circumstances from God*.

Here are some general principles for finding God's will.* These boil down to studying the counsel of God found in the Bible (absolutes and principles), seeking feedback from the people of God, and

finally, discerning the circumstances from God that leads to the peace of God.

1. First, study the Bible and determine if any **biblical absolutes** apply regarding your decision. This would include things like do not lie, kill, steal, or commit adultery. If the insight you were seeking from God was regarding whether you should burn a copy of a music CD for a friend, there is a clear biblical absolute prohibiting this action (i.e. do not steal).
2. Second, study the Bible and locate any **biblical principles** that cast light upon your decision. This includes things such as God's calling to fulfill the Great Commission by witnessing to nonbelievers and "discipling" believers (Matthew 28:16-20). An example in this second category could deal with a decision to break away from a healthy group of believers because of conviction or some sin in our life. This would result in us becoming more of a lone wolf Christian in contradiction to a principle in the Bible not to forsake the assembling of ourselves (Hebrews 10:25).
3. The third step in determining God's will is often the consideration of **godly counsel**, the people of God. Have you been willing to meet with another believer and subject yourself to their evaluation of the matter under consideration? Perhaps you would consider taking up the matter with a parish counsel of other spiritual body of elders to help you to determine God's will concerning a certain matter.
4. The final step in the decision making process is the **confirmation and peace of God**. Although this is not a hard fast rule, the peace of God generally comes only after the consideration of two things, personal circumstances and godly counsel.

[*Adapted from resources found at Discipleship Tape Ministries (dtm.org).]

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 7-24-2016

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **7-24-2016**. This week we cover three excellent readings in which we learn more about God's righteous nature, the forgiveness that we have through Jesus Christ, and how Jesus teaches us to pray.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading from Genesis picks up where we left off in last week's reading where we saw Abraham meet with two angels and the Lord Jesus Himself. This week's reading deals with Abraham's pleading with God concerning the people of the region of Sodom and Gomorrah. These cities were located just north of the Dead Sea in an area known for its great fertility. Today's reading chronicles the events leading up to the destruction of the cities turning them into the wasteland that they are today.

First Reading:

Genesis 18:20-32 NAS95 20 And the LORD said, "The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. 21 I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know." 22 Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham was still standing before the LORD. 23 Abraham came near and said, "Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 24 Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will You indeed sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? 25 Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" 26 So the LORD said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account." 27 And Abraham replied, "Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am but dust and ashes. 28

Suppose the fifty righteous are lacking five, will You destroy the whole city because of five?" And He said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there." 29 He spoke to Him yet again and said, "Suppose forty are found there?" And He said, "I will not do it on account of the forty." 30 Then he said, "Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak; suppose thirty are found there?" And He said, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." 31 And he said, "Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord; suppose twenty are found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy it on account of the twenty." 32 Then he said, "Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak only this once; suppose ten are found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy it on account of the ten."

The LORD told Abraham about the terrible sin of the people of the region of Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 20). The text says that the LORD would go "down" to Sodom (v. 20), a word which brings with it two meanings, geographically south and downwards spiritually. Looking back to chapter 13, we see how Abraham's nephew Lot chose to live in this fertile region when the land would not support both of their herds and there was a conflict among their herdsmen (Genesis 13:7). Abraham, a man who was well acquainted with God and knew of His grace and forgiveness, pleaded with the Lord Jesus before He went down to the region to judge them. We are not told how Abraham knew that the LORD's visit meant judgment. Regardless, Abraham began pleading on the basis of whether there were fifty righteous people in the cities would the LORD not destroy the people? Jesus' answer was implied as negative, there were not fifty righteous people in the region. After Abraham received this negative implication, he proceeded to boldly decrease the number, first to 40, then 30, 20, 10, and finally just 5. By implication by not responding to Abraham's final question the region of Sodom and Gomorrah did not contain even five righteous people. What a terrible condition the region had come to without having even five righteous people in the region!

We may ask, how many righteous people were there in these cities? We know that there was at least one righteous person in the land, the person of Lot, or at least he came to be righteous in his later life after the destruction of the region of Sodom and Gomorrah in which he lived. Even if Lot was righteous in the eyes of the Lord, this would not have brought the total number to the value of five predicated by Abraham's question. We know that the LORD did not destroy Lot. Rather He sent the two angels with whom Abraham had met and they eventually led him away from the city before the fire rained down (Genesis 19:24-25). Looking a bit deeper at Lot, although he may or may not have a righteous man at the time of the story in Genesis 18, we do know that sometime later he repented and was added to the hall of faith in the New Testament. We also know that God spared the city of Zoar from destruction because of Lot's request (Genesis 19:20-21).

The rest of Lot's family didn't fare so well. We know that Lot's wife didn't make the grade (Genesis 19:26). The relationship between Lot's daughters and God is murky since we know that they later engaged in immoral sexual relations with their father since they felt that after the destruction of Sodom every man was dead and that they had to save the race from extinction (Genesis 19:19:31). This severe faithlessness may be abrogated a bit in light of the fact that they had just witnessed the terrible extermination of everyone in the region in which they lived by fire and brimstone raining from the sky (Genesis 19:24). This brings to mine the story of Elijah when he thought that he was the

last believer alive in the entire world (1 Kings 19:14). Then the LORD reminded this great prophet during his brief season of faithlessness that there remained 7,000 who had or would be true to Him (1 Kings 19:18). So although Lot's daughters may have doubted God's promises made through Abraham we are not told the ultimate condition of their heart.

Abraham brought out the central point of the reading in his question at end of verse 25, "Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" The answer, one that is woven throughout the narrative of the decreasing numbers, is a resounding yes. Yes, the Judge of all the earth shall do justly, including the destruction of the wicked. Although in our day God mostly withholds judgment of the "wicked" until after they die, the Bible is clear that judgement is a certainty for those that deny the Lord Jesus and don't yield to His Holy Spirit in giving up their sinful lives.

It is useful to read what Saint Peter wrote about today's story and Lot:

*2 Peter 2:6-9 NAS95 6 (emphasis added) and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter; 7 and if He rescued **righteous Lot**, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men 8 (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds), 9 then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment,*

Peter's explanation helps us to understand the implications of living a **lifelong** pattern of sin without repenting through God's empowerment found through faith in Jesus Christ. Peter was clear that we are to learn from other's mistakes, and Sodom and Gomorrah stands as a "doozie" of an example useful to all of us today. Paul said, "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1Corinthians 10:11). This leads us to the main point of the reading. If Lot can find forgiveness and faith in God in spite of the series of poor choices he made, we took can do the same. God stands ready to forgive us of our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9b-ff). Through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, we are motivated to confess our sins (1 John 1:9a) and receive God's blessing upon our lives demonstrated by our service to Him.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The context of the second reading from Colossians continues from last week (Colossians 1:24-28) but skips forward to verse 12 of the second chapter. The context of the omitted verses 1 -11 in the second chapter leading up to today's reading is Paul's affirmation of Jesus' humanity and divinity, something which the Gnostics opposed. This was because the false teachers that had infiltrated the church taught that since only spirit was good in contrast to flesh that was evil, the person of the Lord Jesus could not have truly manifested Himself as divinity in the flesh. Paul said, "For in Him all

the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9). He also taught the Colossian church how they were complete in Christ Jesus and spiritually circumcised in their heart without the necessity of the physical operation itself (vv. 10-11). The reading continues with important teaching on a Christian's identity in Christ.

Second Reading:

Colossians 2:12-14 NAS95 12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. 13 When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

Paul taught that as believers our spiritually dead carnal life is buried in baptism as a picture of being born from the Spirit of God. When a person is immersed in baptism they make a statement that their sins are buried with Jesus Christ's burial, but when they emerge from the water they are raised in the newness of life in a similar was as when Jesus rose from the dead. Although Jesus was dead, God raised Him from the dead (v. 12d). Through faith God in a sense raised believers from the dead (v. 12c). In addition, as believers God forgave all of our sins – past, present and future (v. 13) and nailed the record of our transgressions to the cross of Christ (v. 14). This hostile "certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us" (v. 14a) has been forever taken away from us!

What does it mean to have all of our sins taken away, forever, with even the record of them being destroyed? One aspect is that if Satan (or we do in our ourselves) brings our past sins back into our mind, we can call upon God in prayer to fight this spiritual battle raging against us with a one hundred percent certain outcome. This is because as believers our God has forgiven us through the precious blood of Jesus Christ. It is only when we doubt our standing as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ that these attacks can harm our minds. Another aspect is that we can trust that although people may bring up our past sins God will never do it. God through Jesus Christ has placed our sins as far as east is from west (Psalm 103:12).

Next, as we turn to the Gospel reading, we will learn something from the Lord Jesus about how He instructed His disciples to pray specifically concerning their needs. This study will be useful because we know that prayer is the antidote to worry that comes when our enemies (spiritual and physical) bring up our past sins.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading from Luke is the Lord Jesus' teaching on prayer that He gave in response to one of His disciple's questions, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples." As you read, begin to develop a list of bullet points from Jesus' teaching. Ask, what is Jesus teaching **me** about prayer?

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Gospel Reading:

Luke 11:1-13 NAS95 1 It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples." 2 And He said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. 3 Give us each day our daily bread. 4 And forgive us our sins, For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation." 5 Then He said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; 6 for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; 7 and from inside he answers and says, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' 8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. 9 So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened. 11 Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? 12 Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? 13 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"

What can we learn about prayer from the Lord Jesus? The big idea of Jesus' teaching on prayer was to pray to the Person of the Father, pray specifically and pray persistently. Prayer is an antidote to worry, as when Satan brings to mind our past sins as we just mentioned in the second reading. In order for this to be an antidote to worry, we must enter into the reality of this prayer, not just recite it. Here are some other points that we can learn about prayer from today's reading.

- We have a Father (that implies a relationship with someone bigger, wiser and more able to cope with this world than ourselves; we are not orphans).
- Our Father is in heaven (He is above the fray of this world and has power and resources at his command that we cannot even fathom).
- His name is holy (His name refers to his character and essence. If he is holy, then he relates in a way that is set apart from the world's way. His holiness is what creates a foundation of trust for us to surrender our will to His will, to turn to Him in our time of need.
- He has a kingdom that is on the move. We can choose to be part of His kingdom and allow His way of heaven to infiltrate this world through my life. Instead of worrying about how I'm going to make it in this world, I am now focused on being used by God to bring His ways to bear on this world.
- He forgives us, and through His strength we can extend forgiveness to others. This is a quality of the Kingdom of God that is countercultural to the world's ways.
- He leads us out of temptation and delivers us from evil. Do I really want to be delivered from temptation and evil, or do I want only to be delivered from the negative consequences of sin?
- He has a kingdom, power and glory that will be manifested forever. Do I want to be a part of this, or do I think that doing life on my own is a better option?

- God calls us to be specific in our prayer. If we (or others) are sick Jesus is teaching us to pray that we may be well. This may be intuitive to you, but how often have you been sick and not prayed for your own healing? Perhaps Jesus will allow sickness in your own life such as to give you compassion for others who are sick.
- God calls us to be persistent in prayer. This is clear not only in today's teaching but also in Jesus' teaching on the parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8). In that case Jesus applauded the efforts of a woman who continually nagged a judge to resolve her case. Jesus calls us to be persistent.

These are some amazing realities that Jesus understood and allowed Him to live in a countercultural way, free of worry and anxiety, because He knew who His Father was. He offers that same type of perspective to us, if we will ask Him to teach us to pray in this way.

As believers, we can be confident that God not only hears our prayers, but answers them. John said, "This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him" (1 John 5:14-15). The key is praying according to God's will. We do that by learning His will, and the way to do that is to study His revealed will in the Bible, the Word of God. God's answers to our prayers may **not** be as we expect. He may answer yes, not, wait, or lead us in another direction to pray. God calls us to pray boldly as we see in Hebrews: "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).

We hope that what you have learned today will help you to pray more effectively and fervently by having the confidence that God will hear and answer you. Over the years I have prayed for a very long list (about 150) people each day concerning their salvation. Over the course of the last almost two decades I have seen God answer my prayers in miraculous ways. In one case a man who had experienced God's miraculous intervention in an accident came to know the Lord Jesus much later in his life as a result of a second drunk driving arrest. This was a man that I had been praying for over the course of about 15 years. He later told me that he had felt called to God during that entire time and this was the natural outcome of what had to happen. He was thankful for God bringing him to this point of decision by using the bad events in his life to turn him around onto the track of following Him. Perhaps one of my faithful readers will recognize the person about whom I am speaking. May God be glorified in all that we do and may we praise Him for His intervention.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Today we learned something from Jesus about how to pray. In what ways does Jesus' teaching challenge your current prayer life?

2. Look back at your some urgent prayers you made to God in the past year. Were any of these written in a journal? How were these prayers answered? How helpful would it be for you to write down certain prayer requests in a journal in order to be able to remember and to look back and

update them with notes about how God responded? Consider starting a prayer journal and using note cards to write down your urgent prayer requests that you carry with you each day.

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/072416.cfm

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 111

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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