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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 160: 11/22/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the first reading from Ezekiel, which contrasts the ungodly shepherds with God, the Good Shepherd. We include many surrounding verses to help us understand the reading in its context. Then we move to the second reading from 1 Corinthians, where we study the truth of believers' resurrection and how it gives us great hope. Finally, we conclude with the Gospel lesson from Matthew 25, where we study the coming judgment for 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.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Prophet Ezekiel. After God told Ezekiel that the people recognized him as a prophet and came to listen to him (Ezekiel 33:30), they did not take his words to heart or change their lives (Ezekiel 33:31d-ff). Instead, God told them that it would be afterward 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 nation's ungodly leaders, including kings, priests, and prophets (except 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 "sheep without a shepherd," 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 matters, so we have included the first ten verses of the chapter leading up to today's reading.

First Reading:

Verses before 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 today's reading, following the opening of chapter 34. *Note: Verses 13-14,* skipped in the reading, were added for *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 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. This concept first appears in the Book of Genesis, when Jacob prophesies 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 echoes the opening of Psalm 23: "The LORD is my Shepherd, I shall not want" (v. 1). "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 this contrast between the evil shepherds and the One True Shepherd continue. "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 is that He will re-gather 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 care for us as a good shepherd cares for His sheep. Finally, although we may feel judged by worldly people in this age, the only real judgment that counts is that of 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.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

As we move on to 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 believers' bodily resurrection: first the Lord Jesus, then all who put their faith in Him. Paul opens this section with a caution: "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 on to today's reading. Note: We skipped verse 27 in the reading, but included it to provide full context.

Second Reading:

> *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 says that since Christ has been raised from the dead and is the first to be resurrected (v. 20), He is the one through whom life came and the precursor of the resurrection hope 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 aspect of the resurrection. Jesus will "come in glory" (Matthew 25:31), which we will read about in today's Gospel lesson. Paul quoted Psalm 8 when he said Jesus would totally subdue all His enemies, "put them under His feet" (vv. 25-26). Ezekiel's evil shepherds will be subdued and judged forever. Jesus' greatest enemy will be death, conquered through the victory of the resurrection, first over Himself and then over all believers. World history will culminate in 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).

Our greatest hope as believers in the Lord Jesus lies in the hope of resurrection. We can rest in the historical fact that Jesus was the first to rise from the dead, one of history's best-proven events. 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. Just as Paul comforted the Corinthian believers with these facts, we can find comfort and comfort others through hope in our future resurrection.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

As we transition to the Gospel lesson, we earlier mentioned in the first reading that God is the Righteous Judge, and in the second reading that one day He will come in Glory to rule and reign over the earth. One element of rulership is acting as a Judge, and at the end of His reign on earth, Jesus will judge those who survive the tribulation period at the conclusion of the Day of the Lord.

Jesus gave the big-picture context of Jesus' return earlier in Matthew 24. The world will grow worse and worse, and many false Christs will arise (Matthew 24:5). Wars and famines will ravage the world (vv. 5-8). Believers will experience great persecution to the extent that the true nature of belief of many will be revealed as false (v. 10). At some unknown time, Jesus will return, and many of the dead in the earth will arise, "some to everlasting life, and some to everlasting shame and contempt" (Daniel 12:2). It seems that the Old Testament Jews arise at this time (Ezekiel 37:12), along with all of the New Testament believers who have gone to be with Jesus (1 Thess 4:13-17). This event is marked by what Jesus said beginning in verse 40, "Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left" (Matthew 24:40). The one who is taken is a believer who is taken alive to heaven; the one left behind will then enter the Great Tribulation (or Day of the Lord). This is like 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).

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Today's reading looks beyond the Lord Jesus' return to the period after his millennial reign on earth, some 1,000 years after the end of the Great Tribulation (Day of the Lord). The reading describes the final judgment, the Great White Throne, in which Jesus separates the "wheat from the chaff."

Gospel Reading:

> *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)*

In the reading, we see the Good Shepherd Jesus forcibly separating the nonbelieving "goats" from the believing sheep. During these "goats" lives, they lived amongst a mixed multitude that Jesus described in the kingdom parables earlier in Matthew 13. There, Jesus described how the wheat and the weeds would live side by side until the harvest, when the master would separate the two (Matthew 24:24-30). Today's reading is that separation, when the mixed seed is sifted, and the weeds are tossed out to be burned (Matthew 24:30c).

In today's reading, Jesus used a shepherd analogy that we saw in Ezekiel. The Good Shepherd who knows His Sheep will divide these two groups based on their heart condition. The criteria He will use is what He explained to Nicodemus in John 3: "You must be born from above (or again, Greek

"anothen") to enter the kingdom of heaven" (refer to John 3:3, with my explanation). In that same Gospel, Jesus said, "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, like any shepherd, and they look the same on the outside, His sheep bear distinctive inner markings. These markings show themselves in their behavior, so even worldly people can recognize them. This becomes clear in verses 35 -40. **Some** of a believer's good works flow from a heart changed by God (John 3:3), as James said, "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:14). The sheep show a variety of "sheeplike" behaviors. They feed the hungry (v. 35a), give drink to the thirsty (v. 35c), clothe the naked (v. 36a), visit the sick (v. 36b), and visit those in prison (v. 36b-c). Jesus then explained that when you do these things for others, you are doing them 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 marginalized in society is an opportunity to show what's really in our hearts. Do we have the love and compassion of God or are we still living only for ourselves? Jesus describes specific needs that were common in His day, 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 need wisdom to know which needs are opportunities 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). Third, 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.

Reflection Questions

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 faith mean? 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 on the obedience of faith, what does it mean for you to walk in obedience of faith? How is your faith evident to others?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 162:

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11/23/2025



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we learn about the appointment of Godly King David. The second reading teaches us about our position in Christ as believers. In the Gospel lesson, we see how faith in Christ leads us to eternal life the very moment when we believe, even if we have committed horrible crimes.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Second Samuel. At this time in Israel's history, the nation was divided. David had become King only over Hebron, while a large portion of the country still held allegiance to Saul's lineage of rulership through his son Ish-bosheth. Upon Ish-bosheth's death, the leaders realized that they were like sheep without a shepherd and finally gave David their allegiance to be king over them as well. This passage tells how David became king over all of Israel.

First Reading:

> *2 Samuel 5:1-3 NASB 1 Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, "Behold, we are your bone and your flesh. 2 Previously, when Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel out and in. And the LORD said to you, 'You will shepherd My people Israel, and you will be a ruler over Israel.'" 3 So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them before the LORD at Hebron; then they anointed David king over Israel.*

The leaders of the tribes of Israel made a public declaration of allegiance to David as King. It might have been a little uncomfortable to admit defeat and finally give allegiance to the rightful king that God had anointed, but they finally did. They relayed several reasons for being willing to give David their allegiance: 1) He was one of them; they are brothers; 2) David had proven his trustworthiness; 3) David was God's appointed ruler. These leaders had to come to terms with their misplaced allegiance to support David as King fully. With this public declaration, Israel was now united under one ruler, and the civil war that had devastated the people for many years could now end.

This is a significant passage in the redemptive story of God's people, Israel, for God had predicted that David's kingdom would have no end. This passage verifies that God's will was accomplished, even though it took many years and trials for David to be anointed King over all of Israel.

This passage also points to a future King who would be of our bone and flesh (Heb. 2:17), who would show His trustworthiness through His sacrificial leadership (Rev. 19:11), and who would be the good shepherd of people who would surrender their lives to His rulership (John 10:11). Jesus came from the line of David and "He will reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). Putting our faith in Jesus is a worthy endeavor as we see the evidence of His competent leadership.

May we be like the elders of the tribes of Israel in this passage. They could no longer hold onto their vanity; instead, we see them surrendering to the king. This sort of scenario gets replayed over and over again as those who are guilty of spiritual treason finally let go of their allegiance to a false king and unconditionally surrender their lives to the rightful king, Jesus.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

In the second reading today, let's look at what Saint Paul had to say to the Colossians.

Second Reading:

> *12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. 13 For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. 15 And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities–all things have been created by Him and for Him. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. 18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything. 19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, 20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. Colossians 1:12-20*

Paul provided some profound truths about our relationship to God as believers in Jesus Christ. These truths are so profound that it's hard to comprehend Paul's words in this short section. He said that "we have been delivered from the devil's kingdom" (v.13), which is Satan's empire (Matthew 4:9) into which we became citizens when we were born. However, after we were born from above (John 3:3) through faith in Jesus (Ephesians 2:8-9) God forgave our sins and transferred us into His holy kingdom (Col 1:14). God created everything for His own purposes (v. 16). He is the Head of the Church, the preeminent One (v.18, also John 3:16 "the only begotten Son"). It was through Jesus' death on the cross as the sin bearer that He made peace with us through His precious blood that was poured out for us (v.20). The peace that Jesus earned for us extends not only to the earth but to the entire universe, including heaven (v. 20).

These truths about our new life in Christ are so profound that they remind me of the words of the Christian hymn "How Great Thou Art," of which verse three reads as follows.

> *And when I think that God, His Son not sparing,*

Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in;
That on the Cross, my burden gladly bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin.

Jesus bore *our* burdens on the cross. He did it gladly, knowing that through His finished work, he would take away our sin and disarm the powers of darkness (Col 2:15). With these truths in mind, let us move into the Gospel lesson.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

In the Gospel this week, in Luke Chapter 23, we jump forward to the Good Doctor's account of Jesus's crucifixion. This is a sudden turn of events since last week in Chapter 21, Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple and looked forward to His second coming. Read the lesson for today and pay particular attention to the insights you picked up from Isaiah 53.

Gospel Reading:

32 And two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with Him. 33 And when they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. 34 But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves. 35 And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One." 36 And the soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine, 37 and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!" 38 Now there was also an inscription above Him, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS." 39 And one of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" 40 But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." 42 And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" 43 And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise." Luke 23:32-43

It played out exactly as Isaiah said it would. Jesus had his possessions divided (v.34), was crucified with others (v.32), and proclaimed to be a King (v.38). Yet even at the hour of His death, Jesus showed compassion for others. First, Jesus prayed to God the Father to forgive the people who were bringing about his crucifixion. He said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (v.34a).

Second, when one of the criminals on the cross expressed repentance and faith in Him (v.42), Jesus told him, "Today you shall be with Me in Paradise." Isn't it amazing that this criminal's simple faith resulted in Jesus' promise of eternal life with Him in heaven, even though he wasn't baptized and had never gone to church or synagogue?

What is the relevance and importance of Luke's teaching for us in our lives today? First, we can be reassured that, like the repentant thief on the cross, since we have repented of our sin and trusted in Jesus' finished work on the cross, we will be and are saved. Second, we can trust that we won't receive what we deserve for our deeds but will instead receive rich blessings from God purely as a result of His grace and not as a result of anything we have done to earn it (Ephesians 2:8-9). Since Jesus already entered His Kingdom, these blessings will come to us in both the present and future when we meet Jesus face to face. "And when I think that God, His Son not sparing, Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in. How great Thou art!"

Reflection Questions

1. Reflect upon Jesus' words to the repentant thief on the cross. "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:42).

A. In what ways is it hard for you to accept that someone who was never baptized, never attended church, or never participated in any religious activities was granted eternal life with Jesus?

B. How long would Jesus promise elapse between the present earthly time when the criminal was

hanging on the cross and when he would be in paradise with Jesus?

2. Reread this verse from the second reading. "13 For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." Taking both these verses and what we learned about salvation in the Gospel lesson, is Jesus making us a promise that we too will inherit eternal life the very day that we die?

3. In the second reading, we read from the second chapter of Colossians, which contained some fundamental truths concerning our position in Christ. This continues the theme Paul began in the opening chapter. In that previous chapter, there were more important truths concerning our position in Christ. Read and reflect upon Paul's Letter to the Colossians, Chapter 1, verses 13-14:

> *"For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."*

What are some practical implications of these verses in your life as a believer in Jesus? Answer this question in light of the following contexts:

– When I am feeling afraid
– When I am feeling that evil people are encompassing me
– When I feel that I need to try harder to be a better person and not miss Mass

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for 11-24-2024

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This week we will see the rulership of Jesus from three different angles in the readings from the Mass. The first reading is an Old Testament prophecy about His dominion and kingdom being an everlasting establishment. The second reading, from the book of Revelation in the New Testament, confirms the eternal dominion and power that Jesus has, but also adds a sense of personal tenderness towards us who believe in Him. The last reading, from the Gospel of John, chronicles the self-revelation of Jesus as King, recognizing that His kingdom was not of this world. Although his kingship was misunderstood and missed by many in His first advent, it will not be misunderstood at His second advent.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Daniel Chapter 7. The first six chapters of the Book record mostly historical events with some prophecy. However, as we move into chapter seven, Daniel records visions given to him from God concerning future events. These prophetic messages were given to Daniel by God during various times during his life. The context of Chapter 7 was a message given to Daniel, "In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon" (Daniel 7:1), meaning it was before the overthrow of the Babylonian Empire by the Medo Persian forces under Cyrus the Great. There is some debate as to the identity of Belshazzar, who was most likely an overlord that reigned under the authority of the King. In examining historical sources, it is also likely that Belshazzar was either the son or grandson of the famous King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel's visions in the first 12 verses of chapter 7 are of four successive empires, beginning with Babylon depicted by a lion (v 4). The

second is Medo / Persia depicted by a bear. The third is the Greek Empire pictured by a leopard, King Alexander, with four wings picturing his four generals to whom his kingdom was divided after his fast and furious life. Finally, the last empire is a "dreadful and terrible beast" depicting both the Roman Empire in the short term and in the long term a restored Roman-like empire corresponding to the "Babylon the Great" in the Book of Revelation. Daniel said about this one, "After this I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet; and it was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns" (Daniel 7:7). Another ruler called the "little horn" (v. 8) will arise from among the last empire with a "mouth uttering great boasts" (v. 8f). This "little horn" was prefigured by King Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who tormented the Jews in the third century BC as recorded in the book of 1 Maccabees. This "antichrist of the Old Testament" is a type of the person that will exist during the end times. This is the person spoken of in Revelation 13:2–10 with language very similar to that of the Prophet Daniel.

This introduction brings us to today's reading in which we see a vision in heaven that pictures the kingdom of Jesus being presented to Him by God the Father. At the end of the age after four world empires have controlled the world with the last one devouring the ones that came before it, God will finally claim the kingdom that is rightfully His after putting down the evil rulers that had come before.

First Reading:

> *Daniel 7:13-14 NAS95 13 "I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. 14 And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and men of every language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed."*

Daniel clearly saw a revelation of the Lord Jesus Who was to come, as Jesus used this same terminology in referring to Himself in Matthew 24:30, "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory." Jesus also called Himself the Son of Man in John 5:27. When Jesus returns to set up His kingdom on earth, "His dominion [will be] everlasting . . . [and] one which will not be destroyed."

From this passage in Daniel, we find out a few very important details about the future that should inform us in our lives today. The first detail is the description of Jesus as the Son of Man. This was Jesus' most common way of referring to himself as recorded in the Gospels. Why would He describe Himself as such and not choose Son of God as His preferred self-reference? It may be that He knew we would be able to revere Him as the divine Son of God, but realized that we may have trouble picturing Him as a man. Jesus' identity as fully God and fully man is a mystery to us, but is nonetheless important. As the second Adam, He fulfilled (as a man) the righteous requirements of the law (Romans 8:3-4), what the first Adam could not do. And in that, He provides salvation for us if we unite ourselves with Him. A second key point, is that Jesus is given dominion, glory and a kingdom for all people to serve Him. If this is the case for eternity (and this will be good for us in the future), then our servanthood to Jesus the King should be good for us today. Some people agonize over the "sacrifice" it is to be a Christian. Well, really, the sacrifice is only to the self-ruled life, which is destructive to our soul anyways. In reality, Jesus' is a good King, so when we let Him rule in our lives each day, we are living the life we were designed to live. Jesus said that He came to bring life and that more abundantly (John 10:10). Can we trust Him to do this in our hearts even now?

In these days of chaos before Jesus returns, we can look with confident hope that one day Jesus will return to set up His perfect kingdom on earth in fulfillment of this promise in Daniel. Jesus will take the dominion and kingdom back from Satan that was given to him for a short time (2 Corinthians 4:4), in light of eternity. As we encounter disturbing events in our world today, we can live with an eternal perspective which banks on the fact that God wins.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The reading is from the Book of Revelation. The context of the reading is the beginning of the Book, in which John introduces Jesus as the rightful Ruler of the earth in very similar language to what we just read from Daniel.

Second Reading:

> *Revelation 1:5-8 NAS95 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood– 6 and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father–to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 7 BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the*

> *earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen. 8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."*

In the reading we see John's testimony about the identity of Jesus as "the faithful witness" (one who tells the truth and who's words are reliable, John 18:37); "firstborn of the dead" (the first and preeminent of all those who will rise from the dead, Romans 8:29); "ruler of the kings of the earth" (the highest power); the One "who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood" (He created a way for us to be made free from the slavery of sin and death by His great love, Romans 6:1-23); and Who "made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father" (His goal is to make His followers into a united people group who serves God the Father with our lives) (vv. 5 – 6). In verse 7 we see the return of the Lord Jesus as we read in Daniel, the One Who will come in the clouds to fulfill the prophecy given by the angels in Acts 1:11 regarding how Jesus would return where they said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven." Furthermore, John quoted from an important prophecy of Zechariah which predicted the ultimate acceptance of Jesus by His people the Jews. Zechariah predicted the events regarding Jesus' return. "*I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn*" (Zechariah 12:10). Finally, John describes Jesus as the first and last, the "Alpha and Omega," a statement which forms a bookend in the Book of Revelation where it is repeated in the closing section in Revelation 21:6 and 22:13. This is a way of saying that Jesus is A to Z and everything in between. He is everything we need.

We can be confident that one day Jesus will return to establish His rightful place on earth as the Ruler of the universe. He released us from our sins by His blood—a great sacrifice on His part. What a wonderful Savior. May we live in the freedom He has granted us, giving our lives back to Him as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1-2).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from Saint John chapter 18. The context is just after Jesus was betrayed by Judas and arrested in the garden across from the Kidron Valley (John 13:1). Jesus was bound and led first to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas the high priest that year (John 18:13). Annas was the one who had prophesied that it would be better for one man to die than for the rest of the nation to perish (John 18:14). Jesus was interrogated by Annas, with Peter following at a distance (vv. 15-17).

Next, Jesus was led to Caiaphas the high priest (v. 24), then finally into the Praetorium where He appeared before Pontius Pilate. While Annas and Caiaphas were the Jewish rulers, Pilate was the Roman ruler, who could sentence a prisoner to death.

Gospel Reading:

> *John 18:33-37 NAS95 33 Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" 34 Jesus answered, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?" 35 Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?" 36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." 37 Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."*

In the reading, Jesus affirmed His rightful rulership of the world, although He had not yet established His kingdom on earth as it has already been so in heaven. Jesus' kingdom was at this time a kingdom not on earth, but rather one in the hearts of the people who believed. Jesus said, "Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice" (v. 37). The subjects of His kingdom are those who come to Him in faith who follow His truth. As we see in 1 John, "We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him" (1 John 3:19). Just as Jesus' rulership and the kingdom were mocked and discarded, we as His followers face similar persecution because of our belief in Him. Jesus said, "In this world you will have tribulation, but take heart, for I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). We must learn how to live in the tension of the now as we wait for the "not yet"—our future with Him. The fact that He endured the mistreatment of those in power gives us hope and strength to endure the mistreatment of the world as it mocks and marginalizes the Gospel message. These are opportunities to walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7) and to be a citizen of heaven (Phil. 3:20), thus showing the veracity of Christ's rulership in our lives.

What does this mean for us today? Today's readings have shown us that Jesus truly is the Alpha and Omega, the rightful ruler of the universe. One day He will return to His rightful place to rule and reign on the earth. Until then we can trust in the promise of His return and look forward to the salvation of our souls. Second, we can trust that once we believe in the Lord Jesus for our salvation and not in any "good" works that we do (Ephesians 2:8-9) we can have assurance that we have eternal life. God tells us that if we believe, then we can presume that we have eternal 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" (1 John 5:13). Finally, we as we continue to study and understand the prophecies about Jesus' return, we can begin to see the events of the world taking shape as Jesus' coming becomes more imminent. These events should not cause us alarm, but rather give motivation to expand our ministry efforts to reach lost people with the saving message of the Gospel.

Reflection Questions

1. There were several descriptions of Jesus that were shared in the Mass passages this week. Take some time and reflect on one or two from the list below and make a connection between the description and how that can impact your perspective:

- Ruler of an everlasting Kingdom
- Son of Man
- Faithful witness
- Firstborn of the dead
- Ruler of the kings of the earth
- The one who loves us and released us from sin by his blood
- The one who made us to be a kingdom

- The one who made us to be priests, to serve God
- The one who was pierced
- The Alpha and Omega
- The one who is and was and is to come
- The King of the Jews
- The one who's kingdom is not of this world, but of another realm

2. If Jesus is King, how is His kingship displayed in your life? Are there ways that you are intentionally surrendering your self-rule in order to be ruled by Him? What areas does His kingship make sense in your life and motivate you to order your life around His values and priorities? Take time to reaffirm your desire to see Jesus' will override your self-will. What areas of your life need to be surrendered to His kingship? Take time to confess these areas of resistance to His rightful reign and ask Him to help you surrender, even in these war zones.

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 11-20-2022

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we learn about the appointment of godly King David. In the second reading, we learn about our position in Christ as believers. In the Gospel lesson, we see how faith in Christ leads us to eternal life the moment we believe, even if we have committed horrible crimes.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Second Samuel. At this time in Israel's history, the nation was divided. David had become King only over Hebron, while a large portion of the country was still holding allegiance to Saul's lineage of rulership through his son Ish-bosheth. Upon Ish-bosheth's death, the leaders realized that they were like sheep without a shepherd and finally gave David their allegiance to be king over them as well. This passage tells how David became king over all of Israel.

First Reading:

2 Samuel 5:1-3 NASB 1 Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, "Behold, we are your bone and your flesh. 2 Previously, when Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel out and in. And the LORD said to you, 'You will shepherd My people Israel, and you will be a ruler over Israel.'" 3 So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them before the LORD at Hebron; then they anointed David king over Israel.

The leaders of the tribes of Israel made a public declaration of allegiance to David as King. It might have been a little uncomfortable to admit defeat and finally give allegiance to the rightful king that God had anointed, but they finally did. They relayed several reasons for being willing to give David their allegiance: 1) He was one of them, they are brothers; 2) David had proven his trustworthiness; 3) David was God's appointed ruler. These leaders had to come to terms with their misplaced allegiance in order to give their full support to David as King. With this public declaration, Israel was now united under one ruler and the civil war that had devastated the people for many years could now end.

This is a significant passage in the redemptive story of God's people, Israel, for God had predicted that David's kingdom would have no end. This passage verifies that God's will was accomplished, even though it took many years and many trials for David to finally be anointed King over all of Israel.

This passage also points to a future King who would be of our bone and flesh (Heb. 2:17), who would show His trustworthiness through His sacrificial leadership (Rev. 19:11), and who would be the good shepherd of people who would surrender their lives to His rulership (John 10:11). Jesus came from the line of David and "He will reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). Putting our faith in Jesus is a worthy endeavor as we see the evidence of His competent leadership.

May we be like the elders of the tribes of Israel in this passage. They could no longer hold on to their vanity; instead, we see them surrendering to the king. This sort of scenario gets replayed over and over again as those who are guilty of spiritual treason finally let go of their allegiance to a false king and unconditionally surrender their lives to the rightful king, Jesus.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

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Let's take a look at what Saint Paul had to say to the Colossians in the second reading today.

Second Reading:

12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. 13 For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. 15 And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities–all things have been created by Him and for Him. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. 18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything. 19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, 20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. Colossians 1:12-20

Paul provided some deep truths about the nature of our relationship to God as believers in Jesus Christ. These truths are so profound that it's hard to comprehend all that Paul said in this short section. He said that "we have been delivered from the devil's kingdom" (v. 13), which is Satan's empire (Matthew 4:9) into which we became citizens when we were born. However, after we were born from above (John 3:3) through faith in Jesus (Ephesians 2:8-9) God forgave our sins and transferred us into His holy kingdom (Col 1:14). God created everything for His own purposes (v. 16) and He is the Head of the Church, the preeminent One (v. 18, also John 3:16 "the only begotten Son"). It was through Jesus' death on the cross as the sin bearer that He made peace with us through His precious blood that was poured out for us (v. 20). The peace that Jesus earned for us extends not only to the earth, but to the entire universe including heaven (v. 20).

These truths about our new life in Christ are so deep that it reminds me of the words of the Christian hymn "How Great Though Art" of which verse three reads as follows.

And when I think that God, His Son not sparing,
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in;
That on the Cross, my burden gladly bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin.

Jesus bore *our* burdens on the cross. He did it gladly, knowing that through His finished work there He would take away our sin and disarm the powers of darkness (Col 2:15). With these truths in mind, let us move into the Gospel lesson.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

In the Gospel this week in Luke Chapter 23, we jump forward to the Good Doctor's account of the crucifixion of Jesus. This is a sudden turn of events since last week in Chapter 21 Jesus gave a prediction of the destruction of the temple and looked forward to the time of His **second** coming. Read the lesson for today and pay particular attention to the insights that you picked up from Isaiah 53.

Gospel Reading:

32 And two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with Him. 33 And when they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. 34 But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves. 35 And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One." 36 And the soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine, 37 and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!" 38 Now there was also an inscription above Him, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS." 39 And one of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" 40 But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." 42 And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" 43 And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise." Luke 23:32-43

It played out exactly as Isaiah said it would. Jesus had his possessions divided (v. 34), was crucified with others (v. 32), and proclaimed to be a King (v. 38). Yet even at the hour of His death, Jesus showed compassion for others. First, Jesus prayed to God the Father to forgive the people that were bringing about his crucifixion. He said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (v. 34a).

Second, when one of the criminals on the cross expressed repentance and faith in Him (v. 42) Jesus told him, "today you shall be with Me in Paradise." Isn't it amazing that this criminal's simple faith resulted in Jesus' promise of eternal life with Him in heaven in spite of the fact that he wasn't baptized and had never gone to church or synagogue?

What are the relevance and importance of Luke's teaching for us in our lives today? First, we can be reassured that like the repentant thief on the cross since we too have repented of our sin and trusted in Jesus' finished work on the cross that we will be and are saved. Second, we can trust that we won't receive what we deserve for our deeds, but will instead receive rich blessings from God purely as a result of His grace and not as a result of anything that we have done to earn it (Ephesians 2:8-9). Since Jesus already entered His Kingdom these blessings will come to us in both the present time and also in the future when we meet Jesus face to face. "And when I think that God, His Son not sparing,

Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in. How great Thou art!"

Reflection Questions

1. Reflect upon Jesus' words to the repentant thief on the cross, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:42).

A. In what ways is it hard for you to accept that someone who was never baptized, never attended church, or never participated in any sort of religious activity was granted eternal life with Jesus?

B. How long of a time period did Jesus promise would elapse between the present earthly time when the criminal was hanging on the cross and when he would be in paradise with Jesus?

2. Read this verse again from the second reading. "*13 For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*" Considering both of these verses and what we learned about salvation in the

Gospel lesson, is Jesus making us a promise that we too will inherit eternal life the very day that we die?

3. In the second reading we read from the second chapter of Colossians in which was some very important truths concerning our position in Christ. This continues the theme Paul began in the opening chapter. In that previous chapter were more truths that are important concerning our position in Christ. Read and reflect upon Paul's Letter the Colossians, Chapter 1 verses 13-14:

"For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

What are the some practical implications of what these verses mean in your life as a believer in Jesus? Answer this question in light of the following contexts:

– When I am feeling afraid

– When I am feeling that evil people are encompassing me

– When I feel that I need to try harder to be a better person and not miss Mass

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This week we will see the rulership of Jesus from three different angles in the readings from the Mass. The first reading is an Old Testament prophecy about His dominion and kingdom being an everlasting establishment. The second reading, from the book of Revelation in the New Testament, confirms the eternal dominion and power that Jesus has, but also adds a sense of personal tenderness towards us who believe in Him. The last reading, from the Gospel of John, chronicles the self-revelation of Jesus as King, recognizing that His kingdom was not of this world. Although his kingship was misunderstood and missed by many in His first advent, it will not be misunderstood at His second advent.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Daniel Chapter 7. The first six chapters of the Book record mostly historical events with some prophecy. However, as we move into chapter seven, Daniel records visions given to him from God concerning future events. These prophetic messages were given to Daniel by God during various times during his life. The context of Chapter 7 was a message given to Daniel "In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon" (Daniel 7:1), meaning it was before the overthrow of the Babylonian Empire by the Medo Persian forces under Cyrus the Great. There is some debate as to the identity of Belshazzar, who was most likely an overlord that reigned under the

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Son of Man in John 5:27. When Jesus returns to set up His kingdom on earth, "His dominion [will be] everlasting . . . [and] one which will not be destroyed."

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In these days of chaos before Jesus returns, we can look with confident hope that one day Jesus will return to set up His perfect kingdom on earth in fulfillment of this promise in Daniel. Jesus will take the dominion and kingdom back from Satan that was given to him for a short time (2 Corinthians 4:4), in light of eternity. As we encounter disturbing events in our world today, we can live with an eternal perspective which banks on the fact that God wins.

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Revelation 1:5-8 NAS95 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood– 6 and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father–to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 7 BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen. 8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

In the reading we see John's testimony about the identity of Jesus as "the faithful witness" (one who tells the truth and who's words are reliable, John 18:37); "firstborn of the dead" (the first and preeminent of all those who will rise from the dead, Romans 8:29); "ruler of the kings of the earth" (the highest power); the One "who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood" (He created a way for us to be made free from the slavery of sin and death by His great love, Romans 6:1-23); and Who "made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father" (His goal is to make His followers into a united people group who serves God the Father with our lives) (vv. 5 – 6). In verse 7 we see the return of the Lord Jesus as we read in Daniel, the One Who will come in the clouds to fulfill the prophecy given by the angels in Acts 1:11 regarding how Jesus would return where they said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven." Furthermore, John quoted from an important prophecy of Zechariah which predicted the ultimate acceptance of Jesus by His people the Jews. Zechariah predicted the events regarding Jesus' return. "*I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn*" (Zechariah 12:10). Finally, John describes Jesus as the first and last, the "Alpha and Omega," a statement which forms a bookend in the Book of Revelation where it is repeated in the closing section in Revelation 21:6 and 22:13. This is a way of saying that Jesus is A to Z and everything in between. He is everything we need.

We can be confident that one day Jesus will return to establish His rightful place on earth as the Ruler of the universe. He released us from our sins by His blood—a great sacrifice on His part. What a wonderful Savior. May we live in the freedom He has granted us, giving our lives back to Him as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1-2).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

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The Gospel reading is from Saint John chapter 18. The context is just after Jesus was betrayed by Judas and arrested in the garden across from the Kidron Valley (John 13:1). Jesus was bound and led first to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas the high priest that year (John 18:13). Annas was the one who had prophesied that it would be better for one man to die than for the rest of the nation to perish (John 18:14). Jesus was interrogated by Annas, with Peter following at a distance (vv. 15-17). Next, Jesus was led to Caiaphas the high priest (v. 24), then finally into the Praetorium where He appeared before Pontius Pilate. While Annas and Caiaphas were the Jewish rulers, Pilate was the Roman ruler, who could sentence a prisoner to death.

Gospel Reading:

John 18:33-37 NAS95 33 Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" 34 Jesus answered, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?" 35 Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?" 36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." 37 Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

In the reading Jesus affirmed His rightful rulership of the world, although He had not yet established His kingdom on earth as it has already been so in heaven. Jesus' kingdom was at this time a kingdom not on earth, but rather one in the hearts of the people who believed. Jesus said, "Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice" (v. 37). The subjects of His kingdom are those who come to Him in faith who follow His truth. As we see in 1 John, "We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him" (1 John 3:19). Just as Jesus' rulership and the kingdom were mocked and discarded, we as His followers face similar persecution because of our belief in Him. Jesus said, "In this world you will have tribulation, but take heart, for I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). We must learn how to live in the tension of the now as we wait for the "not yet"—our future with Him. The fact that He endured the mistreatment of those in power gives us hope and strength to endure the mistreatment of the world as it mocks and marginalizes the Gospel message. These are opportunities to walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7) and to be a citizen of heaven (Phil. 3:20), thus showing the veracity of Christ's rulership in our lives.

What does this mean for us today? The readings today have shown us that Jesus truly is the Alpha and Omega, the rightful ruler of the universe. One day He will return to His rightful place to rule and reign on the earth. Until then we can trust in the promise of His return and look forward to the salvation of our souls. Second, we can trust that once we believe in the Lord Jesus for our salvation and not in any "good" works that we do (Ephesians 2:8-9) we can have assurance that we have eternal life. God tells us that if we believe, then we can presume that we have eternal 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" (1 John 5:13). Finally, we as we continue to study and understand the prophecies about Jesus' return, we can begin to see the events of the world taking shape as Jesus' coming becomes more imminent. These events should not cause us alarm, but rather give motivation to expand our ministry efforts to reach lost people with the saving message of the Gospel.

Reflection Questions

1. There were several descriptions of Jesus that were shared in the Mass passages this week. Take some time and reflect on one or two from the list below and make a connection between the description and how that can impact your perspective:

- Ruler of an everlasting Kingdom
- Son of Man
- Faithful witness
- Firstborn of the dead
- Ruler of the kings of the earth
- The one who loves us and released us from sin by his blood
- The one who made us to be a kingdom
- The one who made us to be priests, to serve God
- The one who was pierced
- The Alpha and Omega
- The one who is and was and is to come
- The King of the Jews
- The one who's kingdom is not of this world, but of another realm

2. If Jesus is King, how is His kingship displayed in your life? Are there ways that you are intentionally surrendering your self-rule in order to be ruled by Him? What areas does His kingship make sense in your life and motivate you to order your life around His values and priorities? Take

time to reaffirm your desire to see Jesus' will override your self-will. What areas of your life need to be surrendered to His kingship? Take time to confess these areas of resistance to His rightful reign and ask Him to help you surrender, even in these war zones.

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 11-22-2020



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. 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.

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Introduction to the First Reading:

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.

First Reading:

Verses before 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.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

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.*

Second Reading:

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.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

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.

The big picture context of Jesus return was provided by Jesus earlier in Matthew 24. The world will grow worse and worse, and many false Christs will arise (Matthew 24:5). Wars and famines will ravage the world (vv. 5-8). Believers will experience great persecution to the extent that the true nature of belief of many will be revealed as false (v.10). At some unknow time Jesus will return and many of the dead in the earth will arise, "some to everlasting life and some to everlasting shame and contempt" (Daniel 12:2). It seems that the Old Testament Jews arise at this time (Ezekiel 37:12), along with all of the New Testament believers who have gone to be with Jesus (1 Thess 4:13-17). This event is marked by what Jesus said beginning in verse 40, "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 is a believer who is taken alive to heaven, the one left behind will then enter the Great Tribulation (or Day of the Lord). 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).

Today's reading looks beyond the return of the Lord Jesus to the period after Jesus' Millennial reign on earth, some 1,000 years after the end of the Great Tribulation (Day of the Lord). The reading describes the final judgment, the Great White Throne in which Jesus separates the "wheat from the chaff."

Gospel Reading:

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. During these "goats" lives, they lived amongst a mixed multiple that Jesus described in the kingdom parables earlier in Matthew 13. There, Jesus described how the wheat and the weeds would live side by side each other until the time of the harvest when the two would be separated by the master (Matthew 24:24-30). Today's reading is that separation in which the mixed seed is sifted and the weeds are tossed out to be burned (Matthew 24:30c).

In today's reading, Jesus used a 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 which 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). Third, 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.

Reflection Questions

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?

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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?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 11-25-2018

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Welcome back to Mass Notes. This week we will see the rulership of Jesus from three different angles in the readings from the Mass. The first reading is an Old Testament prophecy about His dominion and kingdom being an everlasting establishment. The second reading, from the book of Revelation in the New Testament, confirms the eternal dominion and power that Jesus has, but also adds a sense of personal tenderness towards us who believe in Him. The last reading, from the Gospel of John, chronicles the self-revelation of Jesus as King, recognizing that His kingdom was not of this world. Although his kingship was misunderstood and missed by many in His first advent, it will not be misunderstood at His second advent.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Daniel Chapter 7. The first six chapters of the Book record mostly historical events with some prophecy. However, as we move into chapter seven, Daniel records visions given to him from God concerning future events. These prophetic messages were given to Daniel by God during various times during his life. The context of Chapter 7 was a message given to Daniel "In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon" (Daniel 7:1), meaning it was before the overthrow of the Babylonian Empire by the Medo Persian forces under Cyrus the Great. There is some debate as to the identity of Belshazzar, who was most likely an overlord that reigned under the authority of the King. In examining historical sources it is also likely that Belshazzar was either the son or grandson of the famous King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel's visions in the first 12 verses of chapter 7 are of four successive empires beginning with Babylon depicted by a lion (v 4). The second is Medo / Persia depicted by a bear. The third is the Greek Empire pictured by a leopard, King Alexander, with four wings picturing his four generals to whom his kingdom was divided after his fast and furious life. Finally, the last empire is a "dreadful and terrible beast" depicting both the

Roman Empire in the shorter term and in the long term a restored Roman-like empire corresponding to Babylon the Great in the Book of Revelation. Daniel said about this one, "After this I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet; and it was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns" (Daniel 7:7). Another ruler called the "little horn" (v. 8) will arise from among the last empire with a "mouth uttering great boasts" (v. 8f). This "little horn" was prefigured by King Antiochus IV Epiphanes who tormented the Jews in the third century BC as recorded in the book of 1 Maccabees. This "antichrist of the Old Testament" is a type of the person that will exist during the end times. This is the person spoken of in Revelation 13:2 – 10 with language very similar to that of the Prophet Daniel.

This introduction brings us to today's reading in which we see a vision in heaven that pictures the kingdom of Jesus being presented to Him by God the Father. At the end of the age after four world empires have controlled the world with the last one devouring the ones that came before it, God will finally claim the kingdom that is rightfully His after putting down the evil rulers that had come before.

First Reading:

> *Daniel 7:13-14 NAS95 13 "I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. 14 And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and men of every language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed."*

Daniel clearly saw a revelation of the Lord Jesus Who was to come, as Jesus used this same terminology in referring to Himself in Matthew 24:30, "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory." Jesus also called Himself the Son of Man in John 5:27. When Jesus returns to set up His kingdom on earth, "His dominion [will be] everlasting . . . [and] one which will not be destroyed."

From this passage in Daniel we find out a few very important details about the future that should inform us for our lives today. The first detail is the description of Jesus as the Son of Man. This was Jesus' most common way of referring to himself as recorded in the Gospels. Why would He describe Himself as such (and not choose Son of God as His preferred self-reference)? It may be that He knew we would be able to revere Him as the divine Son of God, but realized that we may have trouble picturing Him as a man. Jesus' identity as fully God and fully man is a mystery to us, but is nonetheless important. As the second Adam, He fulfilled (as a man) the righteous requirements of the law (Romans 8:3-4), what the first Adam could not do. And in that, He provides salvation for us if we unite ourselves with Him. A second key point, is that Jesus is given dominion, glory and a kingdom for all people to serve Him. If this is the case for eternity (and this is good for us in the

future), then our servanthood to Jesus the King should be good for us today. Some people agonize over the "sacrifice" it is to be a Christian. Well, really, the sacrifice is only toward the self-ruled life, which is destructive to our soul anyways. In reality, Jesus' is a good King, so when we let Him rule in our life each day, we are living the life we were designed to live. Jesus said that He came to bring life and that more abundantly (John 10:10). Can we trust Him to do this in us even now?

In these days of chaos before Jesus returns, we can look with confident hope that one day Jesus will return to set up His perfect kingdom on earth in fulfillment of this promise in Daniel. Jesus will take the dominion and kingdom back from Satan that was given to him for a short time (2 Corinthians 4:4), in light of eternity. As we encounter disturbing events in our world today, we can live with an eternal perspective which banks on the fact that God wins.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The reading is from the Book of Revelation. The context of the reading is the beginning of the Book, in which John introduces Jesus as the rightful Ruler of the earth in very similar language to what we just read from Daniel.

Second Reading:

> *Revelation 1:5-8 NAS95 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood– 6 and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father–to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 7 BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen. 8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."*

In the reading we see John's testimony about the identity of Jesus as "the faithful witness" (one who tells the truth and who's words are reliable, John 18:37); "firstborn of the dead" (the first and preeminent of all those who will rise from the dead, Romans 8:29); "ruler of the kings of the earth" (the highest power); the One "who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood" (He created a way for us to be made free from the slavery of sin and death by His great love, Romans 6:1-23); and Who "made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father" (His goal is to make His followers into a united people group who serves God the Father with our lives) (vv. 5 – 6). In verse 7 we see the return of the Lord Jesus as we read in Daniel, the One Who will come in the clouds to fulfill the prophecy given by the angels in Acts 1:11 regarding how Jesus would return where they said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven." Furthermore, John quoted from an important prophecy of Zechariah which predicted the ultimate acceptance of Jesus by His people the Jews. Zechariah predicted the events regarding Jesus return: "I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of

supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn" (Zechariah 12:10). Finally, John describes Jesus as the first and last, the "Alpha and Omega," a statement which forms a bookend in the Book of Revelation where it is repeated in the closing section in Revelation 21:6 and 22:13. This is a way of saying that Jesus is A to Z and everything in between. He is everything we need.

We can be confident that one day Jesus will return to establish His rightful place on earth as the Ruler of the universe. He released us from our sins by His blood—a great sacrifice on His part. What a wonderful Savior. May we live in the freedom He has granted us, giving our lives back to Him as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1-2).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from Saint John chapter 18. The context is just after Jesus was betrayed by Judas and arrested in the garden across from the Kidron Valley (John 13:1). Jesus was bound and led first to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas the high priest that year (John 18:13). Annas was the one who had prophesied that it would be better for one man to die than for the rest of the nation to perish (John 18:14). Jesus was interrogated by Annas, with Peter following at a distance (vv. 15-17). Next, Jesus was led to Caiaphas the high priest (v. 24), then finally into the Praetorium where He appeared before Pontius Pilate. While Annas and Caiaphas were the Jewish rulers, Pilate was the Roman ruler, who could sentence a prisoner to death.

Gospel Reading:

> *John 18:33-37 NAS95 33 Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" 34 Jesus answered, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?" 35 Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?" 36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." 37 Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."*

In the reading Jesus affirmed His rightful rulership of the world, although He had not yet established His kingdom on earth as it already was so in heaven. Jesus' kingdom was at this time a kingdom not on earth, but rather one in the hearts of the people who believed. Jesus said, "Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice" (v. 37). The subjects of His kingdom are those who come to Him in faith who follow His truth. As we see in 1 John, "We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him" (1 John 3:19). Just as Jesus' rulership and kingdom were mocked and discarded, we as His followers face similar persecution because of our belief in Him. Jesus said, "In

this world you will have tribulation, but take heart, for I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). We must learn how to live in the tension of the now as we wait for the "not yet"—our future with Him. The fact that He endured the mistreatment of those in power gives us hope and strength to endure the mistreatment of the world as it mocks and marginalizes the Gospel message. These are opportunities to walk by faith not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7) and be a citizen of heaven (Phil. 3:20), thus showing the veracity of Christ's rulership in our lives.

What does this mean for us today? The readings today have shown us that Jesus truly is the Alpha and Omega, the rightful ruler of the universe. One day He will return to His rightful place to rule and reign on the earth. Until then we can trust in the promise of His return and look forward to the salvation of our souls. Second, we can trust that once we believe in the Lord Jesus for our salvation and not in any "good" works that we do (Ephesians 2:8-9) we can have assurance that we have eternal life. God tells us that if we believe, then we can presume that we have eternal 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" (1 John 5:13). Finally, we as we continue to study and understand the prophecies about Jesus' return, we can begin to see the events of the world taking shape as Jesus' coming becomes more imminent. These events should not cause us alarm but rather give motivation to expand our ministry efforts to reach lost people with the saving message of the Gospel.

Reflection Questions

1. There were several descriptions of Jesus that were shared in the Mass passages this week. Take some time and reflect on one or two from the list below and make a connection between the description and how that can impact your perspective:
    - Ruler of an everlasting Kingdom
    - Son of Man
    - Faithful witness
    - First born of the dead
    - Ruler of the kings of the earth
    - The one who loves us and released us from sin by his blood
    - The one who made us to be a kingdom
    - The one who made us to be priests, to serve God
    - The one who was pierced
    - The Alpha and Omega
    - The one who is and was and is to come
    - The King of the Jews
    - The one who's kingdom is not of this world, but of another realm
2. If Jesus is King, how is His kingship displayed in your life? Are there ways that you are

> intentionally surrendering your self-rule in order to be ruled by Him? What areas does His kingship make sense in your life and motivate you to order your life around His values and priorities? Take time to reaffirm your desire to see Jesus' will override your self-will. What areas of your life need to be surrendered to His kingship? Take time to confess these areas of resistance to His rightful reign and ask Him to help you surrender, even in these war zones.

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 11-26-2017



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. 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.

Introduction to the First Reading:

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.

First Reading:

Verses before 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.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

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.*

Second Reading:

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.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

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.

The big picture context of Jesus return was provided by Jesus earlier in Matthew 24. The world will grow worse and worse, and many false Christs will arise (Matthew 24:5). Wars and famines will ravage the world (vv. 5-8). Believers will experience great persecution to the extent that the true nature of belief of many will be revealed as false (v.10). At some unknow time Jesus will return and many of the dead in the earth will arise, "some to everlasting life and some to everlasting shame and contempt" (Daniel 12:2). It seems that the Old Testament Jews arise at this time (Ezekiel 37:12), along with all of the New Testament believers who have gone to be with Jesus (1 Thess 4:13-17).

This event is marked by what Jesus said beginning in verse 40, "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 is a believer who is taken alive to heaven, the one left behind will then enter the Great Tribulation (or Day of the Lord). 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).

Today's reading looks beyond the return of the Lord Jesus to the period after Jesus' Millennial reign on earth, some 1,000 years after the end of the Great Tribulation (Day of the Lord). The reading describes the final judgment, the Great White Throne in which Jesus separates the "wheat from the chaff."

Gospel Reading:

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. During these "goats" lives, they lived amongst a mixed multiple that Jesus described in the kingdom parables earlier in Matthew 13. There, Jesus described how the wheat and the weeds would live side by side each other until the time of the harvest when the two would be separated by the master (Matthew 24:24-30). Today's reading is that separation in which the mixed

seed is sifted and the weeds are tossed out to be burned (Matthew 24:30c).

In today's reading, Jesus used a 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). Third, 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.

Reflection Questions

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?

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