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

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 169: 06-22-2025



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we spent a considerable amount of time discussing the mysterious figure of Melchizedek, mentioned in a reading from Genesis. We dedicate so much time to this man because of the way his ministry prefigures the eternal intercession and finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ on our behalf. In the second reading, we learn from Saint Paul's teaching about the celebration of communion and conclude this week's study with the miracle of our Lord's feeding of the five thousand along the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The context of the first reading is when Abraham was returning from battle with the forces that kidnapped his nephew Lot (Genesis 14:12). Earlier, Lot had separated himself from Abraham after he chose the well-watered, fertile Jordan River Valley towards the east. Not long afterwards, Lot found himself surrounded by war in the nations surrounding the Dead Sea (Genesis 14:3). Abraham

mustered his troops and successfully rescued his nephew and all his possessions (Genesis 14:14-16). Today's reading picks up during Abraham's return from this perilous rescue mission as he passes by the city of Salem, which is known by its modern name, Jerusalem (formerly Jebus, the land of the Jebusites).

First Reading:

> *Genesis 14:18-20 NAS95 18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. 19 He blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; 20 And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." He gave him a tenth of all.*

In the reading, we are introduced to the mysterious figure of Melchizedek, "priest of God Most High" (v. 18b). Melchizedek is perhaps one of the most significant figures in the entire Bible, ranking second only to Jesus. Some believe that Melchizedek was the preincarnate Christ Himself, a "Christophany" or appearance of Christ before His physical birth to Mary as recorded in the Gospels. Why is Melchizedek such an important person, and what application does his ministry have for our lives today? Before we answer this question, we will provide some background about him.

Who is this man, Melchizedek, king of Salem? In today's reading, we find Melchizedek bringing out bread and wine to greet Abraham, who was returning from battle with the forces that kidnapped his nephew Lot. The New Testament offers additional information about this enigmatic figure. In Hebrews 7:1, the text reads, "Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him." Looking at the Book of Hebrews as a whole, you can see that it's grounded in an explanation of Christ through the perspective of the Old Testament Levitical priesthood, thus the title given to the book "Hebrews," meaning Jews. In Genesis 14:3, Abram, later known as Abraham, the father of the Jewish people, is referred to as a Hebrew. We see in Hebrews 7:1 that Melchizedek is described in three ways: 1. The King of Salem, the area we now identify as Jerusalem, and 2. A priest of the "Most High God," meaning a priest of the *only* true God, and 3. One to whom Abraham, the father of the Jews, gave tribute. The lesser person offers tribute to the greater. To summarize, Melchizedek was a king and a priest worthy of tribute.

Going on in Hebrews 7 we find in verse 17, "You [Jesus Christ] are a priest forever according to the

order of Melchizedek," quoted from the Old Testament Book of Psalms 110:4. According to the Book of Leviticus under what we call the Jewish Law, all the Old Testament Priests had to come from the tribe of Levi. Still, Melchizedek was a priest before the separate tribes or Law even existed! Yet Abraham gave a tenth portion (or tithe) to Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:4) as required under the later Law for all priests (verse 5). What is being explained here is that Melchizedek was one of a class of priests that foreshadowed the coming final, eternal (and final) High Priest, Jesus. Melchizedek, whose name means "King of righteousness," could not have come from the line of Aaron (Levi) or Judah, because these lines did not exist during his lifetime. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrificial system; the final sacrifice was Jesus' death on the cross, which did away with the Levitical priesthood (Hebrews 10:11-14). Christ was from the "order of Melchizedek (Ps 110:4, Hebrews 7:17), not the line of Aaron. This new order is made even more clear by reading beyond the quoted section of Psalm 110 to verse 7, "Therefore He will lift up his [Jesus Christ's] head." This eternal priest, Jesus of the non-priestly line of Judah, is and will be exalted by God. As a side note, Melchizedek was the first biblical figure to portray the concept of a priest-king.

Now, with this wisdom in mind, let's answer the question we posited in the opening: Why is Melchizedek such an important person, and what application does his ministry have for our lives today? As Christians, we cannot underestimate the importance of what Melchizedek's priesthood teaches us. First, the "Melchizedekian" is eternal, in contrast to the Jewish sacrificial system that passed away after the destruction of the temple in AD 70. Indeed, the Levitical priesthood died the moment that Jesus died and the veil was torn in two (Matthew 27:51), although the Jews nursed it along for another four decades. Second, the priesthood of Jesus is eternal and is not tied to the life of the priest. Hebrews says, "The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing," (Hebrews 7:23). This is a critically important point because the Scripture says regarding Jesus, "Therefore He is able also to save **forever** those who draw near to God through Him, since **He always lives to make intercession for them** (Hebrews 7:25, emphasis added). Bold text alone does not provide this quote with enough emphasis, as the implications for the church and the Christian are enormous:

- Since Jesus lives eternally, He is always there for us. His intercession with the Father God is eternal on our behalf. In contrast, human priests died, and their ministries ended with their passing.

- Regardless of whatever type of human priesthood was instituted after Jesus' death, the Scripture is clear that the sacrificial system and associated priesthood was eliminated by God forever. The sacrifice of lambs (Exodus 12:5, Numbers 28:7), wine (Numbers 28:7), or bread

(Leviticus 7:13) was forever eliminated by Jesus willingly offering Himself and one perfect sacrifice forever, because "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14). We can be thankful that Jesus' sacrifice cannot ever be repeated and will never need to be.

- Jesus declared victory over sin, whereas the Levitical priesthood left a memory of sin. We see this clearly in the Book of Hebrews.
  Hebrews 10:1-4 NAS95 1 "For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. 2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? 3 But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. 4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."

- Jesus is the Victor of sin and is nowhere in the Bible ever portrayed as a victim. Jesus chose to go to the cross on behalf of our sin. Jesus is our Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, the One Who suffered on our behalf. Jesus said, "No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father" (John 10:18). Because Jesus was victorious over sin, we can be victorious over sin as well. The Bible says, "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57).

- Jesus instituted a new priesthood consisting of all believers, and the old, broken, bloody, and corrupt (Matthew 21:13) sacrificial system of the Old Testament has passed away forever. The Scripture says, "But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). As believers in the risen Lord Jesus Christ, we offer continual **spiritual** sacrifices to God. "Through Him, then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Hebrews 13:15-16).

In closing, was the man Melchizedek in the reading the preincarnate Christ? Hebrews 7:3 says about him that he was "Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of

days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually." However, later in verse 15, the author made the point quite clearly that Melchizedek is a type of Christ, something that points to the later Messiah Jesus. "And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the **likeness** of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 7:15, emphasis added). So, was Melchizedek Christ in the flesh? Maybe, though this isn't explicitly stated in the Scriptures. What we do know is that he points to Christ by representing an eternal priesthood that Jesus now carries for us.

As we move on to the second reading, hopefully, each of us recognizes the principle of giving to God, as demonstrated by Abram after his victory in rescuing Lot from the ungodly kings who surrounded him and had taken him captive. Our giving to the church, charities, and those in need demonstrates that we understand the source of victory is God, and He owns it all. We are to hold our time, talents, and treasures loosely in our palms and let God take from them as He sees fit. As Christians, we are not like the people of Pompeii who perished while grasping their possessions before trying to flee the volcano.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading from 1 Corinthians deals with Saint Paul's teaching on the celebration of communion.

Second Reading:

> *1 Corinthians 11:23-26 NAS95 23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25 In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.*

In the reading, Saint Paul spoke about the celebration of the communion meal. He said, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1

Corinthians 11:26, emphasis added). This teaching placed a precise time limit on the celebration of this essential ordinance. As we look forward to the return of the Lord, we, like the Jews on the evening of the Passover, walk in obedience to the Lord's commandment to celebrate communion *until* He returns.

The celebration of the Lord's Supper is an essential ordinance given to us by the Lord Jesus before He returned to heaven. Each time we celebrate communion, we commemorate Jesus' death on the cross for us, on which He gave his body and poured His blood for us. Jesus instituted the communion celebration during His Last Supper with the disciples on the eve of the Jewish holiday known as Passover. This critical feast commemorated the Jews' deliverance from the final plague brought against the Pharaoh as recorded in Exodus 12. On the solemn eve many millennia ago, the Hebrew people were instructed to slaughter a lamb and mark their doorway with its blood. On that evening, the Death Angel passed through the land and killed the firstborn of every living thing, both human beings and animals, except those who had followed God's commandment in faith by marking their doorways with the symbol of the Lamb of God. The Feast of Unleavened Bread, in which the Jews eat bread without the yeast rising agent, follows Passover. The absence of leaven is symbolic of the Jews' rapid flight from Egypt immediately after that first Passover evening, when the lamb was slaughtered in obedience to God's command for the salvation of each household. The absence of leaven also came to be associated in later Jewish thought with the purification from sin, i.e. leaven is sin, such as Jesus noted when He said to be on watch for the "leaven of the Pharisees" (Matthew 16:6). The symbolism is clear; Jesus is *our* Passover Lamb, the Lamb of God that takes away our sin. John the Baptist said about Jesus, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Jesus is the "Lamb slain since before the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8).

What does this reading mean for our lives? First, God calls us not to forsake the assembly together in the communion service (Hebrews 10:25). As we celebrate communion from now until the day the Lord Jesus returns, we look back to the one sacrifice that He made for our sins. Second, we can recognize that we are saved by grace through faith in God (Ephesians 2:8-9), the same as Moses and the other believers in the Old Testament. They looked forward to Jesus through the symbols of God's supernatural provision, as seen in manna and the healing that came by faith in God, by humbly kneeling before the bronze serpent. The elements of communion remind us of Jesus' body broken for us and His blood shed to pay the debt for our sins. "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). This truly is a celebration, for though our sins are scarlet, we have been washed as white as snow through this sacrifice. We now live in response to this great and precious gift. May you not only celebrate communion, but each day, with a joyful and thankful heart.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading from Luke 9 records Jesus' feeding of the five thousand. This is the only miracle that appears in all four of the Gospels. The total number of people fed would have likely been over ten thousand, as the crowd numbered five thousand men, not counting women and children.

Jesus' feeding of the five thousand, which took place along the shores of the Sea of Galilee, marked the beginning of a series of pivotal events in His ministry, as identified by following the parallel accounts in the Gospel of John. One of these crucial points of decision for the crowds of followers is evident in the easy-to-remember verse 6:66 in John's Gospel, "As a result of this, many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore." These turning points arose as people began to determine in their hearts whether they were faithful followers of Jesus. Another of these is in the previous chapter of John where it says, "For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God" (John 5:18). This is where the rubber meets the road; the faithful followers of God are those that recognize Jesus as God in the flesh, the Messiah, rather than just a miracle doer who they thought would deliver them from their Roman oppressors.

Gospel Reading:

> *Luke 9:11-17 NAS95 11 But the crowds were aware of this and followed Him; and welcoming them, He began speaking to them about the kingdom of God and curing those who had need of healing. 12 Now the day was ending, and the twelve came and said to Him, "Send the crowd away, that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside and find lodging and get something to eat; for here we are in a desolate place." 13 But He said to them, "You give them something to eat!" And they said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless perhaps we go and buy food for all these people." 14 (For there were about five thousand men.) And He said to His disciples, "Have them sit down to eat in groups of about fifty each." 15 They did so, and had them all sit down. 16 Then He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed them, and broke them, and kept giving them to the disciples to set before the people. 17 And they all ate and were satisfied; and the broken pieces which they had left over were picked up, twelve baskets full.*

As the story progressed, we know from the parallel accounts that Jesus asked Philip (who was from

this region) to provide for the crowd. We know from that account that Philip responded to Jesus, stating that it would require the amount of 200 days' wages to buy that much food. This was a significant amount, but it wasn't beneficial, given the distance from the city and the vast size of the crowd. Nevertheless, the people had followed Jesus some distance away from the city and saw Him as One Who would provide for them, so it was natural for Jesus to accommodate their needs through His disciples. In this case, the people found out that God was the true multiplier of things. Again, we know from the parallel account in John that the people did indeed recognize Jesus as a Prophet, seemingly the One prophesied about in Deuteronomy 18:15. However, they misunderstood the role of the Messiah (John 6: 14–15). The people saw in Jesus a political ruler Who could free them from their poverty and Roman oppression. In the end, twelve baskets were left over, corresponding precisely to the count of Jesus' disciples. Each disciple was left with one basket to highlight Jesus' ability to provide amid impossible circumstances. God provided the food, regardless of the people's faith, and used this sign to point to the True Messiah, Jesus.

We, too, may have misunderstandings about how Jesus' power should be used in the world. Although we should ask God to provide for our circumstances, we must recognize that, like the people of the biblical era, we often want God to use His power for our comfort, security, and advancement. We need to be careful to let God be God and not expect Him to be our personal "Genie in the bottle" performing miracles on demand. Nobody stands above Him, for He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and His purposes are beyond understanding. Even though the people in this story wanted Jesus to become their civil King, Jesus ministered to them to meet their spiritual needs instead. One day, Jesus will return to rule and reign on the earth and fulfil the expectations of a perfect ruler.

Reflection Questions

1. The Book of Hebrews opens as follows. "*In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe*" (Hebrews 1:1-2). With this passage in mind, proceed through the Book and study the context of Hebrews before and after chapter 7. What do you find regarding how Jesus is the eternal priest/king that fulfilled the requirements of the Law and how He is our eternal High Priest that makes intercession for us (1 Timothy 2:5). What impact should / does Jesus' intercession make on your perspective and response the challenges, blessings, and your inadequacies?

2. In the Gospel lesson, Jesus called upon God's miraculous power to perform a miracle that would

provide for people's basic needs and, at the same time, confirm Himself as the Messiah. It is evident from reading the synoptic Gospels that His disciples didn't understand the miracle until Jesus explained it to them sometime later, after feeding a second large crowd. In what ways have you missed the knowledge of the miracles of God in your own life? List two or three ways in which God has recently provided for you that you may have taken for granted. Tell God your thankfulness for His provision and ask Him to point out to you ways in which He continues to do so.

Going Deeper

Another figure that prefigured this ministry was Joseph in the Book of Genesis, followed by King David, also of the tribe of Judah. Do a study of these people and see what remarkable parallels you can draw between them and Jesus.

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 06-02-2024



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the Old Testament book of Exodus

and learn about the giving of God's Law and the people's response to it. Then we move to Hebrews in the New Testament, where Jesus is shown to be our high priest, fulfilling the role pictured in the Old Testament offering of sacrificial blood to cover sin. Finally, we conclude with the Gospel of Mark where we learn about the Last Supper. Here Jesus clearly spoke of the significance of Communion, the offering of His body and blood. As you study all three, look for a common theme among them.

Introduction to the First Reading:

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

First Reading:

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

We have read now about the people's response to the giving of God's Law. When Moses came down from the mountain and revealed the Law, the people twice agreed to obey the Law completely, first in verse 3 and again in verse 7. After hearing the people's response to the Law, Moses wrote down the words that God had told him (v. 4). Then, he built an altar and made the sacrifices that God had commanded, including the sprinkling of blood on the altar. The blood from the sacrificial animals represented the covenant, in a similar way as we remember the shedding of the once for all sacrificial Lamb, Jesus, through celebration of communion. This was the beginning of many years of sacrificial offerings which prefigured the ultimate sacrifice of blood to be made by the Messiah Jesus many centuries later. When Moses read from the "book of the covenant" that he had written down (v. 4a), the people they once again vowed to obey the Law.

We know how all of this turned out. Although the people agreed to obey the Law, they very soon broke away from strict observance of it to the extent that God prevented any of them except Joshua and Caleb from entering the Promised Land. In subsequent generations the people fell into cycles of sin, punishment from God, and then returning to follow His Law. At the end of the Old Testament when the voice of the prophets fell silent, the people began increasingly seeking the coming Messiah. Obedience to the Law became codified by the scribes and Pharisees into the Jewish religion through which the doers of this "law" felt justified.

As Christians, we too are called to obey God's Law but through a new relationship granted to us through the New Covenant initiated by Jesus' death and resurrection. Like the Jews in the reading, we agree that we want to obey God. However, unlike those in the reading, our ability to obey God's teaching is granted through the new heart given to us from above (John 3:3). Although obedience ought to be our response when we hear God's Word, God knows that we will continue to struggle with sin (Romans 3:23). Through our relationship with Jesus Christ, we have an Advocate Who intercedes on our behalf with our Father God. Saint John said, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments" (1 John 2:1-3). We should not look back at the Jews and think that we would do any better than they do. Instead, we have a unique empowerment through God's Holy Spirit living within us that they didn't have. This should provide us with a sense of even greater responsibility since, "to whom much is given, much is demanded" (Luke 12:48).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

In the First reading we saw how God's covenant was displayed to His people Israel through the observance of the sacrificial practices in the Law. In this passage from Hebrews we read of a "New Covenant." Although the old covenant was sealed with through the repetitious offering of the blood of sacrificial animals, the New Covenant was sealed with one single offering of the blood of Jesus. In the reading we will see how Jesus is shown as the High Priest Who offers this single, acceptable sacrifice (His death burial, and resurrection) to atone for our sin.

Second Reading:

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

The Old Testament priests had to repeat the sacrifices in the Tabernacle and the Temple, which were mere symbols of the dwelling place of God, for "the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands" (Acts 7:48). But Jesus entered into "the greater and more perfect tabernacle"—into the very presence of God—to present the sufficient sacrifice of His blood. So, not only has Jesus paid the price for our sin, He has also become the one mediator between man and God (1 Timothy 2:5). Therefore, as Christians we can rejoice that through the work of Jesus on our behalf, we have the "promise of the eternal inheritance," ever to be with Jesus in heaven.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

All three of the readings today made mention of a covenant. In the first reading from Exodus, it was God's covenant with man that required the keeping of the Law, including blood sacrifices as a picture of cleansing. In the second reading from Hebrews, the writer reminded us of a New

Covenant that God offers to people through the sacrifice of Christ's blood that satisfied God's demands for justice. Finally, as we look at today's Gospel reading, we have the account of the Last Supper with its deep, significant teaching of essential truth. In the reading we will see Jesus celebrate His last Passover meal with the twelve disciples.

Gospel Reading:

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

Jesus had evidently conferred with the person whom the disciples met regarding the place where they were going to prepare the Passover meal. However, only Jesus could have known that at the instant when they went into the city they would meet this certain man carrying a pitcher (v. 13). The disciples then prepared the meal perhaps not understanding the full significance as we do with the benefit of hindsight. The Passover supper provided clear illustrations of God's grace and mercy to sinful men. First, it pointed back to the delivery of Israel from Egypt. When the angel of death fell upon the Egyptian households, their firstborn children died. But the Jewish children survived because the families had sprinkled the blood of a sacrificial lamb (representative of Jesus, the Lamb of God) on their doorposts. The celebration of Passover for the Jews is a vivid reminder of deliverance by blood. Now, on this special night in Jerusalem Jesus used object lessons to

demonstrate that it was essential to identify by faith in His blood and body in order to receive the offered gift of salvation and a personal relationship with God. In stark contrast to this gracious offer, Jesus points out that one of the Twelve, who had walked and worked with Him, would betray Him. In fact, before the night was over, all of the disciples would fail the Master (however eleven repented and returned to Him).

As we look back at Jesus' Last Supper, we recognize the great importance of our communion with Jesus through the celebration of the communion meal. Communion helps us to recognize how our Savior willingly offered His body and blood as the supreme sacrifice once and for all. Although we take communion many times, each time we look back to the single sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf forever. Unlike the priests in the Old Testament who had to offer repeatedly the same sacrifices, which never took away their sin (Hebrews 10:11), when we celebrate communion we recognize how our Great High Priest Jesus sat down at the right hand of God after offering Himself once, taking away our sins forever (Hebrews 10:12). Communion provides a time for us to reflect upon our unique relationship with God through the New Covenant, one in which we no longer have to rely upon the Old Testament priests offering sacrifice on our behalf, as we saw in the first and second readings today.

Reflection Questions

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

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

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

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

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

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 06-19-2022



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we spend a great deal of time discussing the

mysterious person of Melchizedek mentioned in a reading from Genesis. We dedicate so much time to this man because of the way his ministry prefigures the eternal intercession and finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ on our behalf. In the second reading we learn from Saint Paul's teaching about the celebration of communion and conclude this week's study with the miracle of our Lord's feeding of the five thousand along the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The context of the first reading is when Abraham was returning from battle with the forces that kidnapped his nephew Lot (Genesis 14:12). Earlier, Lot had separated himself from Abraham after he chose the well-watered, fertile Jordan River Valley towards the east. Not long afterwards, Lot found himself surrounded by war in the nations surrounding the Dead Sea (Genesis 14:3). Abraham mustered his troops and successfully rescued his nephew and all of his possessions (Genesis 14:14-16). Today's reading picks up during Abraham's return from this perilous rescue mission as he passed by the city of Salem, what we know by the modern name of Jerusalem (formerly Jebus, the land of the Jebusites).

First Reading:

Genesis 14:18-20 NAS95 18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. 19 He blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; 20 And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." He gave him a tenth of all.

In the reading, we are introduced to the mysterious figure of Melchizedek, "priest of God Most High" (v. 18b). Melchizedek is perhaps one of the most important people in the entire Bible, second only to Jesus. In fact, some believe that Melchizedek was the preincarnate Christ Himself, a "Christophany" or appearance of Christ before His physical birth to Mary as recorded in the

Gospels. Why is Melchizedek such an important person, and what application does his ministry have for our lives today? Before we answer this question, we will provide some background about him.

Who is this man Melchizedek, king of Salem? In today's reading we find Melchizedek bringing out bread and wine to greet Abraham, who was returning from battle with the forces that kidnapped his nephew Lot. The New Testament provides more information about this mysterious person. In Hebrews chapter 7, in verse 1 the text reads, "Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him." Looking at the Book of Hebrews as whole, you can see that it's grounded in an explanation of Christ through the perspective of the Old Testament Levitical priesthood, thus the title given to the book "Hebrews" meaning Jews. In Genesis 14:3 Abram, later called Abraham, the father of the Jews, is called a Hebrew. We see back in Hebrews 7:1 that Melchizedek is three things: 1. The King of Salem, the area we now identify as Jerusalem, 2. A priest of the "Most High God," meaning a priest of the *only* true God, and 3. One to whom Abraham the father of the Jews gave tribute. The lesser person gives tribute to the greater. To summarize, Melchizedek was a king, and a priest worthy of tribute.

Going on in Hebrews 7 we find in verse 17, "You [Jesus Christ] are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek," quoted from the Old Testament Book of Psalms 110:4. According to the Book of Leviticus under what we call the Jewish Law, all of the Old Testament Priests had to come from the tribe of Levi, but Melchizedek was a priest before the separate tribes or Law even existed! Yet Abraham gave a tenth portion (or tithe) to Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:4) as required under the later Law for all priests (verse 5). What is being explained here is that Melchizedek was one of a class of priests that foreshadowed the coming final, eternal (and final) High Priest, Jesus. Melchizedek, whose name means King of righteousness, could not have come from the line of Aaron (Levi) or Judah, because these did not exist during his lifetime. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrificial system, the final sacrifice was Jesus' own death on the cross which did away with the Levitical priesthood (Hebrews 10:11-14). Christ was from the "order of Melchizedek (Ps 110:4, Hebrews 7:17), not the line of Aaron. This new order is made even more clear by reading beyond the quoted section of Psalm 110 to verse 7, "Therefore He will lift up his [Jesus Christ's] head." This eternal priest, Jesus of the non-priestly line of Judah, is and will be exalted by God. As a side note, Melchizedek was the first biblical person to picture the reality of a priest/king.

Now, with this wisdom in mind, let's answer the question we posited in the opening, why is Melchizedek such an important person, and what application does his ministry have for our lives today? As Christians, we cannot underestimate the importance of what Melchizedek's priesthood teaches us. First, the "Melchizedekian" is eternal, in contrast to the Jewish sacrificial system that

passed away after the destruction of the temple in AD 70. Truly, the Levitical priesthood died the moment that Jesus died and the veil was torn in two (Matthew 27:51), although the Jews nursed it along for another four decades. Second, the priesthood of Jesus is eternal and is not tied to the life of the priest. Hebrews says, "The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing," (Hebrews 7:23). This is a critically important point because the Scripture says regarding Jesus, "Therefore He is able also to save **forever** those who draw near to God through Him, since **He always lives to make intercession for them** (Hebrews 7:25, emphasis added). Bold text alone does not do provide this quote with enough emphasis, as the implications for the church and the Christian are enormous:

- Since Jesus lives eternally, He is always there for us. His intercession with the Father God is eternal on our behalf. In contrast, human priests died and their ministries ended with their passing.
- Regardless of whatever type of human priesthood was instituted after Jesus' death, the Scripture is clear that the sacrificial system and associated priesthood was eliminated by God forever. The sacrifice of lambs (Exodus 12:5, Numbers 28:7), wine (Numbers 28:7), or bread (Leviticus 7:13) was forever eliminated by Jesus willingly offering Himself and one perfect sacrifice forever, because "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14). We can be thankful that Jesus' sacrifice cannot ever be repeated and will never need to be.
- Jesus declared victory over sin, whereas the Levitical priesthood left a memory of sin. We see this clearly in the Book of Hebrews.

  Hebrews 10:1-4 NAS95 1 "For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. 2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? 3 But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. 4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."

- Jesus is the Victor of sin and is nowhere in the Bible every portrayed as a victim. Jesus chose to go the cross on behalf of our sin. Jesus is our Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, the One Who suffered on our behalf. Jesus said, "No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father" (John 10:18). Because Jesus was victorious over sin, we can be victorious over sin as well. The Bible says, "but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57).
- Jesus instituted a new priesthood consisting of all believers, and the old, broken, bloody, corrupt (Matthew 21:13) sacrificial system of the Old Testament has passed away forever. The Scripture says, "But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A

> PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). As believers in the risen Lord Jesus Christ, we offer continual **spiritual** sacrifices to God. "Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Hebrews 13:15-16).

In closing, was the man Melchizedek in the reading the preincarnate Christ? Hebrews 7:3 says about him that he was "Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually." However, later in verse 15 the author made the point quite clearly that Melchizedek is a type of Christ, something that points to the later Messiah Jesus. "And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the **likeness** of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 7:15, emphasis added). So, was Melchizedek Christ in the flesh? Maybe, though this isn't explicitly stated in the Scriptures. What we do know is that he points to Christ by representing an eternal priesthood that Jesus now carries for us.

As we move on to the second reading, hopefully each of us recognizes the principle of giving to God as demonstrated by Abram after his victory in rescuing Lot from the ungodly kings who surrounded him and took him captive. Our giving to the church, charities and those in need demonstrates that we understand the source of victory is God and He owns it all. We are to hold our time, talents, and treasures loosely in our palms and let God take from them as He sees fit. As Christians, we are not like the people of Pompeii who perished while grasping their possessions before trying to flee the volcano.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading from 1 Corinthians deals with Saint Paul's teaching on the celebration of communion.

Second Reading:

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 NAS95 23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you,

that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25 In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

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

The celebration of the Lord's Supper is a very important ordinance given to us by the Lord Jesus before He returned to heaven. Each time we celebrate communion we commemorate Jesus' death on the cross for us on which He gave his body and poured His blood for us. Jesus instituted the communion celebration during His Last Supper with the disciples on the eve of the Jewish holiday known as Passover. This important feast commemorated the Jews deliverance from the final plague brought against the Pharaoh as recorded in Exodus 12. On the solemn eve many millennia ago, the Hebrew people were instructed to slaughter a lamb and mark their doorway with its blood. On that evening, the Death Angel passed through the land and killed the firstborn of every living thing, both human beings and animals, except those whom had followed God's commandment in faith by marking their doorways with the symbol of the Lamb of God. The Feast of Unleavened Bread, in which the Jews eat bread without the yeast rising agent, follows Passover. The absence of leaven is symbolic of the Jew's rapid flight from Egypt immediately after that first Passover evening in which the lamb was slaughtered in obedience to God command for the salvation of each household. The absence of leaven also came to be associated in later Jewish thought with the purification from sin, i.e. leaven is sin, such as Jesus noted when He said to be on watch for the "leaven of the Pharisees" (Matthew 16:6). The symbolism is clear; Jesus is *our* Passover Lamb, the Lamb of God that takes away our sin. John the Baptist said about Jesus, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Jesus is the "Lamb slain since before the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8).

What does this reading mean for our lives? First, God calls us not to forsake the assembly together in the communion service (Hebrews 10:25). As we celebrate communion from now until the day the Lord Jesus returns, we look back to the one sacrifice that He made for our sins. Second, we can recognize that we are saved by grace through faith in God (Ephesians 2:8-9) the same as Moses and

the other believers in the Old Testament. They looked forward to Jesus through the symbols of God's supernatural provision through manna and the healing by faith in God by humbly kneeling before the bronze serpent. The elements of communion are the way in which we remember Jesus' body broken for us and His blood shed to pay the debts for our sin. "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). This truly is a celebration, for though our sins are scarlet, we have been washed as white as snow through this sacrifice. We now live in response to this great and precious gift. May you not only celebrate communion, but each day, with a joyful and thankful heart.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading from Luke 9 records Jesus' feeding of the five thousand. This is the only miracle that appears in all four of the Gospels. The total number of people fed would have likely been over ten thousand as the crowd numbered five thousand men not counting women and children.

Jesus' feeding of the five thousand along the shores of the Sea of Galilee marked the beginning of a series of turning points in His ministry that we can identify by following the parallel accounts from the Gospel of John. One of these crucial points of decision for the crowds of followers is evident in the easy to remember verse 6:66 in John's Gospel, "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore." These turning points came about as the people began to determine in their hearts whether they are true followers of Jesus. Another of these is in the previous chapter of John where it says, "For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God" (John 5:18). This is where the rubber meets the road; the true followers of God are those that recognize Jesus as God in the flesh, the Messiah, rather than just a miracle doer who they thought would deliver them from their Roman oppressors.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 9:11-17 NAS95 11 But the crowds were aware of this and followed Him; and welcoming them, He began speaking to them about the kingdom of God and curing those who had need of healing. 12 Now the day was ending, and the twelve came and said to Him, "Send the crowd away, that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside and find lodging and get something to eat; for here we are in a desolate place." 13 But He said to them, "You give them something to eat!" And

they said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless perhaps we go and buy food for all these people." 14 (For there were about five thousand men.) And He said to His disciples, "Have them sit down to eat in groups of about fifty each." 15 They did so, and had them all sit down. 16 Then He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed them, and broke them, and kept giving them to the disciples to set before the people. 17 And they all ate and were satisfied; and the broken pieces which they had left over were picked up, twelve baskets full.

As the story progressed, we know from the parallel accounts that Jesus asked Philip (who was from this region) to provide for the crowd. We know from that account that Philip responded to Jesus stating that to buy that much food would require the amount of 200 days' wages. This was a significant amount, but worthless that far away from the city and in light of the huge size of the crowd. Nevertheless, the people had followed Jesus some distance away from the city and saw Him as One Who would provide for them, so it was natural for Jesus to accommodate their needs through His disciples. In this case, the people found out that God was the true multiplier of things. Again, we know from the parallel account in John that the people did indeed recognize Jesus as a Prophet, seemingly the One prophesied about in Deuteronomy 18:15. However, they misunderstood the role of the Messiah (John 6: 14–15). The people saw in Jesus a political ruler Who could free them from their poverty and Roman oppression. In the end, twelve baskets were left over corresponding exactly to the count of Jesus' disciples. Each disciple was left with one basket to highlight Jesus' ability to provide in the midst of impossible circumstances. God provided the food, regardless of the people's faith and used this sign to point to the True Messiah Jesus.

We too may have misunderstandings about how Jesus' power should be used in the world. Though we should ask God to provide for our circumstances we have to recognize that like the people of the biblical era we often want God to use His power for our comfort, security, and advancement. We need to be careful to let God be God and not expect Him to be our personal "Genie in the bottle" performing miracles on demand. Nobody stands above Him, for He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords and His purposes are beyond understanding. Even though the people in this story wanted Jesus to become their civil King, Jesus ministered to them to meet their spiritual needs instead. One day Jesus will return to rule and reign on the earth and fulfil the expectations of a perfect ruler.

Reflection Questions

1. The Book of Hebrews opens as follows. *"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son,*

whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe" (Hebrews 1:1-2). With this passage in mind, move forward in the Book and study the context of Hebrews before and after chapter 7. What do you find regarding how Jesus really is the eternal priest/king that fulfilled the requirements of the Law and how He is our eternal High Priest that makes intercession for us (1 Timothy 2:5). What impact should / does Jesus' intercession make on your perspective and response the challenges, blessings, and your inadequacies?

2. In the Gospel lesson, Jesus called upon God's miraculous power to perform a miracle to provide for people's basic needs and at the same time to confirm Himself as the Messiah. It is evident from reading the synoptic Gospels that His disciples didn't understand the miracle until Jesus explained it to them some time later after feeding a second large crowd. What ways have you missed understanding the miracles of God in your own life? List two or three ways in which God has recently provided for you that you may have taken for granted. Tell God your thankfulness for His provision and ask Him to point out to you ways in which He continues to do so.

Going Deeper

Another figure that prefigured this ministry was Joseph in the Book of Genesis, then later on King David, also of the tribe of Judah. Do your own study of these people and see what amazing parallels you can draw between them and Jesus.

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the Old Testament book of Exodus and learn about the giving of God's Law and the people's response to it. Then we move to Hebrews in the New Testament, where Jesus is shown to be our high priest, fulfilling the role pictured in the Old Testament offering of sacrificial blood to cover sin. Finally, we conclude with the Gospel of Mark where we learn about the Last Supper. Here Jesus clearly spoke of the significance of Communion, the offering of His body and blood. As you study all three, look for a common theme among them.

Introduction to the First Reading:

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

First Reading:

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

We have read now about the people's response to the giving of God's Law. When Moses came down from the mountain and revealed the Law the people twice agreed to obey the Law completely, first in verse 3 and again in verse 7. After hearing the people's response to the Law, Moses wrote down the words that God had told him (v. 4). Then, he built an altar and made the sacrifices that God had commanded, including the sprinkling of blood on the altar. The blood from the sacrificial animals represented the covenant, in a similar way as we remember the shedding of the once for all sacrificial Lamb Jesus through celebration of communion. This was the beginning of many years of sacrificial offerings which prefigured the ultimate sacrifice of blood to be made by the Messiah Jesus many centuries later. When Moses read from the "book of the covenant" that he had written down (v. 4a), the people they once again vowed to obey the Law.

We know how all of this turned out. Although the people agreed to obey the Law, they very soon broke away from strict observance of it to the extent that God prevented any of them except Joshua and Caleb from entering the Promised Land. In subsequent generations the people fell into cycles of sin, punishment from God, and return to following His Law. At the end of the Old Testament when the voice of the prophets fell silent, the people began increasingly seeking the coming Messiah. Obedience to the Law became codified by the scribes and Pharisees into the Jewish religion through which the doers of this "law" felt justified.

As Christians we too are called to obey God's Law but through a new relationship granted to us through the New Covenant initiated by Jesus' death and resurrection. Like the Jews in the reading, we agree that we want to obey God. However, unlike those in the reading, our ability to obey God's teaching is granted through the new heart given to us from above (John 3:3). Although obedience ought to be our response when we hear God's Word, God knows that we will continue to struggle with sin (Romans 3:23). Through our relationship with Jesus Christ was have an Advocate, Jesus Christ, Who intercedes on our behalf with our Father God. Saint John said, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments" (1 John 2:1-3). We should not look back at the Jews and think that we would do any better than they do. Instead, we have a unique empowerment through God's Holy Spirit living within us that they didn't have. This should provide us with a sense of even greater responsibility since to whom much is given, much is demanded (Luke 12:48).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

In the First reading we saw how God's covenant was display to His people Israel through the observance of the sacrificial practices in the Law. In this passage from Hebrews we read of a "New Covenant." Although the old covenant was sealed with through the repetitious offering of the blood of sacrificial animals, the New Covenant was sealed with one single offering of the blood of Jesus. In the reading we will see how Jesus is shown as the High Priest Who offers this single, acceptable sacrifice (His death burial, and resurrection) to atone for our sin.

Second Reading:

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

The Old Testament priests had to repeat the sacrifices in the Tabernacle and the Temple, which were mere symbols of the dwelling place of God, for "the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands" (Acts 7:48). But Jesus entered into "the greater and more perfect tabernacle"—into the very presence of God—to present the sufficient sacrifice of His blood. So, not only has Jesus paid the price for our sin, He has also become the one mediator between man and God (1 Timothy 2:5). Therefore, as Christians we can rejoice that through the work of Jesus on our behalf, we have the "promise of the eternal inheritance," ever to be with Jesus in heaven.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

All three of the readings today made mention of a covenant. In the first reading from Exodus it was God's covenant with man that required the keeping of the Law, including blood sacrifices as a picture of cleansing. In the second reading from Hebrews the writer reminded us of a New Covenant that God offers to people through the sacrifice of Christ's blood that satisfied God's demands for

justice. Finally, as we look at today's Gospel reading, we have the account of the Last Supper with its deep, significant teaching of essential truth. In the reading we will see Jesus celebrate His last Passover meal with the twelve disciples.

Gospel Reading:

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

Jesus had evidently conferred with the person whom the disciples met regarding the place with they were going to prepare the Passover meal. However, only Jesus could have known that at the instant when they went into the city they would meet this certain man carrying a pitcher (v. 13). The disciples then prepared the meal perhaps not understanding the full significance as we do with the benefit of hindsight. The Passover supper provided clear illustrations of God's grace and mercy to sinful men. First, it pointed back to the delivery of Israel from Egypt. When the angel of death fell upon the Egyptian households, their firstborn children died. But the Jewish children survived because the families had sprinkled the blood of a sacrificial lamb (representative of Jesus, the Lamb of God) on their doorposts. The celebration of Passover for the Jews is a vivid reminder of deliverance by blood. Now, on this special night in Jerusalem Jesus used object lessons to demonstrate that it was essential to identify by faith in His blood and body in order to receive the offered gift of salvation and a personal relationship with God. In stark contrast to this gracious offer,

Jesus points out that one of the Twelve, who had walked and worked with Him, would betray Him. In fact, before the night was over, all of the disciples would fail the Master (however eleven repented and returned to Him).

As we look back at Jesus' Last Supper, we recognize the great importance of our communing with Jesus through the celebration of the communion meal. Communion helps us to recognize how our Savior willingly offered His body and blood as the supreme sacrifice once and for all. Although we take communion many times, each time we look back to the single sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf forever. Unlike the priests in the Old Testament who had to offer repeatedly the same sacrifices which never took away their sin (Hebrews 10:11), when we celebrate communion we recognize how our Great High Priest Jesus sat down at the right hand of God after offering Himself once, taking away our sins forever (Hebrews 10:12). Communion provides a time for us to reflect upon our unique relationship with God through the New Covenant, one in which we no longer have to rely upon the Old Testament priests offering sacrifice on our behalf, as we saw in the first and second readings today.

Reflection Questions

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

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

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

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

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

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 06-23-2019



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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we spend a great deal of time discussing the mysterious person of Melchizedek mentioned in a reading from Genesis. We dedicate so much time to this man because of the way his ministry prefigures the eternal intercession and finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ on our behalf. In the second reading we learn from Saint Paul's teaching about the celebration of communion and conclude this week's study with the miracle of our Lord's feeding of the five thousand along the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The context of the first reading is when Abraham was returning from battle with the forces that kidnapped his nephew Lot (Genesis 14:12). Earlier, Lot had separated himself from Abraham after he chose the well-watered, fertile Jordan River Valley towards the east. Not long afterwards, Lot found himself surrounded by war in the nations surrounding the Dead Sea (Genesis 14:3). Abraham mustered his troops and successfully rescued his nephew and all of his possessions (Genesis 14:14-16). Today's reading picks up during Abraham's return from this perilous rescue mission as he passed by the city of Salem, what we know by the modern name of Jerusalem (formerly Jebus, the land of the Jebusites).

First Reading:

> *Genesis 14:18-20 NAS95 18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. 19 He blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; 20 And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." He gave him a tenth of all.*

In the reading, we are introduced to the mysterious figure of Melchizedek, "priest of God Most High" (v. 18b). Melchizedek is perhaps one of the most important people in the entire Bible, second only to Jesus. In fact, some believe that Melchizedek was the preincarnate Christ Himself, a "Christophany" or appearance of Christ before His physical birth to Mary as recorded in the Gospels. Why is Melchizedek such an important person, and what application does his ministry have for our lives today? Before we answer this question, we will provide some background about him.

Who is this man Melchizedek, king of Salem? In today's reading we find Melchizedek bringing out bread and wine to greet Abraham who was returning from battle with the forces that kidnapped his nephew Lot. The New Testament provides more information about this mysterious person. In Hebrews chapter 7, in verse 1 the text reads, "Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him." Looking at the book of Hebrews as whole you can see that it's grounded in an explanation of Christ

through the perspective of the Old Testament Levitical priesthood, thus the title given to the book "Hebrews" meaning Jews. In Genesis 14:3 Abram, later called Abraham, the father of the Jews, is called a Hebrew. We see back in Hebrews 7:1 that Melchizedek is three things: 1. the King of Salem, the area we now identify as Jerusalem, 2. A priest of the "Most High God," meaning a priest of the *only* true God, and 3. one to whom Abraham the father of the Jews gave tribute. The lesser person gives tribute to the greater. To summarize, Melchizedek was a king, and a priest worthy of tribute.

Going on in Hebrews 7 we find in verse 17, "You [Jesus Christ] are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek," quoted from the Old Testament Book of Psalms 110:4. According to the Book of Leviticus under what we call the Jewish Law, all of the Old Testament Priests had to come from the tribe of Levi, but Melchizedek was a priest before the separate tribes or Law even existed! Yet Abraham gave a tenth portion (or tithe) to Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:4) as required under the later Law for all priests (verse 5). What is being explained here is that Melchizedek was one of a class of priests that foreshadowed the coming final, eternal (and final) High Priest, Jesus. Melchizedek, whose name means King of righteousness, could not have come from the line of Aaron (Levi) or Judah, because these did not exist during his lifetime. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrificial system, the final sacrifice was Jesus' own death on the cross which did away with the Levitical priesthood (Hebrews 10:11-14). Christ was from the "order of Melchizedek (Ps 110:4, Hebrews 7:17), not the line of Aaron. This new order is made even more clear by reading beyond the quoted section of Psalm 110 to verse 7, "Therefore He will lift up his [Jesus Christ's] head." This eternal priest Jesus of the non-priestly line of Judah is and will be exalted by God. As a side note, Melchizedek was the first biblical personality to picture the reality of a priest/king.

Now, with this wisdom in mind let's answer the question we posited in the opening, why is Melchizedek such an important person, and what application does his ministry has for our lives today? As Christians, we cannot underestimate the importance of what Melchizedek's priesthood teaches us. First, the "Melchizedekian" is eternal, in contrast to the Jewish sacrificial system that passed away after the destruction of the temple in AD 70. Truly, the Levitical priesthood died the moment that Jesus died and the veil was torn in two (Matthew 27:51) although the Jews nursed it along for another four decades. Second, the priesthood of Jesus is eternal and is not tied to the life of the priest. Hebrews says, "The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing," (Hebrews 7:23). This is a critically important point because the Scripture says regarding Jesus, "Therefore He is able also to save **forever** those who draw near to God through Him, since **He always lives to make intercession for them** (Hebrews 7:25, emphasis added). Bold text alone does not do provide this quote with enough emphasis, as the implications for the church and the Christian are enormous:

- Since Jesus lives eternally, He is always there for us. His intercession with the Father God is eternal on our behalf. In contrast, human priests died and their ministries ended with their passing.
- Regardless of whatever type of human priesthood was instituted after Jesus' death, the

Scripture is clear that the sacrificial system and associated priesthood was eliminated by God forever. The sacrifice of lambs (Exodus 12:5, Numbers 28:7), wine (Numbers 28:7), or bread (Leviticus 7:13) was forever eliminated by Jesus willingly offering Himself and one perfect sacrifice forever, because "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14). We can be thankful that Jesus' sacrifice cannot ever be repeated, and will never need to be.

- Jesus declared victor over sin, something whereas the Levitical priesthood left a memory of sin. We see this clearly in the Book of Hebrews.

  Hebrews 10:1-4 NAS95 1 "For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. 2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? 3 But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. 4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."

- Jesus is the Victor of sin, and is nowhere in the Bible every portrayed as a victim but He chose to go the cross. Jesus is our Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, the One Who suffered on our behalf. Jesus said, "No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father" (John 10:18). Because Jesus was victorious over sin, we can be victorious over sin as well. The Bible says, "but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57).
- Jesus instituted a new priesthood consisting of all believers, and the old, broken, bloody, corrupt (Matthew 21:13) sacrificial system of the Old Testament has passed away forever. The Scripture says, "But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). As believers in the risen Lord Jesus Christ, we offer continual **spiritual** sacrifices to God. "Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Hebrews 13:15-16).

In closing, was the man Melchizedek in the reading the preincarnate Christ? Hebrews 7:3 says about him that he was "Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually." However, later in verse 15 the author made the point quite clearly that Melchizedek is a type of Christ, something that points to the later Messiah Jesus. "And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the **likeness** of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 7:15, emphasis added). So, was Melchizedek Christ in the flesh? Maybe, though this isn't explicitly stated in the Scriptures. What we do know is that he points to Christ by representing an eternal priesthood that Jesus now carries for us.

As we move onto the second reading, hopefully each of us recognizes the principle of giving to God as demonstrated by Abram after his victory in rescuing Lot from the ungodly kings who surrounded him and took him captive. Our giving to the church, charities and those in need demonstrates that we understand the source of victory is God and He owns it all. We are to our time, talents, and treasures held loosely in our palms and let God take from them as He sees fit. As Christians we are not like the people of Pompeii who perished while grasping their possessions before trying to flee the volcano.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading from 1 Corinthians deals with Saint Paul's teaching on the celebration of communion.

Second Reading:

> *1 Corinthians 11:23-26 NAS95 23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25 In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.*

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

The celebration of the Lord's Supper is a very important ordinance given to us by the Lord Jesus before He returned to heaven. Each time we celebrate communion we commemorate Jesus' death on the cross for us on which He gave his body and poured His blood for us. Jesus instituted the communion celebration during His Last Supper with the disciples on the eve of the Jewish holiday known as Passover. This important feast commemorated the Jews deliverance from the final plague brought against the Pharaoh as recorded in Exodus 12. On the solemn eve many millennia ago, the Hebrew people were instructed to slaughter a lamb and mark their doorway with its blood. On that evening, the Death Angel passed through the land and killed the firstborn of every living thing, both human beings and animals, except those whom had followed God's commandment in faith by

marking their doorways with the symbol of the Lamb of God. The Feast of Unleavened Bread, in which the Jews eat bread without the yeast rising agent, follows Passover. The absence of leaven is symbolic of the Jew's rapid flight from Egypt immediately after that first Passover evening in which the lamb was slaughtered in obedience to God command for the salvation of each household. The absence of leaven also came to be associated in later Jewish thought with the purification from sin, i.e. leaven is sin, such as Jesus noted when He said to be on watch for the "leaven of the Pharisees" (Matthew 16:6). The symbolism is clear; Jesus is *our* Passover Lamb, the Lamb of God that takes away our sin. John the Baptist said about Jesus, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Jesus is the "Lamb slain since before the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8).

What does this reading mean for our lives? First, God calls us not to forsake the assembly together in the communion service (Hebrews 10:25). As we celebrate communion from now until the day the Lord Jesus returns we look back to the one sacrifice that He made for our sins. Second, we can recognize that we are saved by grace through faith in God (Ephesians 2:8-9) the same as Moses and the other believers in the Old Testament. They looked forward to Jesus through the symbols of God's supernatural provision through manna and the healing by faith in God by humbly kneeling before the bronze serpent. The elements of communion are the way in which we remember Jesus' body broken for us and His blood shed to pay the debts for our sin. "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). This truly is a celebration, for though our sins are scarlet, we have been washed as white as snow through this sacrifice. We now live in response to this great and precious gift. May you not only celebrate communion, but each day, with a joyful and thankful heart.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading from Luke 9 records Jesus' feeding of the five thousand. This is the only miracle that appears in all four of the Gospels. The total number of people fed would have likely been over ten thousand as the crowd numbered five thousand men not counting women and children.

Jesus' feeding of the five thousand along the shores of the Sea of Galilee marked the beginning of a series of turning points in His ministry that we can identify by following the parallel accounts from the Gospel of John. One of these crucial points of decision for the crowds of followers is evident in the easy to remember verse 6:66 in John's Gospel, "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore." These turning points came about as the people began to determine in their hearts whether they are true followers of Jesus. Another of these is in the previous chapter of John where it says, "For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God" (John 5:18). This is where the rubber meets the road; the true followers of God are those that recognize Jesus as God in the flesh, the Messiah, rather than just a miracle doer who they thought would deliver them from their Roman oppressors.

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Gospel Reading:

> *Luke 9:11-17 NAS95 11 But the crowds were aware of this and followed Him; and welcoming them, He began speaking to them about the kingdom of God and curing those who had need of healing. 12 Now the day was ending, and the twelve came and said to Him, "Send the crowd away, that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside and find lodging and get something to eat; for here we are in a desolate place." 13 But He said to them, "You give them something to eat!" And they said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless perhaps we go and buy food for all these people." 14 (For there were about five thousand men.) And He said to His disciples, "Have them sit down to eat in groups of about fifty each." 15 They did so, and had them all sit down. 16 Then He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed them, and broke them, and kept giving them to the disciples to set before the people. 17 And they all ate and were satisfied; and the broken pieces which they had left over were picked up, twelve baskets full.*

As the story progressed, we know from the parallel accounts that Jesus asked Philip (who was from this region) to provide for the crowd. We know from that account that Philip responded to Jesus stating that to buy that much food would require the amount of 200 days' wages. This was a significant amount but worthless that far away from the city and in light of the huge size of the crowd. Nevertheless, the people had followed Jesus some distance away from the city and saw Him as One Who would provide for them, so it was natural for Jesus to accommodate their needs through His disciples. In this case, the people found out that God was the true multiplier of things. Again, we know from the parallel account in John that the people did indeed recognize Jesus as a Prophet, seemingly the One prophesied about in Deuteronomy 18:15. However, they misunderstood the role of the Messiah (John 6: 14 – 15). The people saw in Jesus a political ruler Who could free them from their poverty and Roman oppression. In the end, twelve baskets were left over corresponding exactly to the count of Jesus' disciples. Each disciple was left with one basket to highlight Jesus' ability to provide in the midst of impossible circumstances. God provided the food regardless of the people's faith and used this sign to point to the True Messiah Jesus.

We too may have misunderstandings about how Jesus' power should be used in the world. Though we should ask God to provide for our circumstances we have to recognize that like the people of the biblical era we often want God to use His power for our comfort, security, and advancement. We need to be careful to let God be God and not expect Him to be our personal "Genie in the bottle" performing miracles on demand. Nobody stands above Him for He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords and His purposes are beyond understanding. Even though the people in this story wanted Jesus to become their civil King, Jesus ministered to them to meet their spiritual needs instead. One day Jesus will return to rule and reign on the earth and fulfil the expectations of a perfect ruler.

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Reflection Questions

1. The Book of Hebrews opens as follows. "*In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe*" (Hebrews 1:1-2). With this passage in mind, move forward in the Book and study the context of Hebrews before and after chapter 7. What do you find regarding how Jesus really is the eternal priest/king that fulfilled the requirements of the Law and how He is our eternal High Priest that makes intercession for us (1 Timothy 2:5). What impact should / does Jesus' intercession make on your perspective and response the challenges, blessings, and your inadequacies?
2. In the Gospel lesson, Jesus called upon God's miraculous power to perform a miracle to provide for people's basic needs and at the same time to confirm Himself as the Messiah. It is evident from reading the synoptic Gospels that His disciples didn't understand the miracle until Jesus explained it to them some time later after feeding a second large crowd. What ways have you missed understanding the miracles of God in your own life? List two or three ways in which God has recently provided for you that you may have taken for granted. Tell God your thankfulness for His provision and ask Him to point out to you ways in which He continues to do so.

Going Deeper

Another figure that prefigured this ministry was Joseph in the Book of Genesis, then later on King David, also of the tribe of Judah. Do your own study on these people and see what amazing parallels you can draw between them and Jesus.

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the Old Testament book of Exodus and learn about the giving of God's Law and the people's response to it. Then we move to Hebrews in the New Testament, where Jesus is shown to be our high priest, fulfilling the role pictured in the Old Testament offering of sacrificial blood to cover sin. Finally, we conclude with the Gospel of Mark where we learn about the Last Supper. Here Jesus clearly spoke of the significance of Communion, the offering of His body and blood. As you study all three, look for a common theme among them.

Introduction to the First Reading:

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

First Reading:

> *Exodus 24:3-8 NAS95 3 Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do!" 4 Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. Then he arose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. 5 he sent young men of the sons of Israel, and they offered*

> *burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the LORD. 6 Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and the other half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. 7 Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!" 8 So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."*

We have read now about the people's response to the giving of God's Law. When Moses came down from the mountain and revealed the Law the people twice agreed to obey the Law completely, first in verse 3 and again in verse 7. After hearing the people's response to the Law, Moses wrote down the words that God had told him (v. 4). Then, he built an altar and made the sacrifices that God had commanded, including the sprinkling of blood on the altar. The blood from the sacrificial animals represented the covenant, in a similar way as we remember the shedding of the once for all sacrificial Lamb Jesus through celebration of communion. This was the beginning of many years of sacrificial offerings which prefigured the ultimate sacrifice of blood to be made by the Messiah Jesus many centuries later. When Moses read from the "book of the covenant" that he had written down (v. 4a), the people they once again vowed to obey the Law.

We know how all of this turned out. Although the people agreed to obey the Law, they very soon broke away from strict observance of it to the extent that God prevented any of them except Joshua and Caleb from entering the Promised Land. In subsequent generations the people fell into cycles of sin, punishment from God, and return to following His Law. At the end of the Old Testament when the voice of the prophets fell silent, the people began increasingly seeking the coming Messiah. Obedience to the Law became codified by the scribes and Pharisees into the Jewish religion through which the doers of this "law" felt justified.

As Christians we too are called to obey God's Law but through a new relationship granted to us through the New Covenant initiated by Jesus' death and resurrection. Like the Jews in the reading, we agree that we want to obey God. However, unlike those in the reading, our ability to obey God's teaching is granted through the new heart given to us from above (John 3:3). Although obedience ought to be our response when we hear God's Word, God knows that we will continue to struggle with sin (Romans 3:23). Through our relationship with Jesus Christ was have an Advocate, Jesus Christ, Who intercedes on our behalf with our Father God. Saint John said, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments" (1 John 2:1-3). We should not look back at the Jews and think that we would do any better than they do. Instead, we have a unique empowerment through God's Holy Spirit living within us that they didn't have. This should provide us with a sense of even greater responsibility since to whom much is given, much is demanded (Luke 12:48).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

In the First reading we saw how God's covenant was display to His people Israel through the observance of the sacrificial practices in the Law. In this passage from Hebrews we read of a "New Covenant." Although the old covenant was sealed with through the repetitious offering of the blood of sacrificial animals, the New Covenant was sealed with one single offering of the blood of Jesus. In the reading we will see how Jesus is shown as the High Priest Who offers this single, acceptable sacrifice (His death burial, and resurrection) to atone for our sin.

Second Reading:

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

The Old Testament priests had to repeat the sacrifices in the Tabernacle and the Temple, which were mere symbols of the dwelling place of God, for "the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands" (Acts 7:48). But Jesus entered into "the greater and more perfect tabernacle"—into the very presence of God—to present the sufficient sacrifice of His blood. So, not only has Jesus paid the price for our sin, He has also become the one mediator between man and God (1 Timothy 2:5). Therefore, as Christians we can rejoice that through the work of Jesus on our behalf, we have the "promise of the eternal inheritance," ever to be with Jesus in heaven.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

All three of the readings today made mention of a covenant. In the first reading from Exodus it was God's covenant with man that required the keeping of the Law, including blood sacrifices as a picture of cleansing. In the second reading from Hebrews the writer reminded us of a New Covenant that God offers to people through the sacrifice of Christ's blood that satisfied God's demands for justice. Finally, as we look at today's Gospel reading, we have the account of the Last Supper with its deep, significant teaching of essential truth. In the reading we will see Jesus celebrate His last Passover meal with the twelve disciples.

Gospel Reading:

> *Mark 14:12-26 NAS95 12 On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb was being sacrificed, His disciples said to Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare for You to*

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

Jesus had evidently conferred with the person whom the disciples met regarding the place with they were going to prepare the Passover meal. However, only Jesus could have known that at the instant when they went into the city they would meet this certain man carrying a pitcher (v. 13). The disciples then prepared the meal perhaps not understanding the full significance as we do with the benefit of hindsight. The Passover supper provided clear illustrations of God's grace and mercy to sinful men. First, it pointed back to the delivery of Israel from Egypt. When the angel of death fell upon the Egyptian households, their firstborn children died. But the Jewish children survived because the families had sprinkled the blood of a sacrificial lamb (representative of Jesus, the Lamb of God) on their doorposts. The celebration of Passover for the Jews is a vivid reminder of deliverance by blood. Now, on this special night in Jerusalem Jesus used object lessons to demonstrate that it was essential to identify by faith in His blood and body in order to receive the offered gift of salvation and a personal relationship with God. In stark contrast to this gracious offer, Jesus points out that one of the Twelve, who had walked and worked with Him, would betray Him. In fact, before the night was over, all of the disciples would fail the Master (however eleven repented and returned to Him).

As we look back at Jesus' Last Supper, we recognize the great importance of our communing with Jesus through the celebration of the communion meal. Communion helps us to recognize how our Savior willingly offered His body and blood as the supreme sacrifice once and for all. Although we take communion many times, each time we look back to the single sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf forever. Unlike the priests in the Old Testament who had to offer repeatedly the same sacrifices which never took away their sin (Hebrews 10:11), when we celebrate communion we recognize how our Great High Priest Jesus sat down at the right hand of God after offering Himself once, taking away our sins forever (Hebrews 10:12). Communion provides a time for us to reflect

upon our unique relationship with God through the New Covenant, one in which we no longer have to rely upon the Old Testament priests offering sacrifice on our behalf, as we saw in the first and second readings today.

Reflection Questions

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

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

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

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

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

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