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 Easter Sunday 4-5-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for Easter Sunday, **4-5-2015**. On this joyful day of celebration, we remember how God raised His Son, our Savior, Jesus from the dead. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, we have eternal life through faith in His finished work on the cross. Accordingly, this week's readings answer some of the most important questions that humans have ever asked about eternal life. The first reading is a message from Saint Peter that explains the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection that has been provided for all humankind. The second reading from Saint Paul's Letter to the Colossians provides the implications of what believing in Jesus looks like in the life of the believer. Finally, we conclude with the glorious story of Jesus' resurrection from the Gospel of Saint John.

Throughout my earlier years, our family always held a special celebration of Jesus' resurrection on this important day of Easter Sunday. Our festivities included a delicious dinner with special people including my grandmothers, grandmas, aunts, uncles, and of course my brothers and sisters. Back then, I understood that Jesus' resurrection from the dead was very important. As I grew into adulthood, I came to a much fuller understanding of the meaning of Easter Sunday and I am learning how to live in the reality of Jesus' resurrection for every day of my life. My prayer is that through this study you, too, will come to a deeper appreciation of what Jesus did for us and live in His resurrection power all throughout the days ahead.

First Reading:

The first reading this week is from the Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 10. The context of this section is

Saint Peter's address to Cornelius, the gentile Centurion from Caesarea. A Centurion was a roman military leader who led 100 men. The story of what we are about to read happened a few days after Peter had seen a vision of a huge sheet lowered to the ground containing a variety of animals, including ones that the Jews were forbidden from eating according to the Old Testament Law. God revealed to Peter that he was no longer bound by these dietary food laws, and by extrapolation, that the proclamation of the Gospel was being opened to the Gentiles. God told Peter, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy" (Acts 10:15b-ff). At the same time that Peter had his vision of accepting Gentiles, Cornelius, a God-fearing Gentile, had a vision in which an angel of God spoke to him about salvation. He sent messengers to Peter in Joppa with orders to bring him to his home in Caesarea. Because Peter had been convinced in this vision about associating with Gentiles, he agreed to travel to Cornelius' home. When Peter arrived Cornelius fell at his feet and worshiped him, but Peter stopped him. Peter then said, "Stand up; I too am a man" (v. 26). He addressed the crowd that Cornelius had gathered by saying, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean" (v. 28). Then Cornelius explained that he had seen a vision of an angel who told him to send for Simon Peter at the home of one Simon the tanner who lived by the sea (v. 32). It was at this point that we join Peter's address to Cornelius along with his relatives and close friends (Acts 10:24).

Now let's read the text, noting that some of the omitted verses were included in order to provide the full context.

Acts 10:34-43 NAS95 34 Opening his mouth, Peter said: "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, 35 but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him. 36 The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all) — 37 you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. 38 You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. 39 We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. 40 God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, 41 not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. 42 And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. 43 Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins."

Peter said quite an earful; his message encapsulated almost the entirety of the Gospel. He told the gentile Cornelius and his family the Good News regarding the forgiveness of sins offered to anyone who believes, Jew or Gentile alike (v. 34), through faith in Jesus Christ (v. 43). Peter, fresh from his vision of the animals coming down in the large sheet, affirmed that God was no respecter of persons; this salvation was available to everyone (vv.34 – 35). Peter provided a high-level narrative to Cornelius of his personal, eyewitness testimony concerning the events about Jesus Christ. He said

that Jesus:

- Was anointed by God with power (v.38),
- Ministered to the people by healing and opposing the devil (v.39),
- Was crucified by the Jews in Jerusalem (v.39b),
- Was raised by God on the third day (v.40),
- Was made visible to select witnesses after His resurrection (v.41), and
- Provided the disciples with specific instructions regarding preaching the truth about Jesus being the divinely appointed Judge of the living and the dead (v.42).

Peter confirmed that Jesus was the fulfillment of the testimony given by all of the Old Testament prophets. Finally, Peter announced the best news of all, that **anyone** who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of their sins (v.43). What, though, does "believing in Jesus" mean? For many believe that Jesus existed or that He was a good teacher. When the Bible talks about believing in Jesus, it means having a personal, experiential trust that we put in Jesus for our salvation. We all know that we have done evil things and thought wrongly about people. These wrong behaviors and mindsets are what the Bible calls sin. Because of our choices to sin, we each have a debt that we owe to the Holy God, our Creator who designed us for Himself. By sinning, we basically declared cosmic treason. This sin debt will need to be paid. The question is, who will pay? We have two payment options: 1. an eternity in hell, or 2. belief in Jesus' payment for our sin. All of the best deeds in the world do not cancel out our sin debt. The Bible is very clear about this, for it says, "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Death, meaning eternal separation from God, is the payment for sin. And that is why Jesus' death on the cross is so important. Here is where He made the payment for my sin and your sin. This payment is offered to us as a free gift of eternal life. Therefore, belief in Jesus is accepting this gift of Jesus' payment for your sin debt and trusting in Him for eternal life. This is why the celebration of Easter (Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday) is such a glorious memorial in the Christian church.

Second Reading:

Understanding Peter's testimony in the first reading that anyone who believes in Jesus receives the forgiveness of their sins, provides a convenient gateway to the second reading where we see that humans cannot attain to God through their own efforts. This reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Colossians, chapter 3. This Book is one of the biblical books known as the "Prison Epistles" named because Paul wrote them while he was in prison in Rome. The reading today opens with the word "therefore" in verse one. Any time we see that word (as you may have noted in previous editions of Mass Notes) we have to ask, "What is it the 'therefore' there for?" The "therefore" in 3:1 refers to what Paul said in the previous chapters. In order to give the passage more context, we will explore this in much further detail below.

Stepping back to look at the big picture, Paul's overall purpose in the Epistle was to correct heresy that was being taught in the church. The heresy had four elements that Paul addressed in chapter 2. These false beliefs included the denial of the sufficiency and preeminence of Jesus Christ (2:8), the

exaltation of Jewish ritualism (2:11, 16-17), the teaching of the extreme denial of the flesh as a way of getting closer to God (known as "asceticism," 2:20-23), and the ungodly practice of worshiping angels (2:18). All four teachings clearly contradict the Scriptures. Paul corrected their misunderstandings early in the second chapter by making some clear statements to help them stand in the midst of false teaching. Paul said, "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Colossians 2:8-9). This statement addressed elements of all four of the heresies that were being taught and practiced by certain members of the church.

With this context in mind, let's read from Saint Paul's Letter, the second reading in the Mass today. As you read, keep in mind the sufficiency that we as believers have through faith in Jesus Christ.

Colossians 3:1-4 NAS95 1 Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

Paul said, "if you have been raised up with Christ. This has a threefold meaning. First, he meant this in the sense that **if** we have believed in Jesus' death and resurrection, then we are in a sense crucified with Him and therefore "raised up" on the cross with Him. Paul said in Galatians, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Galatians 2:20). Second, we have been "raised up" in the sense that, if we believe, we have been "born from above." This is something that Jesus tried to explain to Nicodemus (John 3:3), the man who evidently did later come to believe in Jesus since he came to help prepare Jesus' body for burial after He was crucified (John 19:39). Jesus used a Greek word "anothen" which had a dual meaning, above and again. Jesus taught Nicodemus that he had to born from above spiritually, and that he had to be born a second time spiritually in a process distinct from his physical birth. The instant a person "believes" they are "born from above," meaning that they received the gift of eternal life and the Holy Spirit of God now lives inside of them. The third meaning that Paul had in mind regarding being "raised up" with Christ is that in a spiritual sense after we die we will be "raised up" to a much greater authority in order to reign with Jesus Christ. Paul said, "If we endure, we will also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us" (2 Timothy 2:12).

Here is another important insight from the reading. Paul said in verse 4, "When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory." Notice the repetition of the word "revealed." We spoke about one aspect of Christ's revelation last week in the Palm Sunday readings when we discussed His triumphal entry to Jerusalem. However, in this reading Paul wasn't referring to Christ's exaltation as King when he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. Rather, he was referring to Jesus' Second Coming at which time He will return in glory to judge the world. As we said last week, 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 (Revelation 19:11). Jesus **was revealed** as the King of the Jews when he entered Jerusalem on a donkey. He **was revealed** as the King of the universe when he rose from the dead, this is what we are celebrating today. Finally, Jesus will be revealed when He comes again in glory with all of His believers in tow, that is us, His saints (Revelation 19:14, 1 Corinthians 1:2, Acts 9:13, Acts 9:32, Acts 26:10, Romans 16:2).

As we conclude the second reading and discussion, it may be helpful to rephrase the flow of thought before the first few verses. After the three verses of the reading, a capstone statement provides my personal summary of the reason why we must set our minds on things above:

Keep in mind the correction given to us regarding the false teaching that depends on self-effort, and realize we **have been** crucified with Christ, we **have been** born from above, and we **will be** exalted to participate in reigning with Jesus Christ. Since God **has** granted us all of these incalculable gifts, **THEN** let us "*Set [our] minds on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For [we] have died and [our lives are] hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then [we] also will be revealed with Him in glory*" (vv. 2-4). We are called by God to do the latter (vv. 2-4) because the teachers of the theological heresies were attempting to bring Jesus down to their level by falsely thinking they could reach up to heaven by practicing manmade religion.

I hope that this illustrates the importance of reading the context of the verses from the reading. The big idea is that humans cannot attain fellowship with God in heaven through religious rituals, ascetic practices (like starving the body), or the worship of angels (see Luke 4:8, Matthew 4:10, and especially Revelation 22:8-9 where the practice is expressly forbidden). The only way that humans can attain eternal life and fellowship with God is through faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, believing that Jesus atoned for our sin (Romans 10:9-13).

Alternative Second Reading:

This week's readings included an alternative to the second reading. This optional passage was from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. The context is Paul's confrontation of a certain church member who was having an immoral relationship with his stepmother. In verse one of this chapter he said, "It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife" (1 Corinthians 5:1). Paul was upset with the church because rather than disciplining the one that was involved with this sin, the church acted as if this was an acceptable practice for a believer in Jesus. The Corinthian church failed to exercise these proper steps of church discipline that could have eventually led to the restoration of the man that was trapped in this sexual sin. This would have included first calling the person to repentance and separating him from the church. Paul's confrontation is strong, but it is based in the power of the Gospel, Jesus' sacrifice for sin.

1 Corinthians 5:6-8 NAS95 6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? 7 Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. 8 Therefore let us celebrate the

feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

The root of the issue was that this young church was flaunting the freedom that they had in Christ. Paul explains this by using imagery drawn from the Old Testament Feast of Passover. In verse 6 Paul referred to the Jewish religious practice of purifying their home from yeast (leaven) during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exodus 12:15). Every Jewish home would have to get rid of yeast and bake unleavened bread during this season. He uses this imagery to provide a metaphor for the purity that God requires in the church. Paul's point was that the "leaven" of the man's sin permeated throughout the church, in the same way yeast permeates dough (v. 6). It was bad enough the church tolerated this sin amongst them, but they even boasted about it (v. 6).

As we celebrate Jesus' resurrection today on Easter Sunday, this passage helps us to recognize God's calling to live holy and pure lives. This is especially true in our culture that is filled with temptations to be drawn into sexual sins, something with which the ancient Corinthians also struggled. Today we can celebrate that Jesus fulfilled once and for all the repetitive, annual practice among the Old Testament Jews to sacrifice their Passover lamb (Hebrews 10:10). We can turn to the victorious One in prayer to deliver us from our temptations (Matthew 6:13), even difficult things such as sexual sin. Jesus calls us to "confess our sins one to another" (James 5:16) meaning that we can turn to a fellow Christian to ask for their intercessory prayer on our behalf when we encounter struggles that we are unable to overcome through our own prayer and obedience. Paul calls believers to celebrate the feast with sincerity and truth before God and our community. What better day to contemplate making some serious changes in our life than on Easter Sunday?

Gospel Reading:

As we move onto the Gospel reading from Saint John Chapter 20 we will see the "reason for the season" of Easter. Throughout the Lenten period, we have looked forward to the celebration of this glorious day. Before you read, say a short prayer asking God to show you what the resurrection means for your life.

John 20:1-9 NAS95 1 Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone already taken away from the tomb. 2 So she ran and came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." 3 So Peter and the other disciple went forth, and they were going to the tomb. 4 The two were running together; and the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first; 5 and stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings lying there; but he did not go in. 6 And so Simon Peter also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he saw the linen wrappings lying there, 7 and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. 8 So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed. 9 For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.

The narrative continues beyond what was covered in the reading:

10 So the disciples went away again to their own homes. 11 But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; 12 and she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. 13 And they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." 14 When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, "Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away." 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means, Teacher). (John 20:10-16)

Can you imagine being one of the disciples who watched Jesus die on the cross? Then all of a sudden news reaches you that Jesus' body is not in the tomb. You run to the tomb on Sunday and realize it is empty. What are the options? Maybe someone had taken the body or maybe Jesus' prediction that he would rise again really did come true. It would have been confusing, mind-blowing and extremely scary, for those who sought to kill Jesus were still feeling emboldened to snuff out any memory of Jesus.

Mary Magdalene believed and was the first person to see the risen Lord alive. She received confirmation that since God raised Jesus from the dead, she would one day be raised herself.

We can also have assurance of salvation which leads to eternal life by trusting in what the Scripture says about how a person does make it to heaven when they die. The first reading brought up the idea of "belief in Jesus." Let's recap what this means, for this is the foundation of our faith. First, God says that all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). God says that because of our sin the payment we will receive without some outside intervention is death, meaning eternal separation from God (Romans 6:23). In that same verse, God says that the outside intervention has been given as a free gift: Jesus died on the cross for the payment of our sins. This good news can also be found in the famous verse that is often seen printed on cardboard signs held up at sporting events. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Saint Paul said, "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).

Does this sound like something that is simple to achieve? It is simple, but if it's not necessarily easy. If it were easy then everyone in the world that ever heard the Gospel would become a believer. Peter said in Acts 2:38 that belief is intricately tied to repentance. When we believe in Jesus, it is because we are convicted of our need for a Savior. This leads us to repent of (or turn away from) our sins. This means that we have come to agree with God about our sins, and recognize them for what they are, deadly (Romans 6:21). The Bible says that even one single sin would keep us from entering heaven – forever (James 2:10). So repentance of sin, turning away from the destructive forces that

once ruled our lives, is an on-going part of exercising faith in Jesus. One preacher said, "If your faith hasn't changed you, it probably hasn't saved you." This is not to imply that works are necessary for salvation. But it is to say that true faith is manifested in our lives being oriented around the values that Christ had, because He is our life (Colossians 3:4). Jesus' death and resurrection were given as a gift to all, to cover our sin and provide us with the right to be accepted into heaven. As we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday, keep in mind the simplicity of this Gospel message that Jesus gave to the world.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. We covered a great deal of ground today in our study. The main point that we ask you to consider in light of your study is, what difference does the resurrection of Jesus Christ make in **your** life? Contemplate this question in light of the following contexts.

A. What difference does Jesus' resurrection make as I move about in many relational networks where I rub shoulders with people who don't all believe that faith in Jesus is the only pathway to God? How does my life reflect the power of Jesus' resurrection and become an apologetic for His life-transforming presence?

B. What difference does Jesus make if you find yourself in an unhappy situation this Easter? How does the knowledge that Jesus rose from the dead give you hope through these difficulties?

2. Perhaps you don't completely understand the meaning of Jesus in your life. Have you received the forgiveness of your sins through the only method possible: faith in Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection from the dead? Do you want to be with God and know that you will make it to heaven when you die? Let's pray to affirm or reaffirm our belief in Jesus this Easter.

Dear God, I recognize that I am a sinner, and that because of my sin I deserve death and eternal separation from You. I believe that Jesus died for my sins as payment of the penalty I owed. I believe that You raised Him from the dead and that He will come again in glory. I want to have this gift of eternal life that the Bible talks about through faith in Christ. I repent of my sins and ask You, in the name of Jesus, to empower me to set my sights on spiritual things above, not on earthly desires that have separated me from You. I pray this in Jesus' Holy name, Amen.

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/040515.cfm

First Reading ACTS 10:34A, 37-43

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Second Reading COL 3:1-4 or 1 COR 5:6B-8

Gospel Reading JN 20:1-9

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 3-15-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 03-15-2015. This week we examine the readings and discover many important truths about God. We learn about the nature of God and how He is faithful, just and forgiving. We see how we cannot earn our righteous standing before God and how this is a free gift to us through faith in His One and Only provision, Jesus Christ.

The first reading is from the Book of Second Chronicles. The context was a time of deep darkness in the Kingdom of Israel. Godly King Josiah, who was a key reformer for the Nation during the decline of the theocratic kingdom, had just been killed after going into battle against Neco King of Egypt (2 Chronicles 35:23). Following his death the decline of the kingdom continued with the appointment of Josiah's son Joahaz as King of Judah who was promptly deposed by Neco (2 Chronicles 36:3). At this

point, "The king of Egypt made Eliakim his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. But Neco took Joahaz his brother and brought him to Egypt" (2 Chronicles 36:4). This king "did evil in the sight of the LORD his God" (2 Chronicles 35:5) and after some 11 years was dragged captive to Egypt (2 Chronicles 35:5a, 6). In the short span of time before the happenings in today's reading two more kings ruled in Judah, first King Jehoiachin (v. 9) and finally Zedekiah who is introduced in the opening verse of the reading.

Note: We included all the intervening verses between 11 and 23 in order to include the full context and lead to the full meaning.

2 Chronicles 36:11-23 NAS95 11 Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. 12 He did evil in the sight of the LORD his God; he did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet who spoke for the LORD. 13 He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar who had made him swear allegiance by God. But he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the LORD God of Israel. 14 Furthermore, all the officials of the priests and the people were very unfaithful following all the abominations of the nations; and they defiled the house of the LORD which He had sanctified in Jerusalem. 15 The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to them again and again by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place; 16 but they continually mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, until there was no remedy. 17 Therefore He brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or infirm; He gave them all into his hand. 18 All the articles of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his officers, he brought them all to Babylon. 19 Then they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem, and burned all its fortified buildings with fire and destroyed all its valuable articles. 20 Those who had escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, 21 to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath until seventy years were complete. 22 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia–in order to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah–the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, 23 "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all His people, may the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up!'"

We see in the reading that Zedekiah continued the wickedness of his forefathers, and did not listen to the Lord who spoke through the contemporary Prophet Jeremiah (vv. 11-12). At that time, the Kingdom of Babylon was now the reigning world power and Jeramiah had spoken to Zedekiah about the coming siege by their mighty ruler King Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah told him a message from the Lord saying, "I spoke words like all these to Zedekiah king of Judah, saying, "Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him and his people, and live!" (Jer 27:12). Zedekiah failed

to heed God's advice given by Jeremiah and eventually "the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, until there was no remedy" (v. 16a). The event that occurred next has reverberated throughout Jewish history ever since and included the destruction, looting, and burning of the temple, the destruction of the walls around Jerusalem, and the deportation of the people (including Jeremiah). God wasn't finished with Israel though, and He kept His promise to restore the temple and the city after seventy years. God said through Jeremiah, "For thus says the LORD, 'When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place" (Jer 29:10). In the closing verses of the reading we see how the Medo Persian king Cyrus made a decree concerning the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem along with the restoration of the people (vv. 22 – 23). Interestingly, the Prophet Isaiah predicted the coming of Cyrus over a hundred years before he was even born, and stated that he would be God's shepherd to rebuild the temple, which hadn't even been destroyed yet. Isaiah said, "It is I who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.' And he declares of Jerusalem, 'She will be built,' And of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid.'" (Isa 44:28).

What can we learn about God from the reading? First, God works through any world leader, even idolatrous, pagan kings like Nebuchadnezzar and King Cyrus of Persia. We saw in the reading how God used Nebuchadnezzar to discipline His people during a seventy-year period under He raised up Cyrus to restore it. God called Cyrus His shepherd (Isa 44:28). Saint Paul told in the New Testament about how all rulers were established by God. He said, "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God" (Romans 13:1).

A second thing we can learn about God from the reading is that He keeps his promises. Even when His patience is tested, His punishment also includes a plan for restoration even before the day of Judgment comes. As we saw in the introduction to the reading, King Zedekiah was the last in a long line of evil rulers that God allowed to serve in the Kingdom of Judah. Once the rules and the people continued in their unrepentant sin, God carried out His promised plan to discipline the people for 70 years. Then, he restored them according to His promise. In the same way, God is also faithful to us in that He only disciplines us because He loves us. The author of Hebrews said in quoting from Psalm 94:12, "FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES" Hebrews 12:6). He goes on to explain the meaning of the Lord's discipline. "For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness" (Hebrews 12:10-11).

Finally, we can draw more attributes of God from the reading, here are a few:

- God is slow to anger: contrary to popular belief, God is not capricious in His display of anger, nor is He looking for people to burn up with His wrath. He is patient and wanting people to repent, not desiring that any should perish (1 Timothy 2:4).

- God is abounding in love and faithfulness. Abounding connotes the overflowing and abundant nature of God's love and faithfulness. He's not going to run out!
- God is also just. He will punish the sin of the guilty who have not brought themselves to Him in surrender. It would be unloving for God to allow injustice to prevail. So even in His punishment of wickedness, God is exercising His loving faithfulness.

As we move onto the second reading, we will learn more about another important aspect of God: He is a forgiving God, One who has provided the ultimate forgiveness for the sins of all humankind through the giving of His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. The second reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. As you read, take careful note of how clearly God has provided us with the message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and how works flow from a believer's heart that has been changed by God.

Ephesians 2:4-10 NAS95 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Saint Paul provided what is quite likely the clearest explanation of Christian salvation in the entire Bible. He said that a believer was "dead in their transgressions" (Romans 3:23) but then was "made alive together with Christ" (v. 5). He states twice that a believer is saved by grace, not works (verses 5 and 8), not because of our works but because of God's great love for us (v. 4) and the grace of God (v. 8a) through our faith (v. 8). Finally, Paul says that the end result of our creation ("His workmanship") is the good works that God has prepared for us through His foreknowledge (v. 10). Salvation is a free gift from God (v. 8) that cannot be earned (Romans 6:23).

The Gospel reading is from John Chapter 3 and includes verse 16, which is the famous one that is often seen printed on signs being waived by people at various sporting events. The context of this section is the conclusion of a meeting that happened at night between Jesus and Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews (John 3:1), meaning that he was a member of the Sanhedrin (that is the Jewish ruling council). Evidently, Nicodemus feared the reaction of the Jews so he met secretly with Jesus. Later in John's Gospel, Nicodemus came with Joseph or Arimathea to prepare Jesus' body for burial (John 19:39), an action which revealed his willingness to make a bold, public statement about his identification with Jesus.

John 3:14-21 NAS95 14 "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; 15 so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have

eternal life. 17 For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. 18 He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 19 This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21 But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."

The story including in verse 14 was recorded in Numbers 21 during which Moses instructed the Hebrew 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. This is the same thing that we saw in the second reading (Ephesians 2:8-9). In both cases the people were (or are being) saved by God's grace through faith in God.

We see in this passage that God's love is the foundation for life that is eternal. It is God's love that moved Him to give His one and only Son. "Begotten" is a translation of a Greek word that has the connation of being unique. So to clarify, John is saying that there is no one else like God's Son Jesus. He is the only one of His kind and He was given to us to provide the one and only way to eternal life. As we said earlier, God does not want people to perish (1 Tim. 2:4). His love compelled Him to send His Son into the world to be our Savior. So what separates those who have eternal life and those who are perishing? Belief in Jesus Christ. Belief is a robust word that connotes trust, relationship, and knowledge that is applied to one's life. While we grow in our belief in Jesus, we must clarify whether we truly believe or not. We must have a place of entry into the life of Christ. Do we want Him or not? If we reject Him, then we stand condemned already. Our unforgiven sin leaves no other option than to be judged by God at the end of our lives. However, if we turn to Jesus in faith and rest our hope for salvation in Him, then we are saved. That is why He came to this world, to save.

We have covered a very lot of important ground this week. As we prepare for Easter Sunday on which we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, let's contemplate how great is the mystery of salvation. How are you feeling, do you feel guilty because you sense that you haven't done enough for God? If you have repented of your sin and trusted in the Lord Jesus for forgiveness you can rest in God's graceful provision for you. Spend some time in prayer right now to talk to God and tell Him about your feelings. We pray that you have benefited from the readings this week.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. We saw in the second reading how Paul explained the source and outcome of salvation for a believer in Jesus Christ. Explain the relationship between faith and works for the believer based

upon Ephesians 2:4-10.

2. A common theme that exists in the lives of many who do not believe in Jesus as their only source of forgiveness of sin before God is the extent to which they do good works in their lives to justify the bad things they may have done. Read both the second and the Gospel reading again, and then the following verses:

Joh 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.

Ac 4:12 "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

1John 5:12 – 13 He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

In light of these readings, explain the relationship between works and faith for the non-believing person. Will good their good works ever provide a means for a person to earn their way to heaven?

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.cfm

First Reading 2 CHR 36:14-16, 19-23

Second Reading EPH 2:4-10

Gospel Reading JN 3:14-21

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 2-1-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 2-1-2015. This week we open with the first reading from the Book of Deuteronomy in which we study a prophecy about the coming Messiah that was fulfilled by Jesus Christ. Then we move to the second reading from First Corinthians where we study Saint Paul's teaching on marriage of Christians. Finally, we return to the Book of Mark for the Gospel lesson where we see Jesus heal a demon-possessed man.

The first reading is from the Book of Deuteronomy. At this point in history, the people of God (the Hebrews) were entering the Promised Land after 400 years of slavery in Egypt. They were in need of structure and direction, so that their new life in the Promised Land would be fruitful and safe. It had been many generations since this people group had been able to make their own decisions and govern themselves. Therefore, God gave them a strong leader called Moses and some thorough instructions, recorded here in the book of Deuteronomy. This Book primarily records the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai. There are several big ideas behind God's giving of the Law. First, the Law established a new covenant with the Hebrew people called the Mosaic Covenant. This Covenant between God and the Hebrew people included promises that were conditional in nature. The Mosaic Covenant consisted of ordinances which included moral laws, civil laws, and ceremonial laws for God's chosen people, the Jews. The Law also expanded the already existing promises granted by God in the Abrahamic Covenant into a new covenant referred to as the Palestinian Covenant. Although the promises made in this Covenant were unconditional, the Jewish people will not fully obtain them until the Lord Jesus returns to rule and reign on the earth. A second aspect of God's giving of the Law provided a means for God to hold people judicially accountable when they break the law. Saint Paul explained this in Romans Chapter 4 by saying, "when there is no law there

is no transgression" (Romans 4:15). Finally, since Moses was himself a prophet, the Law also included prophecy, as we will read about in the first reading as follows below. *Note: We have included the last two verses in Chapter 18 that were omitted from the reading in order to provide the full meaning and context.*

15 "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him. 16 This is according to all that you asked of the LORD your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, or I will die.' 17 The LORD said to me, 'They have spoken well. 18 I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. 19 It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him. 20 But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.' 21 "You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?' 22 "When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him." (Deuteronomy 18:15-22)

As the Hebrew people were on the brink of newfound freedoms, this passage guided them so that they would discerning of those who claimed to speak for God. The reading pointed out several things. First, God promised to Moses that He would raise up a Prophet like himself (v. 17) and provided stern words about the importance of listening to the future Prophet. God warned that there is accountability for failing to listen to the true Prophet (v. 10 "require it of him"). Second, in verse 21 God also provided a test for any person that claimed to be a prophet. If a person claims to be a prophet, they must not speak on behalf of a false god and whatever they say must come true. If the self-proclaimed prophet fails either of these two tests, he must be put to death.

The Old Testament is full of prophecies from God-ordained prophets who spoke on behalf of God and called people back to their covenant relationship with God. We know from the New Testament that the final Prophet whom Moses predicted in verse 15 was none other than Jesus Christ Himself. The proof for this fact is found in three places in the New Testament, once in the Gospel of John and twice in the Book of Acts. Nathaniel said in John's Gospel, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote–Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (John 1:45). Peter quoted Deuteronomy 18:15 in Acts 3:22, and Stephen in his famous speech he made just before being martyred said about Jesus, "This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, 'GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN" (Acts 7:37).

Let's discuss briefly the importance of recognizing false prophets in our own day through the application of the prophetic test given in Deuteronomy 18. First, the New Testament authors warned about the coming of false prophets. John said, "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). Peter said, "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be

false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves" (2 Peter 2:1). If false prophets will abound, how are we to respond to these false prophets? We have a story in Acts 17 that illustrates the answer to this question. It says: "Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:11).

Paul was so bold in another letter as to say that even if he came back to them and changed the message of the Gospel or they had a special appearance from an angel, not even that should persuade them from the sure foundation that was already laid. He said, "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!" (Galatians 1:8-9).Therefore, our response is very clear. We must be diligent to study God's Word so that we can test what people are saying and discern whether they are a true prophet (speaking the Word of God) or whether they are a false prophet (speaking presumptuously). These are strong words, but as we study God's Word we will be able to reject false teaching when we encounter it.

The second reading is from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. The context is Paul's teaching on the value of a person's singleness during this period in the church when it was undergoing explosive growth and at the same time, persecution – especially from the Jews. These verses have often been used to elevate singleness over marriage. But as you understand the context of unbearable famine and persecution for the church, we see that Paul was putting a temporary moratorium on weddings, in order to help them endure the unusual circumstances that these believers were facing. *Note: Verses 36 – 38 were included in order to provide the full meaning and context.*

32 But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; 33 but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, 34 and his interests are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. 35 This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord. 36 But if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin daughter, if she is past her youth, and if it must be so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let her marry. 37 But he who stands firm in his heart, being under no constraint, but has authority over his own will, and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin daughter, he will do well. 38 So then both he who gives his own virgin daughter in marriage does well, and he who does not give her in marriage will do better. (1 Corinthians 7:32-38)

The fact that the Old Testament and other places in the New Testament affirm the beauty and value of marriage needs to give perspective to the interpretation of this passage. For example, Paul recommended that young widows remarry (1 Timothy 5:11-15) and Jesus Himself affirmed the Old Testament teaching that a man shall leave his father and mother to be united to his wife (Matthew 19:5). In the present crisis (mentioned in 1 Cor. 7:26), Paul was giving them apostolic teaching that applied wisdom to their dire situation. First, Paul said that if a person is single they can be wholly dedicated to the service of the Lord, whereas a married person is also concerned with the affairs of their mate and family (vv. 32). In times of persecution and famine, it is much easier to be single than married. The simplicity of life when one is in survival mode is complicated when a spouse and children are brought into the picture and their vulnerabilities can be exploited by persecutors. Second, he said that if a person desired to marry that there was nothing wrong with their desire (v. 35). What he was saying was that at this time in the church it was strongly advantageous for a person engaging in ministry to remain single, like he was. This is the path that Jesus and others in the New Testament chose, including Saint Paul. Finally, Paul said that fathers should not unduly guard their daughters in such a way as to prevent them from fulfilling their desires to marry (vv. 36 – 38). During that cultural context, the father's approval of the marriage meant everything. This is of course still the case in many cultures in the world.

What does this mean for today? Since the rest of the counsel of Scripture affirms the sanctity of marriage, we must not look at marriage as a better or worse state of affairs. There are advantages and disadvantages to both singleness and marriage. If you are single, you currently have the gift of singleness (1 Cor. 7:7). If you are married, you have the gift of marriage. Will you let God use either state of affairs to further His work in your life?

The Gospel lesson is from Mark Chapter one which continues from last week.

21 They went into Capernaum; and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and began to teach. 22 They were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. 23 Just then there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, 24 saying, "What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are–the Holy One of God!" 25 And Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" 26 Throwing him into convulsions, the unclean spirit cried out with a loud voice and came out of him. 27 They were all amazed, so that they debated among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him." 28 Immediately the news about Him spread everywhere into all the surrounding district of Galilee. (Mark 1:21-28)

Several points arise from the text. First, early on in His ministry Jesus is widely accepted in the synagogue in Capernaum as a rabbi, or teacher. The text says, "He entered the synagogue and began to teach. They were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (vv. 21b – 22). This is an extremely important point because later on when the religious leaders began contesting His teaching they pointed out that He was just a carpenter from Nazareth. They said, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of

James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?" And they took offense at Him" (Mark 6:3). This hearkens us back to the passage from Deuteronomy, which gave a prophecy about a great Prophet and criteria for discerning whether someone was speaking on behalf of God. Jesus passed the tests (and then some), but the religious leaders failed to hold up their end of the bargain. They refused to listen to the words of the Prophet and will have to stand to give an account for their rejection of God's Messiah. Jesus spoke with authority because He was The Authority!

A second important point from the text is what the demonic spirit within the man in the synagogue said about Jesus. The demon recognized Jesus as being from Nazareth and the "Holy One of God" meaning Messiah (v. 24). Although the Jewish leaders rejected Jesus as Messiah, the demonic spirit was compelled to testify as to His identity. One day, "every knee will bow and tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father" (Philippians 2:10-11). Finally, God used the testimony of the demonic spirit in order to further the spread of the Gospel (vv. 27 – 28). Each one of us will have to decide how to respond to the authority of Jesus. Will we reject His authority or surrender to it?

As believers, we too can speak with the authority of God, following Jesus' example and being filled with His Words. Anytime we recite Scripture we possess the authority of God and have power within the range allowed by God's sovereignty to unset spiritual darkness. Keep this in mind the next time you encounter spiritual darkness including false teaching. You can apply the test for a true prophet that we learned about from Deuteronomy, as well as speak the truth from the words of Scripture into confusing and dark issues. Although we may not have all of the well-reasoned answers to spiritual skeptics, if we know the Word of God we can respond with God's authority simply by applying the truth of Scripture to each encounter.

This week one of my relatives is being forced to take a hard stand at her school. Her coach has decided to get around the rules regarding the frequency of athletic practice allowed for this particular conference by scheduling "open gym" periods with the team. In theory, these events are optional but in reality, any player missing one of the open gym periods would be in jeopardy of harming their standing on the team. This particular team player has decided to abide by the rule and miss this informal practice session in order to satisfy the calling that God has placed upon her heart to be obedient to Him. Although our study of the Word of God can sometimes be rather abstract in terms of application in our daily lives, in this case it became clear to this person from God's teaching that they needed to take a stand. Is there anything in the Bible study lesson this week that caused a "prick in your heart" about which you need to take a stand for God? In what areas in your life have you been exposed to false teachings and need to exclaim that these sources are accursed?

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Think about some of the concepts covered in this week's Bible reading:

    - Being discerning about who I listen to and rejecting false teaching
    - Being obedient to true teaching (that lines up with Scripture)

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- Being wise about how I think about marriage and singleness
- Surrendering to Jesus' authority
- Standing up to misuse of authority with Scripture as my authority

Which of the above concepts do you need help in? Talk to God about how you would like for Him to be at work in this area.

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/020115.cfm

First Reading DT 18:15-20

Second Reading 1 COR 7:32-35

Gospel Reading MK 1:21-28

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

What is Salvation?

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Next Steps (Continued):

The Bible says, ***"Nor** is there salvation in any **other**, for there is **no other name** under heaven given among men by **which** we must be saved." Acts 4:12*

You may ask if I believe, what must I do to be saved. The answer can be found in Romans Chapter 10:

"[T]hat if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.For the Scripture says, Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.For whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." (Romans 10:9-13)

Does this sound too simple? It is. Salvation is a free gift. Our main problem is that we want to do something to earn it. We cannot, it has been purchased for us. All we have to do is to seek God, and He guarantees you that He will show Himself to you. I have watched God work in the lives of dozens of people. I am absolutely sure that He will work in your life! I know that I called upon God and He answered me!

The next things that we need to discuss are the attributes of God. Many people have a personal view of God which may or may not be correct. They may be absolutely wrong in their view. Or their god may not really be God at all. For years my god was myself, I sought pleasure as my source of personal fulfillment. Here is what God says about Himself in His book, the Bible.

(1) God is a Holy God

The word holy means separate. When applied to God, holy means apart from sin. Heaven as a place of God is holy. "And there shall in no wise enter into it [Heaven] anything that defileth…" (Revelation 21:27 KJV). People measure themselves by many different standards. These include (A) their own standards, (B) society's ever changing standards, and (C) their church or other religious institution's (or cult's) standards. It is worthwhile to ask ourselves where we fall upon these standards of judgment. Are we at the top of our class in our own standards? What about the standard set by our society? Since God is holy, He measures us by His holy standard. If God measured us according to His holy standard, where would we fall? The answer according to God, is FAR SHORT. Remember, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23) If we measured anyone against this standard, where would they fall? Again, they would fall FAR SHORT.

Since God is Holy, and Heaven is God's home and is also holy, would anyone be good enough to earn his or her way to Heaven?

(2) God is a God of Justice

The Bible records in Genesis 18:25: "Shall not the Judge of the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25c) God must do right. Let's suppose that a person measured up to God's standard of perfection, he fulfilled all of the requirements. What would God have to do? The answer is that He would have to let him into Heaven.

Here are several illustrations that help to explain the concept of justice.

(A) Suppose that I killed a person, went to the judge, and he let me go. Would that be just?

(B) Suppose that I killed a person, went to the judge and told him I am sorry I won't do it again. Then the judge let me go. Would this be just?

(C) Suppose that I killed a person, went to the judge and told him that I'm sorry, I won't do it again, and I will do some good deeds to make up for the murder of the person. Would that be just?

The key concept of God's justice is that sin demands punishment. God cannot excuse or overlook sin.

In light of God's holiness and justice, who deserves punishment and is anyone good enough to earn their way to Heaven? The answer is ALL deserve punishment, and no one is good enough to earn their way to Heaven.

(3) God is a God of Love

God cannot violate His holiness or his justice. He cannot tell us that I love you; I know that you have sinned, and technically you cannot go to Heaven but I will let you in anyway. God's love cannot violate his holiness and justice. He has to satisfy them. How? To satisfy God's justice, someone has

to pay the punishment for our sins. We need a substitute. I cannot pay the punishment for your sins because I have also sinned. The only one that can pay the punishment for our sins is somebody who has never sinned. The only one that has never sinned is God. How can God die for our sins? The only way that God could die for our sins is to become a man.

For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. (Gospel of John 3:16-17 KJV)

But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8 KJV)

Jesus Christ died for your sins past, present, and future. Does that mean that everyone is going to Heaven? No. What determines who goes to Heaven? What is the difference between the sinner, and the redeemed forgiven sinner? There is a condition that must be met for those that are going to Heaven. Those who meet the condition MUST go to Heaven. Those who do not meet the condition MUST go to Hell. This condition is shown below.

(4) God is a God of Mercy

The condition that we must meet in order to go to Heaven is found in the book of Romans, and it reveals God's attribute of mercy. The Book of Romans was written by the apostle Paul to Gentiles (non-Jewish people) like myself:

[T]hat if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.For the Scripture says, Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For whoever calls on the name of the LORD ***shall be saved****. (Romans 10:9-13)*

What does the Bible promise if you meet the condition of God's mercy? The answer is, you WILL BE SAVED. When we look at the passage in Romans above, we see two things.

(A) You must believe that you are a sinner and as a condition of God's justice is headed to **Hell.**

Hell = No Hope

(B) You must receive the free gift of salvation without believing that you can earn it by good works. After this God's justice and mercy requires that you go to **Heaven.**

Heaven = Hope, through the Promise by God through saving faith.

The Bible says:

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"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me." (Revelation 3:20)

You have to believe and answer the calling from the Lord Jesus to save you. If you have not done so, confess your sins to God and exclaim your belief to Him that you believe and trust in Jesus for your salvation.

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 11-23-2014



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 11-23-2014. This week we open with the first reading from Ezekiel in which we see the contrast between the ungodly shepherds and God the Good Shepherd. We include a great deal of the surrounding verses in order to help us to understand the meaning of the reading based upon its context. Then we move onto the second reading from 1 Corinthians in which we study the truth of the resurrection of believers and how this provides us with great hope. Finally, we conclude with the Gospel lesson from Matthew 25 in which we study the coming judgment of everyone who lives in the world at the end of the tribulation period. We pray that this study gives you much more insight as you attend Mass this coming Sunday.

The first reading is from the Prophet Ezekiel. The context is just after God told Ezekiel that although the people recognized him as a prophet and came to listen to him (Ezekiel 33:30-31c) they did not take his words into account and change their lives (Ezekiel 33:31d-ff). Instead, God told them that it

would be afterwards that they would look back and "know that a prophet has been among them" (v. 33). In Ezekiel's time, and also in the present age God is not pleased with people going through the motions of dead religion, especially when they don't listen to God's word and let Him operate on their hearts and minds to change their behavior. Chapter 34, the section from which today's reading is taken, opens with God's scathing critique of the "shepherds of Israel," meaning the ungodly leaders of the nation including kings, priests, and prophets (except for Ezekiel, Daniel and Jeremiah his contemporaries). We get our word "pastor" from the Latin word for "shepherd." These passages are messianic, meaning that they prefigure the revelation of the True Shepherd Jesus Christ. In those days the people were as "sheep without a shepherd," something eerily reminiscent of what Jesus said some six hundred years later. "Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36-37). As usual in these study notes it is crucially important to understand the context as the reading provides a **contrast** between the ungodly "shepherds" of Ezekiel's time and the Godly Shepherd God and His ultimate fulfillment in the Person of Jesus Christ. This contrast is important enough to understand that we have provided the first ten verses of the chapter leading up to today's reading.

> *1 Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, 2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, 'Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? 3 You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock. 4 Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them. 5 They were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered. 6 My flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill; My flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth, and there was no one to search or seek for them.' 7 Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: 8 'As I live,' declares the Lord GOD, 'surely because My flock has become a prey, My flock has even become food for all the beasts of the field for lack of a shepherd, and My shepherds did not search for My flock, but rather the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock;' 9 therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: 10 Thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will demand My sheep from them and make them cease from feeding sheep. So the shepherds will not feed themselves anymore, but I will deliver My flock from their mouth, so that they will not be food for them.'"(Ezekiel 34:1-10)*

This is the text of the reading for today that follows the opening of chapter 34. *Note: Verses 13-14 which were skipped in the reading were added in order to provide the full context.*

> 11 For thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them

> out. 12 "As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day. 13 I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land. 14 I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down on good grazing ground and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. 15 I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest," declares the Lord GOD. 16 "I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick; but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with judgment. 17 As for you, My flock, thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will judge between one sheep and another, between the rams and the male goats." (Ezekiel 34:11-17).

Throughout the Scripture, the Lord God pictures Himself as the "Shepherd of the Sheep," and this occurs early in the Bible. This theme in the reading from Ezekiel occurs frequently in Ezekiel's Book, occurring some 15 times in chapter 34 alone. The first time this concept appears is back in the Book of Genesis when Jacob was prophesizing about the twelve sons (and tribes) of Israel, this time about Joseph. "Joseph is a fruitful bough, A fruitful bough by a spring; Its branches run over a wall. The archers bitterly attacked him, And shot at him and harassed him; But his bow remained firm, And his arms were agile, From the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel)" (Genesis 49:22-24). The shepherd theme is reminiscent of the opening of Psalm 23, "The LORD is my Shepherd, I shall not want" v. 1). We see this clearly in today's reading. "I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down on good grazing ground and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest," declares the Lord God" (vv. 14-16). As we examine today's reading we find additional insight into the identity of this Shepherd of Israel. He emerges as a Shepherd-King figure Who has a special relationship with the LORD. This is none other than the Lord Jesus Himself. If we look beyond today's reading to verse 34, we see a continuation of this contrast between the evil shepherds and the One True Shepherd. "Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd" (Ezekiel 34:23). "David" in this verse prefigures the One True Shepherd that was yet to come at the time Ezekiel wrote this passage, the Person of Jesus Christ. It is also evident throughout Scripture that the resurrected King David will also play a role in governing Israel in the future Millennial reign of the Lord Jesus on earth.

As believers in Jesus, we can find great comfort from Ezekiel's writing. First, God will seek His sheep that are lost, meaning that God Himself places a calling upon our lives to come to faith in His Son Jesus Christ (v. 11). Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:44). Second, since God keeps His promises that He made to Israel, He will keep all of the promises that He has made to us. One of those promises made to Israel is that He will re-gather this nation Israel at some future time. "I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land" (v. 13a). Third,

we can trust that God will take care of us in the same way that a Good Shepherd takes care of His sheep. Finally, although we may feel judged by worldly people in this age, the only real judgment that counts is our True Judge the Lord Jesus Himself (v. 17). We can trust that God's judgment will be correct in that as we enter eternity He will judge between the evil shepherds in our land and the ones that do good in serving Him.

As we move onto the second reading, we will see more about the Person Jesus Christ, since He was made alive at the resurrection, we too will be made alive when our bodies are resurrected from the dead. The reading is from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. The context is Paul's vigorous explanation of the bodily resurrection of believers, first the Lord Jesus and then all people who put their faith in Him. Paul opens this section with a caution to his readers for them to "hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:2b,c). The main theme that runs throughout the chapter is that the risen Lord Jesus is the hope of all believers, in spite of the fact that some in the church had denied the teaching of the future resurrection of the dead (v.12). Paul said, "But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain" (1Corinthians 15:13-14). He closes the section just before today's reading by saying, "If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied" (1Corinthians 15:19), something which denies the conventional wisdom of our age that would say that the Christian life is a noble way of living. With these concepts in mind let's move onto today's reading. *Note: Verse 27 which was skipped in the reading was provided in order to provide the full context.*

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

Paul said that since Christ **has** been raised from the dead, is the first One to be resurrected (v.20), He is the one through Whom came life and is a precursor of the hope of resurrection for all who believe (v. 22b, 23). As we saw in the first reading from Ezekiel, Jesus' rulership will be established on earth, which is one of the aspects of the resurrection. Jesus will "come in glory," (Matthew 25:31) something that we will read about in the Gospel lesson today. Paul quoted from Psalm 8 when he said that Jesus would totally subdue all of His enemies, "put them under His feet" (vv. 25-26). The evil shepherds spoken of by Ezekiel will be subdued and judged forever. The greatest enemy that Jesus will conquer is death through the victory of the resurrection, first Himself and then all believers. The culmination of world history will be marked by the end of Jesus' one thousand year

(millennial) reign on earth. This will be concluded with Christ handing over His kingdom to His Father in heaven (vv.24 -28), something that would fall into the category of what Saint Peter called "things that are hard to understand" (2 Peter 3:16). After Christ has handed His kingdom over to the Father, His eternal reign will begin (Revelation 21, 22).

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

As we transition to the Gospel lesson, earlier we mentioned in the first reading how God is the Righteous Judge and in the second reading how one day He will come in Glory to rule and reign over the earth. One of the elements of rulership is acting as a Judge, and at the end His reign on earth Jesus will judge those who have survived the tribulation period at the conclusion of the Day of the Lord. This is the judgment that is marked by Jesus' statement earlier in Matthew 24, "Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left" (Matthew 24:40). The one that is taken will be taken in judgment, the one that is left behind will enter the Millennial Reign of Jesus Christ. This is similar to what happened to the nonbelievers during Noah's flood. Jesus said, "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be(Matthew 24:37-39). As you read the Gospel lesson from Matthew 25, keep in mind the context that this judgment is immediately preceding Jesus' Millennial Reign on earth, rather than the Great White Throne judgment spoken of in Revelation 20:11-15 which doesn't happen until **after** Jesus' thousand year reign on earth. This judgment is the "reaping" spoken of by John in the Book of Revelation Chapter 14. "And another angel came out of the temple, crying out with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, 'Put in your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe.' Then He who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped" (Revelation 14:15-16).

> *31 "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. 32 All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; 33 and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; 36 naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' 37 Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? 38 And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? 39 'When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come*

> *to You?' 40 The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.' 41 Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; 42 for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; 43 I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.' 44 Then they themselves also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?' 45 "Then He will answer them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' 46 These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (Matthew 25:31-46)*

In the reading we see how nonbelieving goats are forcibly separated from the believing sheep by the Good Shepherd Jesus. Up until the time of this judgment these two groups of people who looked identical on the outside lived together in the world. This concept of a "mixed multitude" is clearly taught by Jesus in other places in the Gospel and especially in His parable of the wheat and the tares which also speaks of this same judgment (Matthew 13:24-30). In that parable Jesus said, "Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, 'First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn'" (Matthew 13:30). In today's reading Jesus' point is similar, but He used the shepherd analogy that we saw in Ezekiel. The Good Shepherd who knows His Sheep will divide these two groups on the basis of their heart condition. The criteria that He will use was something He explained to Nicodemus in John Chapter 3, "You must be born from above (or again, Greek "anothen") to enter the kingdom of heaven" (John 3:3, with my explanation). Jesus said in that same Gospel, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:27-28). Although Jesus as God knows His sheep instinctively, just like any shepherd, and they look the same on the outside, His sheep bear distinctive markings on the inside. These markings display themselves in their **behavior**, which is a way that even the worldly people can recognize them. This becomes clear in verses 35 -40. **Some** of the good works of a believer flow from a heart that has been changed by God (John 3:3), as James said, "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:14). The sheep indulge in a variety of "sheeplike" behaviors. They feed the hungry (v. 35a), give drink to the thirsty (v. 35c), clothing to those without (v. 36a), visit the sick (v. 36b), and visit those in prison (v. 36b-c). Jesus then went on to explain that anytime you do these things for others it was as if you were doing it directly for Him (vv. 37-40, 42-45). Jesus also made it clear that the eternal destination (v. 46) for nonbelievers is the "eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels" (v. 41). It's interesting to note that Jesus' sheep sit at His right hand, while Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father (1 Peter 3:22).

The Gospel lesson helps us to prioritize and value what God cares about. In this world, attending to the needs of those who are marginalized in society is an opportunity for us to display what's really in our hearts. Do we have the love and compassion of God or ware we still living only for ourselves? Jesus shares specific types of needs that were commonplace in His day and age including hunger, thirst, lack of sufficient clothing, and imprisonment. You might be encountering other types of needs

that God is asking you to meet (helping a child learn how to read, sacrificing some of your income to provide a home for someone, giving a friend a ride to work while their car is being repaired. The opportunities to meet other people's needs are endless. So we'll need to ask for wisdom to know what needs are our opportunity to love Christ by serving others.

What does all of this mean in our lives? First, we can trust that the Good Shepherd Who was the first to rise from the dead will also come for us one day when we enter eternity (John 14: 3). Second, even though we may be tortured by the ungodly behavior of people in the world, we can trust that God knows the intentions of our heart and those who are His. God will work it out, "Vengeance is mine says the Lord" (Romans 12:19). Second, We can rest in the fact that our good works flow out of a heart changed by God (Ephesians 2:8-9, John 3:3) and these are evident to those who are unknowingly (2 Corinthians 4:3-4) on the broad road to destruction (Matthew 7:13). Our good works will be evident to them and will shed light on their evil works (John 3:20). Finally, we can trust that since we are believers we can trust in the fact that when we sit before the Lord in judgment it will be for the basis of rewards and not to determine our eternal destination.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the Bible the word translated "faith" brings with it the idea of expecting to have the things hoped for or living in light of an unseen reality. In your life, what does it mean to have faith? How does faith play into obedience? Are these two separate things in your mind or are they connected?

2. The Greek word translated "obedience" (hupakoe) according to Strong's Concordance (5218, drawn from 5219) means "attentive hearkening, i.e. (by implication) compliance or submission." Read the following Scripture and answer the question that follows.

> *25 Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, 26 but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to* ***obedience of faith****; 27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen. (Romans 16:25-27, emphasis added)*

In light of what you learned today along with Paul's teaching above on obedience of faith, what does it mean for you to walk in obedience of faith? How is your faith evident to others?

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/112314.cfm

First Reading EZ 34:11-12, 15-17

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Second Reading 1 COR 15:20-26, 28

Gospel Reading MT 25:31-46

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 10-12-2014



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 10-12-2014. This week we open with the first reading from Isaiah 25 in which we see a song of praise and a promise of redemption of the fallen earth and its people in a future age. Then we move to the second reading that is a continuation of the study from Paul's Letter to the Philippians. Finally, we conclude with a parable of Jesus in The Gospel of Matthew addressed to the Jewish leaders that is very similar to what we studied last week.

The first reading is from the Prophet Isaiah who wrote of God's judgment and blessings. The context is just after God spoke about warnings of wrath in Chapter 24 that began with, "Behold, the LORD lays the earth waste, devastates it, distorts its surface and scatters its inhabitants" (Isaiah 24:1). This theme continued throughout that chapter with promises of wrath for those who dealt

treacherously (v. 16) as well as promises of judgment on the angels who rebelled against God. God said, "So it will happen in that day, That the LORD will punish the host of heaven on high, And the kings of the earth on earth" (Isaiah 24:21). Chapter 25 then opens with a song of praise reminiscent of the Book of Psalms as follows, which will provide a backdrop for the first reading later in this study.

> *1 O LORD, You are my God; I will exalt You, I will give thanks to Your name; For You have worked wonders, Plans formed long ago, with perfect faithfulness. 2 For You have made a city into a heap, A fortified city into a ruin; A palace of strangers is a city no more, It will never be rebuilt. 3 Therefore a strong people will glorify You; Cities of ruthless nations will revere You. 4 For You have been a defense for the helpless, A defense for the needy in his distress, A refuge from the storm, a shade from the heat; For the breath of the ruthless Is like a rain storm against a wall. 5 Like heat in drought, You subdue the uproar of aliens; Like heat by the shadow of a cloud, the song of the ruthless is silenced. (Isaiah 25:1-5)*

These verses apply both in Isaiah's near term context as well as in the eschatological (end times) future, which is a frequent occurrence in Isaiah. The city in verse two is symbolic of any city that sets itself against God, rather than some particular place. In the Old Testament, this was pictured by cities including Moab, Edom and Babylon. The Babylonian Empire was destroyed some two hundred years after Isaiah wrote about the capital city of Babylon, marking one of the near term fulfillments of verse 2. However, in a future time, a city also called Babylon will also set itself against God and ultimately be overthrown as we read in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 14:8, 18:2). In the verses that follow, God promises to be an advocate for the weak (v. 4) and to silence all of His oppressors (v. 5d). An understanding of this context helps to understand the banquet described in the subsequent text of today's reading because God will prepare this feast for His believers after he vanquishes the enemies of His people. As you read the text of the first reading, note how God will at some future time prepare a banquet for His people.

> *6 The LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain; A banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow, And refined, aged wine. 7 And on this mountain He will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples, Even the veil which is stretched over all nations. 8 He will swallow up death for all time, And the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces, And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth; For the LORD has spoken. 9 And it will be said in that day, "Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; Let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation." 10 For the hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain, And Moab will be trodden down in his place As straw is trodden down in the water of a manure pile. (Isaiah 25:6-10)*

God promises us that at some future time He will prepare a banquet for His people, either during Christ's one thousand year reign on the earth as described in Revelation Chapter 20 or some other time. God says that this banquet will be held "on this mountain" (v. 7a) most likely meaning the location from which the rulership will be centered, meaning Jerusalem, the center of the earth

(Ezekiel 5:5, Revelation 11:2, Daniel 8:14). Next, God says that He will remove the veil that is over the nations (v. 7b) and eliminate death forever. Saint Paul spoke about the spiritual veil that exists in the heart of every nonbeliever. He said, "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). Before this bountiful feast, once the earth has been purified during the time described by Jeremiah as "Jacob's trouble" (Jeremiah 30:7), the people that remain will enter into God's eternal reign. Any nation that ever exalted itself against God, typified by "Moab" in verse 10, will be put down into the "manure pile" (v. 10b).

This passage in Isaiah is reminiscent of what John wrote about in the Book of Revelation. The way biblical revelation works is that God has gradually unfolded information about His divine plan, first through the Old Testament writings by Moses and the Prophets, and finally through Jesus and the New Testament. Jesus' disciples understood more than the Old Testament saints did, and John understood more than did the readers of Isaiah as God gradually unfolded more of the scroll of revelation. Perhaps this is why the events in the Book of Revelation are the unrolling of a scroll (Revelation 5:1). Notice the similarity in Revelation Chapter 21 to what we read from Isaiah:

> *3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, 4 and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." 5 And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." (Revelation 21:3-5).*

We can rest in the promises of God, because as we have seen how He faithfully accomplished His past promises He will also accomplish His future promises. God is faithful in doing what He says He will do, and generous in what He both gives us and promises us in the future. These truths are true regardless of how we feel about them, although as believers the veil has already been lifted from our hearts (2 Corinthians 3:16). As we move onto the second reading, we will see a continuation of the themes of faithfulness and generosity as God calls His people to model both of these traits.

The second reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Philippians. The context is Paul's teaching that we studied last week on the antidote for worry. Paul made a commanding call to prayer, correct thinking, and right actions in order to combat anxiety. He said that instead of worrying we should pray (Philippians 4:6). Second, we should focus our thoughts upon the correct things including a list of good things that are worthy of praise (v. 8). As you read today's reading, note that we have included verses 15-18 in order to understand the full context.

> *12 I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. 13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. 14 Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction.*

> *15 You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; 16 for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs. 17 Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. 18 But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.*
>
> *19 And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. 20 Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (Philippians 4:12-20)*

Paul said that he understood how to "get along with humble means" (v. 12), meaning just the basic necessities of life such as food, water, and clothing. He said that he had learned "the secret" (v. 12) of being satisfied whether he had an abundance or a lack of the things he needed. Paul revealed the secret of his success in verse 13 for dealing with a lack of provision. He said, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." The verb that Paul used for being able to do all things means to "be strong," or to have strength. The word he used for "strengthens me" means to "put power in." What Paul was saying was that he could be strong when he was lacking because God infuses him with the necessary power until He provided the necessary provision. In the closing verse, Paul said that God would supply all of our needs "according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (v. 19). This means that God will supply our needs in proportion to His **infinite** resources.

In trying to understand the application of Paul's message, it is important to understand the context given in verses 15-18. The Philippians had given generously to Paul, and they were the **only** ones to do so. This provides us with a strong insight into the application of Paul's message. As believers we are to be generous in our giving because this is how God supplies other people's needs. We are to hold our possessions that God has given us with an open hand and let God take from them and add more as He sees fit. A principle is that the more generous we are, the more that He will place into our hands for the stewardship of giving to others. This is far from the "name it and claim it" theology often seen on many of the TV "preachers." Rather, this is how God ordains us to give to others by entrusting us to be good stewards or what He has given to us.

How many of us can understand what it means to live with nearly nothing? I remember a story about a friend of mine from Liberia who immigrated to America and is now a pastor. During the oppression by the various military forces in the country, he was forced to live without any food for a period of two weeks. He said that looking back on it he was able to endure it through his faith that God would provide for his needs. It was his faith in God that got him through this and kept him safe during his harrowing journey out of the country. He told me something like, "It wasn't bad, you would be surprised how easy it was to go without food for two weeks when you are on the run and you know

that God is on your side." Saint Paul said, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

The Gospel lesson is from Matthew and is similar to what we studied last week with Jesus addressing the Jewish religious leaders. This time the story is about a king that planned a wedding feast for his son. Notice how Jesus opened the story with "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to" (v. 1) which provides an insight into the meaning that Jesus intended the chief priests and Pharisees (Matthew 21:45) to understand.

> *1 Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying, 2 "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. 3 And he sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling to come. 4 Again he sent out other slaves saying, 'Tell those who have been invited, Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are all butchered and everything is ready; come to the wedding feast.' 5 But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business, 6 and the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them. 7 But the king was enraged, and he sent his armies and destroyed those murderers and set their city on fire. 8 Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. 9 Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast.' 10 Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered together all they found, both evil and good; and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests. 11 But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, 12 and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?' And the man was speechless. 13 Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' 14 For many are called, but few are chosen." (Matthew 22:1-14)*

In the story, we see how the king, who by application is God, sent the good news (aka the Gospel) of the marriage feast for his son, who by application is Jesus. The invited guests were by application the Jews to whom the kingdom was initially given, except they rejected the message from the king and instead went about their worldly business (vv. 3-6). Some even went so far as to kill the king's servants, who are by application the prophets that we discussed last week. The fact that the invitation came directly from the king made the rejection of the invitation that much more of a serious matter. By application, the Jews rejected the offer of salvation provided by God through his Son Jesus Christ. As a result, they will bear the rage of the king (v. 7). When the invited guests failed to attend the wedding, the king sent his servants to find other guests, by application the Gentile world. The Gospel message went out to the Gentile world and many came to the church but not everyone who came was clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ (v. 11). The person that the king discovered without the wedding clothes (v. 11) was guilty of a great sin because God was the One who provided the attire in the first place. The application is that of a person who goes through the motions of Christianity but was never "born from above" (John 3:3). The penalty for committing the only unpardonable sin of not putting on the righteousness of Christ (Romans 13:14) is assignment of the soul to a literal place known as hell, where there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew

8:12, 13:42). Jesus taught about this in His Sermon on the Mount:

> *21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. 22 "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.' (Matthew 7:21-23)*

God provides everything that a person needs to be properly clothed at the upcoming feast that we read about in the first reading from Isaiah. People obtain the necessary "wedding attire" by repenting of their sin and trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ's finished work on the cross. Any good works that believers do flow out of their relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9) as a result of the new heart that was given to them the moment that they believed (2 Corinthians 5:17). They are justified in the eyes of God, meaning that it was just as if they had never sinned. Although the Scripture is clear that the sins of a believer are not held against them, as we saw in the second reading they are accountable for the stewardship of what God has given to them. As believers, we are accountable to God for the use of our time, our talents and our treasures. As a result of our stewardship we will shall give account of ourselves to God (Romans 14:12) resulting in various degrees of reward in heaven.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. God will lovingly hold us accountable for the use of our spiritual gifts, so it's very important to understand that which we have been given. Sometimes the best way to understand your gifts is to ask others. A second insight about understanding our spiritual gifts is that we can ask ourselves what we like doing. What gifts, meaning time, talents, and treasures, have you been given by God? Write down a list of two or three gifts that you feel or others have told you that you possess.

2. How are you using each of the gifts that you have been given. Pray that God would enlighten your heart to show you ways in which you may expand you ministry. Perhaps you will receive an insight similar to this, "I have the sense that I want to volunteer in a nursing home one night a week" (gift of helps or hospitality). Alternatively, "Many people have always told me how positive I am" (gift of encouragement), "I will be more intentional about encouraging those whom I come in contact with each week."

For Further Study:

If you desire a more comprehensive method of determining your spiritual gifts there are some innovative spiritual gift tests available online. Here is a link to one such resource: http://tinyurl.com/spiritualgifts

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/101214.cfm

First Reading IS 25:6-10A

Second Reading PHIL 4:12-14, 19-20

Gospel Reading MT 22:1-14

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 9-28-2014



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 9-28-2014. This week we open with a reading from the Prophet Ezekiel in which we learn about the seriousness of sin. Then we move to the second reading with a continuation of the study in the Book of Philippians. Finally, we conclude with the Gospel lesson from Saint Matthew.

The first reading is from the Prophet Ezekiel. We provided a comprehensive introduction to the Prophet Ezekiel in the September 7 edition of Mass Notes. The context of the reading is the Lord's teaching on the seriousness of sin. "The soul who sins shall die," (v. 4d) the text says in the opening section of this chapter. Specifically, God taught on the seriousness of idolatry (v. 6), covetousness (v. 6), robbing the poor (v. 7), depriving the hungry from food and the poor from adequate clothing (v. 7), and charging interest on loans to a fellow Jew (v. 8). Obedience to God's Laws flows from an obedient heart, one that has been changed through embracing the mystery of God's love. Saint Paul said, "[F]or all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). And, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). God's gift is eternal life but it comes only through faith in Him. In the Old Testament times this meant trusting in what they knew about God and looking forward to their Messiah Jesus' future conquering of sin forever. In a sense, God had already provided salvation because Jesus is called the Lamb slain since before the foundation of the world, although that event was yet future (Revelation 13:8). In a similar way the Kingdom of Heaven is an already, not yet proposition. In our day, we receive eternal life by trusting in what we know about God and looking back to what Jesus did for us on the cross.

A summary of this section is given in the verses that immediately proceed the reading:

> *"Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked," declares the Lord GOD, "rather than that he should turn from his ways and live? 24 But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity and does according to all the abominations that a wicked man does, will he live? All his righteous deeds which he has done will not be remembered for his treachery which he has committed and his sin which he has committed; for them he will die." (Ezekiel 18:23-24)*

With this context in mind let's proceed with the reading.

> *25 "Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not right.' Hear now, O house of Israel! Is My way not right? Is it not your ways that are not right? 26 When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity and dies because of it, for his iniquity which he has committed he will die. 27 Again, when a wicked man turns away from his wickedness which he has committed and practices justice and righteousness, he will save his life. 28 Because he considered and turned away from all his transgressions which he had committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die." (Ezekiel 18:25-28)*

The reading is a study in contrasts, first, that of a wicked man that repented of his sin, and second, one that continued in his sin to the point of death. We see in verse 26 that habitual sin can have serious consequences, even to the point of death. Let's back up and look more closely at the difference between someone whose heart has been renewed by God and the person who remains spiritually dead. The Scripture reveals very clearly that there are two distinct classes of people, two different roads with only one of them leading to heaven. Jesus called them the narrow road and the

broad road (Matthew 7:13-14, below). The first class is those whose sins are forgiven and who are spiritually alive, born from above (John 3:3). Ezekiel said something about this earlier in this chapter, "All his transgressions which he has committed will not be remembered against him; because of his righteousness which he has practiced, he will live" (Ezekiel 18:22). The second class is those whose soul is spiritually dead and whose sin will be held against them for an eternity after they die. This is a crucial point especially since most people in the world are unknowingly on the broad road. Jesus said, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13-14). If a person never truly experiences and trusts in God's saving grace through faith in Jesus then their soul remains spiritually dead during their life on earth. When they die physically, their already dead soul enters the abode of the dead and at some future point they will experience a second death. This fearsome event is enough to scare anyone and is described in the Book of Revelation. "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8). "And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15).

Let's go back to the reading. In verse 27 God said, "when a wicked man turns away from his wickedness which he has committed and practices justice and righteousness, he will save his life." Is God saying that a person earns their way to heaven by their good works? No, the whole of Scripture is clear that good works flow out of a heart that has been regenerated by God. Yes, nonbelievers can do good works, but their motivation is different from a child of the kingdom. Even though they are spiritually dead, they are still human beings created in the image of God. Whatever they do flows out of their existence as an image bearer of God, but their deeds do not result in them obtaining eternal life. The Scripture shows that works that are pleasing to God flow from a heart that is submitted to God through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus said this plainly in John 6:29. When people asked what they should do to fulfill the works that God requires, Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: To believe in the one He has sent."

Ezekiel's message is reminiscent of an event that occurred in the Book of Acts with a couple named Ananias and Sapphira that showed the deadly result of sin in the rapidly growing, early church. The story best tells itself as follows below.

> *1 But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, 2 and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet. 3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? 4 "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." 5 And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it. 6 The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him. 7 Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came*

> *in, not knowing what had happened. 8 And Peter responded to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?" And she said, "Yes, that was the price." 9 Then Peter said to her, "Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out as well." 10 And immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. 11 And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things. (Acts 5:1-11)*

While not every sin is met with such immediate consequences, we see that sin is a serious matter and believers are called to holiness. As we move onto the second reading, we will see Saint Paul's call to holy living by being unselfish and walking in unity to accomplish God's purposes. The context is that Paul had wrestled with a hypothetical argument whether it was better for him to continue ministering amidst his struggles in prison or go to heaven to be with the Lord. His conclusion was that it was better for the Philippians if he stayed (Philippians 1:24), and that he was confident that he would indeed continue (v. 25). Next, Paul admonished the Philippians to walk in a unified way worthy of Jesus Christ (v. 27). He warned them that they may have to suffer for Jesus' sake (v. 29). All of this leads to the reading for today which opens with the adverb "therefore." Therefore, with these previous things in mind, let's read the text. [Note: Two versions of the reading were provided, we are using the shorter one because we covered the other verses in a previous week.]

> *1 Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, 2 make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. 3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, (Philippians 2:1-5)*

Paul is making a hypothetical and rhetorical argument by using four "ifs" in the first verse, the idea is "if then." It is rhetorical because the "if" is not really in question, it is assumed. So they "if" could be read as "because." Because there is 1. Encouragement in Christ, 2. Consolation of love, 3. Fellowship of the Spirit, and 4. Affection and compassion then do the following things. First, be unified for God's purpose (v.2). Second, act unselfishly and humbly (v. 4). Finally, as a means of accomplishing unselfish and humble behavior worthy of Jesus Christ, live with the mindset of regarding other's needs as more important than your own (v. 4). An attribute of a person that has been made spiritually alive by faith in God is that they look out for "the interests of others" (v. 4). The high ideals of this passage can only be lived out if we are in Christ. He is the One who empowers us to let go of selfishness and pride so that we can embrace the new life of humility that Christ lived and gives us.

The Gospel lesson is from Saint Matthew Chapter 21. The context is just after Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem riding on a donkey (Matthew 20:7-8), the same way a king would enter a city. Next,

Jesus threw the money changers out of the temple in order to purify it (v. 12), healed people (v. 14), and twice contended with the chief priests and scribes in the temple (vv. 15-16, vv. 23-27). An interesting thing happened between Jesus' two visits there. As Jesus was walking by a certain fig tree he saw that it was not bearing fruit so he said to it, "Let no fruit grow in you ever again" (v. 19c). Afterwards Matthew recorded, "And at once the fig tree withered" (v. 19d). The disciples, in response to what Jesus did to the tree said, "[H]ow did the fig tree wither all at once?" (v. 20c). Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it will happen. And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (vv. 21-22). Clearly Jesus performed the "miracle" of the killing of the fig tree so that the religious leaders would either see it or hear about it. He was emphasizing the importance of faith that leads to good works. With this context in mind let's read the Gospel passage that Jesus directed squarely at the "chief priests and elders of the people (v. 23a) who had confronted Him while He was teaching.

> *28 But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go work today in the vineyard.' 29 "And he answered, 'I will not'; but afterward he regretted it and went. 30 The man came to the second and said the same thing; and he answered, 'I will, sir'; but he did not go. 31 Which of the two did the will of his father? They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you. 32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him; and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him." (Matthew 21:28-32)*

Jesus said that there are two groups of people, those who believe and do the work of the Father, and those who don't believe and don't accomplish the Father's work. Jesus told them that they did not follow John the Baptist's calling to repent and believe, as did the first son in the story.

This is a story of contrasts between two sons. First, the sons have different degrees of fruitfulness in accomplishing the works of their father. The first one bears fruit and the other one does not, like the fig tree in Jesus' previous story. Truly, both sons at first refused to work when directed to do so by their father. However, the first son repented and accomplished the will of his father. One son is a child of their Father God; the other son is shown through his works to be a child of a different father. Jesus explained this paternal relationship while addressing the Pharisees in John's Gospel. He told them, "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). Though these were harsh words, Jesus was telling them the truth in order for them to have an opportunity to repent of their sin and turn to Him in faith.

As was explained earlier, there are two roads. Jesus said, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13-14). The narrow road is the one on which the godly son who repented of his sin

traveled. The broad road is the one on which the ungodly son made his journey.

Finally, there are two ultimate destinations as well. Jesus said earlier in Matthew's Gospel, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter" (Matthew 7:21). Jesus points out that you can have the right theology and pay lip service, but that is not the criteria for being in the kingdom of heaven. The destination is heaven for the son that repents and becomes a child of Father God, and hell for the son that does not repent and turn to do the will of the Father. Proverbs 14 says, "There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death" (v. 12). This is the broad road, and a person doesn't realize that they are on this pathway until they are confronted with the reality of their sin in light of the Holy Scriptures. God in His grace desires for everyone to repent of their sin and believe in Him for eternal life (2 Peter 3:9).

Let's summarize what we have studied so far this week. As we saw in the first reading, God places a high value upon repentance. In that reading we saw the contrast between a wicked man that repented and another that continued in their sin to the point of death. In the second reading we also saw a study of contrasts, that of a humble believer that looked out for the interests of others and an implied person that did not. In the Gospel lesson we saw a contrast between two sons, one a child of God and the other a child of the world. There were two roads and ultimately two final destinations.

I had an encounter a few weeks ago that helps to illustrate the two paths about which the Scriptures speak. A few weeks ago I attended a funeral for a dear Christian woman and ran into a friend of mine from high school at the luncheon that was held afterwards. I remembered that I had shared with her the plan of salvation through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. As we talked she joyfully told me how she had recently acquired some sort of floating cooler gizmo for her pool so that she didn't have to leave the pool in order to get a new drink. As she was telling me the story I noticed that something clicked in her mind at which point she suddenly began backtracking and downplaying the importance of this new gadget. I wrapped my short visit at her table and wished her well as I left. Even though I never objected to what she was saying I noticed that her conscience seemed to speak to her. I wanted to ask her what she did when she needed to go to the restroom but I held it in. I hoped that she could do the same (pun intended). Instead I thought that it might just be better to excuse myself and continue visiting with people at some other tables.

People everywhere are on one of two paths. The people who are on the narrow path through faith in Jesus Christ exude a certain holiness as they go about their lives which has a certain repelling effect to the ones unknowingly on the other road. As believers we can rejoice in the fact that our ultimate destination is heaven, even if we have to make the hard choices associated with walking along the narrow road. The Scripture is clear that God is "a rewarder of those that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). Those people who honestly seek God **will** find Him. This is clear from a principle found in Jeremiah 29:13 though it's addressed to the nation of Israel.

May you continue to seek God as you journey this week.

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Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the Gospel lesson we talked about two sons, one a child of God and the other a child of the world. Read the following passages and then answer the questions that follow.

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Acts 4:12 "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

1 John 5:13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Romans 10:9-10 that 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; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

A. What does God say about whether or not we are a sinner, regardless if we have faith in Jesus Christ?

B. What does God tell us about how we can be sure that we are on the narrow road since the Scripture said that you are a sinner?

2. Each of the passages help to create a robust picture of true faith. True faith expresses itself in following the will of God out of a repented heart. Spend some time with the Lord asking Him if there are any packets of resistance in your heart about which you need to repent and turn towards God.

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/092814.cfm

First Reading EZ 18:25-28

Second Reading PHIL 2:1-11 or PHIL 2:1-5

Gospel Reading MT 21:28-32

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Keywords:

sin, narrow road, Ezekiel 18, humility salvation

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 8-17-2014



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 8-17-2014. The readings this week all follow a central

theme, God's revelation of the mystery of salvation being given to the Gentiles in addition to the Jews. The Jews were always God's chosen method of bringing light to the Gentile world. We will see that in the first reading from Isaiah 56 and the second reading from Romans 11. Finally, in the Gospel lesson we will see Jesus' interaction with a Gentile woman and how her faith in Jesus' ability to heal her daughter provided a glimpse into God's plan of salvation for the Gentiles.

The first reading is from the Prophet Isaiah. Chapter 56 is in the closing section of the Book of Isaiah, where God revealed important spiritual truths including the importance of His Word (Isaiah 55:10-11) as well as some further information about His plan of salvation for the Gentiles. In the section immediately prior to today's reading, God outlined His promises that He made to the covenant people, the Jews. As you read, note that verses 2-5 which were skipped in the mass lectionary have been added in order to provide the reader with a fuller understanding of the text.

> *1 Thus says the LORD, "Preserve justice and do righteousness, For My salvation is about to come And My righteousness to be revealed. 2 How blessed is the man who does this, And the son of man who takes hold of it; Who keeps from profaning the sabbath, And keeps his hand from doing any evil. 3 Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say, "The LORD will surely separate me from His people." Nor let the eunuch say, "Behold, I am a dry tree." 4 For thus says the LORD, "To the eunuchs who keep My sabbaths, And choose what pleases Me, And hold fast My covenant, 5 To them I will give in My house and within My walls a memorial, And a name better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off. 6 Also the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, To minister to Him, and to love the name of the LORD, To be His servants, every one who keeps from profaning the sabbath And holds fast My covenant; 7 Even those I will bring to My holy mountain And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; For My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples." (Isaiah 56:1-7)*

Several important points arise from Isaiah's prophecy. First, in light of the previous chapters in which God recounted His promises to the Jews, He announced a charge to them to maintain a clear conscience. In verse one He tells them to "preserve justice and do righteousness" because His salvation would come in the future and at that point His righteousness would be revealed. For a Jew, keeping the Law meant honoring the sabbath as well as "keep[ing] [their] hands from doing any evil" (v. 3).This is a calling to all believers to walk uprightly with the knowledge of salvation that they possess, whether Jew or Gentile. This is clear because in verse three God began to lay out further details about his plan of salvation for the Gentiles. Second, everyone would be welcomed into God's kingdom who walked in faith with God including the Gentiles (foreigners) or those who felt unwelcome in it such as the childless eunuchs. Large families were considered a blessing of God in the Jewish world. God said that he would "give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off" (v. 5c) and that he would "bring [them] to [His] holy mountain and make them joyful in [His] house of prayer" (v. 7). Finally, God revealed through Isaiah that anyone could join the Jewish community of believers and partake in their worship and celebration of God. He said, "[His] house [would] be

called a house of prayer for **all** peoples" (v. 7c, emphasis added).

Although Isaiah provided additional information about God's plan of salvation for the Gentiles through the Jews this was not a new concept in the Bible. Even in the very first Book of the Bible God spoke about salvation coming to all people through Abraham the father of all believers. God told Abraham, "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice" (Genesis 22:18). King David said some three hundred years earlier, "All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, And all the families of the nations will worship before You" (Psalm 22:27). Earlier in Isaiah's record he provided insight into the ultimate method that God would use to bring salvation to the whole world. He said regarding the future Messiah Jesus, "The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them" (Isaiah 9:2). Though the Jews were always a light that pointed to salvation through faith in God, the ultimate light would be the Lord Jesus.

As we turn to the second reading, we will find additional information about God's plan of salvation to the Gentiles that came through the Jews. In this portion of Romans, Paul uses an analogy of an olive tree to describe God's saving ways. Because the Jews rejected the Messiah, some of the original branches (the Jews) had been broken off. This grieved Paul to no end. But this made room for the wild branch (that of the Gentiles) to be grafted into the pure olive tree (the Life of Christ). Our hope is in God's ability to take what is broken and make it whole again (both Jews and Gentiles). And if He is able to do that at the macro-level, can we not trust Him to do that at the micro-level of our lives?

As you read please note that a large section of the text was omitted in the mass reading (verses 16-28 shown separated from the rest) but have been included in order to provide the full meaning of the text.

> *13 But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, 14 if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them. 15 For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?*

> *16 If the first piece of dough is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too. 17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, 18 do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. 19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." 20 Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; 21 for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. 22 Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. 23 And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be*

> *grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. 24 For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree? 25 For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery–so that you will not be wise in your own estimation–that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; 26 and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB." 27 "THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS." 28 From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers;*

> *29 for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 30 For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, 31 so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. 32 For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all. (Romans 11:13-32)*

The big idea in the reading is the revelation of the "mystery" (v. 25a) that God has allowed the Jews to be disobedient to Him for a period of time such that the Gentile believers may be "ingrafted" into God's plan of salvation. Paul affirmed that as the "apostle to the Gentiles" (v. 13) he hoped that through his ministry to them that he may motivate his fellow Jews to trust in Jesus (v. 14). He said that at some future date that all of Israel would be saved (v. 25). As Gentiles without the knowledge of God we are being shown God's mercy during what some commentators refer to as the "church age." The church was something that wasn't reveled to the Old Testament Prophets, or even to Jesus' own disciples until close to the end of Jesus' earthly ministry. In the Old Testament the Hebrew people were distinct from the surrounding nations because of their Law, culture, food, temple, and their worship practices. In the New Testament, Jesus' vision for the church would be for us to be "in the world, but not of it" (John 17:15-16). In the reading Paul stated how the people of God (both Jews and Gentiles) were now one.

Saint Paul revealed more revelation from God about the mystery of the church. Later in Ephesians, God used the analogy of the love that exists between a man and a woman to show how He loves the church. Paul said that husbands are to "love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for it" (Ephesians 5:25). He continued, "This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:32, emphasis added). Paul said more about the mystery of the church:

> *4 By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; 6 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise*

in Christ Jesus through the gospel, (Ephesians 3:4-6)

How could God allow the hardness of the Jewish people's hearts and to set them aside until the last Gentile that desired salvation would find faith in Jesus Christ? This is one of the deep mysteries with which Paul was wrestling. The answer, at least partially, is found in the last verse of the second reading. "For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all" (v. 32). God loves us so much that He is willing to endure the hardness of the Jews hearts until all of us Gentiles that desire salvation find faith in Jesus Christ. The point that Paul makes throughout his letters and the passage in Romans in particular is that we can trust God's mercy, even if we don't fully understand His ways.

As we move onto the Gospel lesson, remember that at this point the church age was still hidden and God's plan of salvation for the Gentiles through faith in Jesus' perfect sacrifice on the cross wasn't in view yet. The context of the Gospel reading is just after Peter (and Jesus) walked on the waters of the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 14:25-31) that we studied last week. After Jesus had calmed the wind and the waves they crossed the lake and came to the region of Gennesaret (14:34) located on the northwest shore of the lake. A series of events preceding this caused Jesus to leave this Jewish region. This included the unwillingness of the Jewish people to repent (Matthew 11:20-24), the rejection of Jesus by the people in his own hometown of Nazareth (Matthew 13:53-58), and the arrest and execution of John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1-10). Jesus' movement to this region spoke symbolically of the future ministry to the Gentiles that some of the disciples would have.

We drop in on the story of the Caananite woman right Matthew highlighted the hardness of the hearts of the Pharisees. This story provides a sharp contrast between the Jewish religious leaders' response to Jesus and the non-religious Gentile response to Jesus. In the previous verses, Jesus was grilled by the Pharisees and then He shows them to be the frauds that they are. Then in contrast, we read a story about the real journey of faith.

> *21 Jesus went away from there, and withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon. 22 And a Canaanite woman from that region came out and began to cry out, saying, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed." 23 But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came and implored Him, saying, "Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us." 24 But He answered and said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." 25 But she came and began to bow down before Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" 26 And He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." 27 But she said, "Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." 28 Then Jesus said to her, "O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed at once. (Matthew 15:21-28)*

The Gentile woman was from a group of people who had always troubled Israel. The Canaanites were first mentioned in the Bible way back in Genesis Chapter 10 (v. 18). They were among the people groups that God promised to drive out during the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt (see Exodus 33:2 and 34:11). They were a people that in Old Testament times lived in the lowland regions west of

the Jordan River. Mark called her "a Gentile, of the Syrophoenician race" (Mark 7:26), indicating that she was a Greek. Jews had always been separated from the Greeks (or Gentiles) although the Jews were immersed in a thoroughly Greek culture. As the story plays out the Gentile woman called out to Jesus by using a respectful title, "Lord, Son of David" (v.22) and one which elicited that she had some understanding of Jesus. She called Jesus by the name "Lord" three times. The word "Lord" means master and the one using the term would be implying their submission to His authority in their life. Certainly, she had heard about his healing powers, but now she used a title that was reserved for the Messiah. She was a persistent woman, and Jesus' disciples implored him to send her away "because she keeps shouting at us" (v. 23c). Then Jesus addressed her and said that His ministry was only to the Jews (v. 24). Next, the woman bowed down before Jesus and He used a metaphor and told her that "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs" (v. 27). The "children's bread" referred to God's covenant people the Jews. This meant that since she wasn't a Jew she was not technically Jesus' first **priority** during his short earthly ministry, which was to the Jews, not to the Gentiles. Her answer to him was very surprising and was an indication of the faith that she had in the Lord Jesus. "Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table" (v. 27). Jesus rewarded her faith by immediately healing her daughter. The Bible is clear that God commends those with faith, He is a "rewarder of those that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). The Gentile woman was rewarded by having her daughter healed. One can only imagine what became of the woman afterwards since Jesus absolutely made a tremendous impression upon her.

What do the readings this week mean to us in our lives? First, God emphasizes the necessity of faith in the perfect, finished work or Jesus Christ for all people, whether Jew or Gentile, and is no respecter of persons. He "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). God provided the plan of salvation through Jesus and made this available to everyone. "For the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). God said "that 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; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation" Romans 10:9-10).

Second, we should love and respect the Jews who although their hearts are hardened are the ones who brought salvation to us through Jesus Christ. We should "not be conceited, but fear; 21 for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either" (Romans 11:20). God has made Israel to be a blessing to the world, and all the way back in Genesis He cautioned us about how we should treat them. He said, "And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Genesis 12:3).

Finally, with the privilege of faith we also have great responsibility to share with everyone the knowledge of Jesus Christ, whether Jew or Gentile. Jesus didn't give us many commands when He left but did leave a clear message about what should be our priority in life. This is called the Great

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Commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. How do you personally respond to God's call to salvation?

- Have you made a decision to accept His call and be grafted into the life of Christ?
- What does God's inclusion of Gentiles into the salvation story tell you about His character and heart?
- How does God's longing to see all people saved encourage you to reach out to others with His good news of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ?

2. How does the faith of the Canaanite woman challenge or affirm you in your own faith journey? Have you seen anyone model this type of faith? Who is God using you to encourage with this type of faith?

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/081714.cfm

First Reading IS 56:1, 6-7

Second Reading ROM 11:13-15, 29-32

Gospel Reading MT 15:21-28

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 6-15-2014

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 6-15-2014. This week we open with the narrative of Moses' encounter with God on Mount Sinai. This is where God gave Moses the 10 Commandments, which are still guiding lawmakers today. Then we move to the New Testament where we will see the outworking of a higher law, the law of Love. It is God's love for us that allows a new way of living to emerge in us.

The first reading is from Exodus 34. The backdrop to this story includes shame and glory, for this is Moses' second time to receive the law from God on Mount Sinai. The first time ended in shame, for he came down from the mountain to find the people of God worshiping a golden calf (see Exodus 32). The second time ended in glory, for Moses asked to see God's glory and this is what God revealed. The new stone tablets and God's patience with His people are an indication of His character, which this passage describes.

> *4 So he [Moses] cut out two stone tablets like the former ones, and Moses rose up early in the morning and went up to Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and he took two stone tablets in his hand. 5 The LORD descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the LORD. 6 Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; 7 who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations." 8 Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship. 9 He said, "If now I have found favor in Your sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go along in our midst, even though the people are so obstinate, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Your own possession." (Exodus 34:4-9)*

The importance of this passage may be missed by its brevity and simplicity. But let us not

underestimate the foundational nature of this revelation of the character of God to His people. Remember, the newly released Hebrew people had just been delivered from being ruled by the Egyptians as slaves. You can take the slave out of Egypt, but something internal has to happen in order to take the mentality of a slave out of the person of God. A revelation of God's true nature would be the antidote to the slave mentality. Here is what we learn about God from this passage:

- God is a self-disclosing, self-revealing God. He desires to make Himself known to His people. Without God first revealing Himself to people, humans would have no way of knowing Him. The Hebrew people were his special chosen people to reveal His character. How would they reveal His character without knowing Him? The self-revealing nature of God is the foundation of relationship with God to all people. This is His grace.
- The word "LORD" which is used as His special covenantal name for the Jewish people, means "I AM". This reveals that God is ever-present and absolutely existent. The Hebrew people needed to know that the God of their fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, was also their ever-present Father as well.
- God is compassionate and gracious. These words are packed with depth and the rest of the Bible should be understood in light of God's character of compassion and grace. Here are some helpful definitions. **Compassionate:** refers to deep love (usually of a superior for an inferior) rooted in some natural bond (i.e. Mother to child; Father to child). Compassion is the deep feeling one for another who is totally helpless, and usually results in providing aid to the one who is in need. Mercy and forgiveness go hand in hand with compassion.
- God is slow to anger: contrary to popular belief, God is not capricious in His display of anger, nor is He looking for people to burn up with His wrath. He is patient and wanting people to repent, not desiring that any should perish (1 Timothy 2:4).
- God is abounding in love and faithfulness. Abounding connotes the overflowing and abundant nature of God's love and faithfulness. He's not going to run out! The word for love used here means loving-kindness. The two characteristics put together mean that God is fiercely loyal to His children. We can count on Him to love and to forgive.
- God is also just. He will punish the sin of the guilty who have not brought themselves to Him in surrender. It would be unloving for God to allow injustice to prevail. So even in His punishment of wickedness, God is exercising His loving faithfulness.
- When God's glory is revealed, the only appropriate place for humans to be is bowed to the ground, worshiping.
- When God's glory is revealed, Moses wanted God to go with him and the people. He could not envision being alone in this world. God's presence is appealing, we do not have to protect ourselves from getting "too much of God."
- When God's glory is revealed, Moses recognized the sinful state of himself and the people. God's glory makes us more self-aware of our own short-comings. Our shabby excuses don't really hold up in God's presence, therefore we must rely on God's grace in order to stand in His presence.
- "Brethren": shows that those who are in Christ are in a family relationship. The laws that govern a family are higher than a governmentally enforced system. Family relationships are governed by the higher law of love.

- "Rejoice": why must Paul command the Corinthians to rejoice? He must know that it is easier for humans to be critical and despair over life than it is to rejoice. We must be reminded that we have a lot to be thankful for.
- "Be made complete": reminds us of the believer's status in Christ. We are positionally complete in Christ (for Jesus cried "It is finished" from the cross), but it takes some effort on our part to live out the reality of this new status.
- "Be comforted": Paul started this letter telling the Corinthians that the God of all comfort will comfort them in their troubles (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). He closes it by encouraging them to appropriate the comfort that only God can give.
- "Be like-minded and live in peace": means that Christians should seek to live in an understanding way with each other, allowing the Truth to unite us.
- "and the God of love and peace will be with you": Is He not with us when we are living contrary to these commands. Well, in a way, yes. It is true that God is omnipresent. His love and peace is available to all people at all times. But the difference between having God's love and peace and not having God's love and peace is the choice we as humans make to accept or reject who God is in our lives. If we live contrary to His ways, His love and peace will not be in us. If we want to have the God of love and peace making His presence known to us, we have simply to ask and receive, making room for Him to manifest Himself in us and through us. We can't have His love and peace without having Him.
- "Greet one another with a holy kiss": this actual practice may not be common in our churches anymore, but we have similar expressions of fellowship by shaking hands, giving a hug or smiling across the aisle at someone. The idea behind this is to be welcoming and inclusive with others who are in fellowship with us in our local places of worship.
- "All the saints greet you": this closing phrase gives Saint Paul's theology of sainthood. He frequently uses the word "saint" to describe genuine believers in Christ (1 Cor. 1:2, 2 Cor. 1:1; Philippians 1:1). He opened the letter to the Ephesians by saying: "To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 1:1). God gives the status of saint to all who have bowed their knee to Jesus as Lord, for now Christ's righteousness is credited to our account (2 Corinthians 5:21). That is what makes us a saint before God.
- To receive His free gift of eternal life by believing in Jesus
- To receive His forgiveness for a particular sin that you previously thoughts was too big for God to forgive
- To treat another Christian as a brother/sister
- To recognize your identity as a saint and make choices based on this
- To be "like-minded" with other Christians over the truth
- To be comforted by the God of all comfort
- To let God's compassion and grace be your interpretive framework for the circumstances of your life
    -

Gracious: unmerited favor, the root word depicts a heartfelt response by someone who has something to give to one who has a need; it is an adjective that describes the generous acts of Yahweh. It is generous in the sense that it is not deserved. Mercy is when you don't get the

> bad that you deserve; Grace is when you get the good that you don't deserve. God demonstrates both compassion and grace toward us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

In this passage we also learn some things about people and the proper response to God as seen in Moses:

The second reading is from Saint Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians Chapter 13. This is the close of Saint Paul's letter and serves as a reminder of the sort of people that God calls us to be now that we have entered into relationship with Him. Since we know Him to be compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love, we can be people who are growing to look more and more like Him.

> *11 Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. 12 Greet one another with a holy kiss. 13 All the saints greet you. (2 Corinthians 13:11-13)*

Paul has had a tenuous relationship with the Corinthian believers, with multiple visits and multiple letters used to try to point them to what it looks like to live differently than the pagans. The relationship one has with Christ as Savior ushers us into a new way of life that does not operate according to the world's system. Therefore, he summarizes his message with instruction on how to live out the Christian life.

The Gospel reading is from John Chapter 3. Verse 16 is the famous verse which is often seen printed on signs being waived by people at various sporting events. The context of this section is the conclusion of a meeting that happened at night between Jesus and Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews (John 3:1), meaning that he was a member of the Sanhedrin that is the Jewish ruling council. Evidently, Nicodemus feared the reaction of the Jews so he met secretly with Jesus. Later in John's Gospel, Nicodemus came with Joseph or Arimathea to prepare Jesus' body for burial (John 19:39), an action which revealed his willingness to make a bold, public statement about his identification with Jesus.

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

We see in this passage once again that God's love is the foundation for life that is eternal. It is God's love that moved Him to give His one and only Son. "Begotten" is a translation of a Greek word that has the connation of being unique. So to clarify, John is saying that there is no one else like God's Son Jesus. He is the only one of His kind and He was given to us to provide the one and only way to eternal life. As we said earlier, God does not want people to perish (1 Tim. 2:4). His love compelled Him to send His Son into the world to be our Savior. So what separates those who have eternal life

and those who are perishing? Belief in Jesus Christ. Belief is a robust word that connotes trust, relationship, and knowledge that is applied to one's life. While we grow in our belief in Jesus, we must clarify whether we truly believe or not. We must have a place of entry into the life of Christ. Do we want Him or not? If we reject Him, then we stand condemned already. Our unforgiven sin leaves no other option than to be judged by God at the end of our lives. But if we turn to Jesus in faith and rest our hope for salvation in Him, then we are saved. That is why He came to this world, to save. Have you entered into the life of Christ by putting your faith in His atoning death on the cross and receiving His resurrection power for daily living? If you want to do so, you can make that decision right now and talk to God about wanting to put your faith in Christ. The following prayer may help you to express your heart to God:

> *Dear God, your word says that you loved the world, and I trust that that includes me. In your love you gave your one and only Son, Jesus, to bring me eternal life. I realize that without the gift of Your Son, my life will end in eternal death, it will perish. I need Jesus to be my Savior. I want to believe in Him. And even though I don't know exactly what that means or entails, I trust that you will show me how to enter into His life and be saved. I trust in Jesus to save me from the eternal consequences of my sin. I believe in You, Jesus, and receive your free gift of eternal life. Now please help me to walk in light of your Truth and love. Change me into the saint that the New Testament declares your people to be. I am Yours, Lord. Amen.*

If you made a decision either now or some time ago to put your belief in Jesus, would you ask God to give you an opportunity to share this good news with someone else? It may be with someone who already knows Jesus, but needs encouragement that God loves them. Or it may be to someone who has never heard of God loving the world so much that He would send His one and only Son to save them from the consequences of their sin. Perhaps you would even be willing to share your testimony on the Christians for Christ website. The good news is so good, we can't keep it to ourselves!

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. We saw God's love in a myriad of ways in this week's reading. Go back through each passage and write out in your own words below some of the ways that you see God's love.

> **Exodus 34**
>
> **2 Corinthians 13**
>
> **John 3**

2. How does the description of God's love in His Word differ from your own understanding of God? What false notions do you need to reject and what truths do you need to ask God to help you keep in mind?

3. How is God calling you to live in light of His love? Choose one of the points of application below or write out your own:

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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/061514.cfm

First Reading EX 34:4B-6, 8-9 (plus skipped verses)

Exodus 34:4-9 NAS95 4 So he cut out two stone tablets like the former ones, and Moses rose up early in the morning and went up to Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and he took two stone tablets in his hand. 5 The LORD descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the LORD. 6 Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; 7 who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations." 8 Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship. 9 He said, "If now I have found favor in Your sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go along in our midst, even though the people are so obstinate, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Your own possession."

Second Reading 2 Corinthians 13:11-13

11 Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. 12 Greet one another with a holy kiss. 13 All the saints greet you. 2 Corinthians 13:11-13

Gospel Reading JN 3:16-18

John 3:16-18 NAS95 16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. 17 "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. 18 "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Source(s):

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Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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Mass Study Notes for Easter Sunday 4-20-2014



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass study notes for Easter Sunday, 4-20-2014. This week you will hear a story about a death-defying airplane trip that prompted me to ponder ultimate questions of life. This week's readings answer some of the most important questions that humans have ever asked about eternal life. The first reading is a message from Saint Peter that explains the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection that has been provided for all humankind. The second reading from Saint Paul's Letter to the Colossians provides the implications of what believing in Jesus looks like in the life of the believer. Then we conclude with the glorious story of Jesus' resurrection from the Gospel of Saint John.

Before we move to the readings, my wife asked me this week as I was studying the readings for the Easter Sunday Mass, what does Jesus' resurrection mean to me? I thought for a moment, and was about to give her an answer in "Christianese" like "because Jesus atoned for my sins." However, I stopped myself and found that I could not answer her question. Instead, I told her that I would think about it and get back to her with the answer. I thought about her question over a period of several days, and spent time reading the conclusion of all four of the Gospels that chronicled Jesus' resurrection from the dead. After much study, I came up with the answer. The resurrection means to me that I don't have to be afraid of dying. I might not be thrilled with it, but I don't have to live in constant fear of dying. (Hebrews 2:14-15 says: "he himself likewise partook of the same things,

thatthrough death he mightdestroythe one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,[15] and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery).

When I was younger, I didn't really think much about dying. That changed one day when I was flying with my twin brother into an airport southwest of Indianapolis to make a fuel stop on our way to Houston. This was during a time in my life when I did not sense any sort of close communion with God even though I attended Mass each week. The weather this particular day was challenging and we had delayed our departure from my home airport in Pontiac, Michigan because of thunderstorms. After we left Pontiac, we were in an out of the clouds all the way down to Terre Haute. The stress of determining whether to fly, when to leave, and then flying under instrument flight procedures in the clouds without an autopilot on my first airplane left me feeling very frazzled as I approached the navigational fix at which I would commence the landing procedure. Complicating the matter was that the only instrument approach procedure that made sense that day because of the wind conditions was something known as a "back course" approach, meaning that the indicator needles in the navigation instruments had to be interpreted backwards from their normal readings. In other words, left was right and right was left. (In pilot talk it was a localizer back course approach). As we descended during the approach I was reaching the point of mental exhaustion when my brother suddenly screamed, "We seem to be awfully low Jim!" As I looked up from my instruments I realized that after I crossed the final approach fix I had continued to descend to a level which put us only about a hundred feet above the sequenced flashing landing lights (known as rabbits). I quickly realized my mistake, added power and climbed up to avoid descending further into the lights and terrain below. After this happened it hit me, we could have died! From that day forward, I began to think about dying and what was beyond my time on earth. Would I go to heaven or hell? How good did I have to be to get into heaven? How does a person get to heaven? We will answer those questions later in the study today.

The first reading this week is from Acts of the Apostles Chapter 10. The context of this section is Saint Peter's address to Cornelius, the gentile Centurion from Caesarea. This happened a few days after Peter had seen a vision of a huge sheet lowered to the ground containing a variety of animals including ones that the Jews were forbidden from eating according to the Old Testament Law. God revealed to Peter that he was no longer bound by these dietary food laws, and by extrapolation, that the proclamation of the Gospel was being opened to the Gentiles. God told Peter, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy" (Acts 10:15b-ff). After Cornelius, a God-fearing Gentile, had a vision in which an angel of God spoke to him, he sent messengers to Peter in Joppa with orders to bring him to his home in Caesarea. Afterwards, Peter agreed to travel to Cornelius' home. When Peter arrived Cornelius fell at his feet and worshiped him, but Peter stopped him. Peter then said, "Stand up; I too am a man" (v. 26). He addressed the crowd that Cornelius had gathered by saying, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean" (v. 28). Then Cornelius explained that he had seen a vision of an angel who told him to send for Simon Peter at the home of one Simon the tanner who lived by the sea (v. 32). It was at this point that we join Peter's address to Cornelius along with his relatives and close friends (Acts 10:24).

Read the text, noting that some of the omitted verses were included in order to provide the full context (as our readers know that we are prone to do).

> *34 Opening his mouth, Peter said: "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, 35 but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him. 36 The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all) — 37 you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. 38 You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. 39 We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. 40 God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, 41 not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. 42 And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. 43 Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins." (Acts 10:34-43)*

Peter said quite an earful; his message encapsulated almost the entirety of the Gospel. He told the gentile Cornelius and his family the Good News regarding the forgiveness of sins offered to anyone who believes, Jew or Gentile alike (v. 34), through faith in Jesus Christ (v. 43). Peter, fresh from his vision of the animals coming down in the large sheet, affirmed that God was no respecter of persons; this salvation was available to everyone (vv.34 – 35). Peter provided a high-level narrative to Cornelius of his personal, eyewitness testimony concerning the events about Jesus Christ. He said Jesus was anointed by God with power (v.38), ministered to the people by healing and opposing the devil (v.39), was crucified by the Jews in Jerusalem (v.39b), was raised by God on the third day (v.40), was made visible to select witnesses after His resurrection (v.41), and provided the disciples with specific instructions regarding preaching the truth about Jesus being the divinely appointed Judge of the living and the dead (v.42). Peter confirmed that Jesus was the fulfillment of the testimony given by all of the Old Testament prophets. Finally, Peter announced the best news of all, that **anyone** who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of their sins (v.43).

Understanding Peter's testimony in the first reading that anyone who believes in Jesus receives the forgiveness of their sins provides a convenient gateway to the second reading where we see that humans cannot attain to God through their own efforts. This reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Colossians, chapter 3. This Book is one of the biblical books known as the "Prison Epistles" named because Paul wrote them while he was in prison in Rome. The reading today opens with the word "therefore" in verse one. Any time we see that word (as you may have noted in previous editions of Mass Notes) we have to ask, "What is it the "therefore" there for?" The "therefore" in 3:1 refers to what Paul said in the previous chapters. In order to give the passage more context, we will explore this is much further detail below.

Stepping back to look at the big picture, Paul's overall purpose in the Epistle was to correct some heresy that was being taught in the church. The heresy had four elements that Paul addressed in chapter 2. These false beliefs included the denial of the sufficiency and preeminence of Jesus Christ (2:8), the exaltation of Jewish ritualism (2:11, 16-17), the teaching of the extreme denial of the flesh as a way of getting closer to God (known as "asceticism," 2:20-23), and the ungodly practice of worshiping angels (2:18). All four teaching are clearly contradicted by the Scriptures. Paul corrected their misunderstandings early in the second chapter by making some clear didactic statements. Paul said, "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Colossians 2:8-9). This statement addressed elements of all four of the heresies that were being taught and practiced by certain members of the church.

With this context in mind, let's read from Saint Paul's Letter, keeping in mind the sufficiency that we as believers have through faith in Jesus Christ.

> *1 Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. (Colossians 3:1-4)*

Paul said, "if you have been raised up with Christ. This has a threefold meaning. First, he meant this in the sense that **if** we have believed in Jesus' death and resurrection, then we are in a sense crucified with Him and therefore "raised up" on the cross with Him. Paul said in Galatians, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Galatians 2:20). Second, we have been "raised up" in the sense that, if we believe, we have been "born from above." This is something that Jesus tried to explain to Nicodemus (John 3:3), the man who evidently did later come to believe in Jesus since he came to help prepare Jesus' body for burial after He was crucified (John 19:39). Jesus used a Greek word "anothen" which had a dual meaning, above and again. Jesus taught Nicodemus that he had to born from above spiritually, and that he had to be born a second time spiritually in a process distinct from his physical birth. The instant a person believes they are "born from above," meaning that they received the gift of the Holy Spirit of God. The third meaning that Paul had in mind regarding being "raised up" with Christ is that in a spiritual sense after we die we will be "raised up" to a much greater authority in order to reign with Jesus Christ. Paul said, "If we endure, we will also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us" (2 Timothy 2:12).

Here is another important insight from the reading. Paul said in verse 4, "When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory." Notice the repetition of the word "revealed." We spoke about one aspect of Christ's revelation last week in the Palm Sunday readings when we discussed His triumphal entry to Jerusalem. However, in this reading Paul wasn't referring

to Christ's exaltation as King when he road into Jerusalem on a donkey. Rather, he was referring to Jesus' Second Coming at which time He will return in glory to judge the world. As we said last week, 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 (Revelation 19:11). Jesus **was revealed** as the King of the Jews when he entered Jerusalem on a donkey. He **was revealed** as the King of the universe when he rose from the dead, this is what we are celebrating today. Finally, Jesus will be revealed when He comes again in glory with all of His believers in tow, that is us, His saints (Revelation 19:14, 1 Corinthians 1:2, Acts 9:13, Acts 9:32, Acts 26:10, Romans 16:2).

As we conclude the New Testament reading and discussion, it may be helpful to rephrase the flow of thought before the first few verses (in one very long, grammatically incorrect sentence). After the three verses of the reading, a capstone statement provides my personal summary of the reason why we must set our minds on things above:

> **THEREFORE**, keeping in mind the correction given to us regarding the four theological heresies, since we **have been** crucified with Christ, **have been** born from above, **will be** exalted to participate in reigning with Jesus Christ, and since God **has** granted us all of these incalculable gifts from God, **THEN** let us "*Set [our] minds on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For [we] have died and [our lives are] hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then [we] also will be revealed with Him in glory*" (vv. 2-4). We are called by God to do the latter (vv. 2-4) because the teachers of the theological heresies were attempting to bring Jesus down to their level by falsely thinking they could reach up to heaven by practicing manmade religion.

How is that for a long sentence?! However, did you understand the importance of reading the context into the study of the verses from the reading? The big idea is that humans cannot attain fellowship with God in heaven through religious rituals, ascetic practices (like starving the body), or the worship of angels (see Luke 4:8, Matthew 4:10, and especially Revelation 22:8-9 where the practice is expressly forbidden). The only way that humans can attain eternal life and fellowship with God is through faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, believing that Jesus atoned for our sin (Romans 10:9-13).

As we move onto the Gospel reading from Saint John Chapter 20 we will see the "reason for the season" of Easter. Throughout the Lenten period we have looked forward to the celebration of this glorious day. Before you read, say a short prayer asking God to show you what the resurrection means to you.

> *1 Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone already taken away from the tomb. 2 So she ran and came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." 3 So Peter and the other disciple went forth, and they were going to the tomb. 4 The two were running together;*

> *and the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first; 5 and stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings lying there; but he did not go in. 6 And so Simon Peter also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he saw the linen wrappings lying there, 7 and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. 8 So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed. 9 For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. (John 20:1-9)*

The narrative continued beyond what was covered in the reading:

> *10 So the disciples went away again to their own homes. 11 But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; 12 and she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. 13 And they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." 14 When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, "Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away." 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means, Teacher). (John 20:10-16)*

Mary Magdalene believed and was the first person to see the risen Lord alive. She received confirmation that since God raised Jesus from the dead, she would one day be raised herself. We can also have assurance of salvation which leads to eternal life by trusting in what the Scripture says about how a person does make it to heaven when they die. First, God says that all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). God says that because of our sin the payment we will receive without some outside intervention is death, meaning eternal separation from God (Romans 6:23). In that same verse, God says that the outside intervention has been given as a free gift: Jesus' died on the cross for the payment of our sins. This good news can also be found in the famous verse that is often seen printed on cardboard signs held up at sporting events. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Saint Paul said, "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). Does this sound like something that is simple to achieve? It is simple, but if it's not necessarily easy. If it were easy then everyone in the world that ever heard the Gospel would become a believer. Peter said in Acts 2:38 that we must repent of (or turn away from) our sins. This means that we have to come to an agreement with God about our sins, and recognize them for what they are, deadly (Romans 6:21). The Bible says that even one single sin would keep us from entering heaven – forever (James 2:10). So repentance of sin, turning away from the destructive forces that once ruled our lives, is an on-going part of exercising faith in Jesus. One preacher said, "If your faith hasn't changed you, it probably hasn't saved you." This is not to imply that works are necessary for salvation. But it is to say that true faith is manifested in our lives being oriented around the values that Christ had,

because He is our life (Colossians 3:4). Jesus' death and resurrection were given as a gift to all, to cover our sin and provide us with the right to be accepted into heaven. As we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday, keep in mind the simplicity of this Gospel message that Jesus gave to the world.

What about you? Have you received the forgiveness of your sins through the only method possible: faith in Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection from the dead? Do you want to be with God and know that you will make it to heaven when you die? Let's pray to affirm or reaffirm our faith.

> *Dear God, I believe that I am a sinner, and that because of my sin I deserve death and eternal separation from You. I believe that Jesus died for my sins as payment of the penalty I owed. I believe that You raised Him from the dead and that He will come again in glory. I repent of my sins and ask You, in the name of Jesus, to empower me to set my sights on spiritual things above, not on my carnal desires that have separated me from You. I pray this in Jesus' Holy name, Amen.*

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. What difference does the resurrection of Jesus Christ make in **your** life?

2. Take a few quiet moments and ponder how you truly feel about dying. Are you afraid of death? Have you had a narrow escape with dying that changed you opinion about the eventuality of dying? In light of your response, write down some of the verses that we covered today which provide you with hope of eternal life when you die.

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/011214.cfm

First Reading ACTS 10:34A, 37-43 (Plus Skipped Verses)

Acts 10:34-43 NAS95 34 Opening his mouth, Peter said: "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, 35 but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him. 36 "The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all) — 37 you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. 38 "You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. 39 "We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. 40 "God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, 41 not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us

who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. 42 "And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. 43 "Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins."

Second Reading COL 3:1-4

Colossians 3:1-4 NAS95 1 Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

Gospel Reading JN 20:1-9

John 20:1-9 NAS95 1 Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene *came early to the tomb, while it *was still dark, and *saw the stone already taken away from the tomb. 2 So she *ran and *came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and *said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." 3 So Peter and the other disciple went forth, and they were going to the tomb. 4 The two were running together; and the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first; 5 and stooping and looking in, he *saw the linen wrappings lying there; but he did not go in. 6 And so Simon Peter also *came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he *saw the linen wrappings lying there, 7 and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. 8 So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed. 9 For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB