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 164: 05-31-2026



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

Introduction to the First Reading:

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

passage describes.

First Reading:

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

The importance of this passage may be missed by its brevity and simplicity. But let us not underestimate the foundational nature of this revelation of God's character to His people. Remember, the newly released Hebrew people had just been delivered from being ruled by the Egyptians as slaves. You can take the slave out of Egypt, but something internal has to happen in order to take the mentality of a slave out of the person of God. A revelation of God's true nature would be the antidote to the slave mentality. Here is what we learn about God from this passage:

- God is a self-disclosing, self-revealing God. He desires to make Himself known to His people. Without God first revealing Himself to people, humans would have no way of knowing Him. The Hebrew people were his special chosen people to reveal His character. How would they reveal His character without knowing Him? The self-revealing nature of God is the foundation of a relationship with God for all people. This is His grace.

- The word "LORD," which is used as His special "covenantal" name for the Jewish people, means "I AM". This reveals that God is ever-present and absolutely existent. The Hebrew people needed to know that the God of their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, was also their ever-present Father as well.

- God is compassionate and gracious. These words are packed with depth, and the rest of the Bible should be understood in light of God's character of compassion and grace. Here are some helpful definitions. Compassionate: refers to deep love (usually of a superior to an inferior) rooted in some natural bond (i.e., Mother to child; Father to child). Compassion is the deep feeling one has for another who is totally helpless, and usually results in providing aid to the one who is in need. Mercy and forgiveness go hand in hand with compassion.

Gracious: unmerited favor, the root word depicts a heartfelt response by someone who has something to give to one who has a need; it is an adjective that describes the generous acts of Yahweh. It is generous in the sense that it is not deserved. Mercy is when you don't get the bad that you deserve; Grace is when you get the good that you don't deserve. God demonstrates both compassion and grace toward us: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

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

- God is abounding in love and faithfulness. Abounding connotes the overflowing and abundant nature of God's love and faithfulness. He's not going to run out! The word for "love" used here means "loving-kindness". The two characteristics put together mean that God is fiercely loyal to His children. We can count on Him to love and to forgive.

- God is also just. He will punish the sin of the guilty who have not brought themselves to Him in surrender. It would be unloving for God to allow injustice to prevail. So even in His punishment of wickedness, God is exercising His loving faithfulness.

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

- When God's glory is revealed, the only appropriate place for humans to be is to bow to the ground and worship.

- When God's glory is revealed, Moses wanted God to go with him and the people. He could not envision being alone in this world. God's presence is appealing; we do not have to protect ourselves from getting "too much of God."

- When God's glory was revealed, Moses recognized the sinful state of himself and the people. God's glory makes us more self-aware of our own shortcomings. Our shabby excuses don't really hold up in God's presence; we must rely on God's grace in order to stand in His presence.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

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

Second Reading:

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

Paul has had a tenuous relationship with the Corinthian believers, with multiple visits and letters aimed at pointing them to what it looks like to live differently from the pagans. The relationship one has with Christ as Savior ushers us into a new way of life that does not operate according to the world's system. Therefore, he summarizes his message with instructions for living out the Christian

life.

- "Brethren": shows that those who are in Christ are in a family relationship. The laws that govern a family are higher than a government-enforced system. Family relationships are governed by the higher law of love.

- "Rejoice": why must Paul command the Corinthians to rejoice? He must know that it is easier for humans to be critical and despair over life than it is to rejoice. We must be reminded that we have a lot to be thankful for.

- "Be made complete": reminds us of the believer's status in Christ. We are positionally complete in Christ (for Jesus cried, "It is finished" from the cross), but it takes some effort on our part to live out the reality of this new status.

- "Be comforted": Paul began this letter by telling the Corinthians that the God of all comfort would comfort them in their troubles (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). He closes it by encouraging them to appropriate the comfort that only God can give.

- "Be like-minded and live in peace" means that Christians should seek to live in an understanding way with each other, allowing the Truth to unite us.

- "and the God of love and peace will be with you": Is He not with us when we are living contrary to these commands? Well, in a way, yes. It is true that God is omnipresent. His love and peace is available to all people at all times. But the difference between having God's love and peace and not having them is the choice we humans make to accept or reject who God is in our lives. If we live contrary to His ways, His love and peace will not be in us. If we want the God of love and peace to make His presence known to us, we simply have to ask and receive, making room for Him to manifest Himself in us and through us. We can't have His love and peace without having Him.

- "Greet one another with a holy kiss": this practice may not be common in our churches

> anymore, but we have similar expressions of fellowship, such as shaking hands, giving a hug, or smiling across the aisle at someone. The idea is to be welcoming and inclusive toward others who are in fellowship with us in our local places of worship.

- "All the saints greet you": this closing phrase gives Saint Paul's theology of sainthood. He frequently uses the word "saint" to describe genuine believers in Christ (1 Cor. 1:2, 2 Cor. 1:1; Philippians 1:1). He opened the letter to the Ephesians by saying: "To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 1:1). God gives the status of saint to all who have bowed their knee to Jesus as Lord, for now Christ's righteousness is credited to our account (2 Corinthians 5:21). That is what makes us a saint before God.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

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

Gospel Reading:

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

We see in this passage once again that God's love is the foundation of eternal life. It is God's love that moved Him to give His one and only Son. "Begotten" is a translation of a Greek word that has the connotation of being unique. So, to clarify, John is saying that no one else is like God's Son,

Jesus. He is the only one of His kind, and He was given to us to provide the one and only way to eternal life. As we said earlier, God does not want people to perish (1 Tim. 2:4). His love compelled Him to send His Son into the world to be our Savior. So, what separates those who have eternal life from those who are perishing? Belief in Jesus Christ. Belief is a robust word that connotes trust, relationship, and knowledge that is applied to one's life. As we grow in our belief in Jesus, we must clarify whether we truly believe. We must have a place of entry into the life of Christ. Do we want Him or not? If we reject Him, then we stand condemned already. Our unforgiven sin leaves no other option than to be judged by God at the end of our lives. But if we turn to Jesus in faith and rest our hope for salvation in Him, then we are saved. That is why He came to this world, to save. Have you entered into the life of Christ by putting your faith in His atoning death on the cross and receiving His resurrection power for daily living? If you want to do so, you can make that decision right now and talk to God about putting your faith in Christ. The following prayer may help you to express your heart to God:

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

Please consider sharing the testimony of your journey to faith in Jesus with me. If you want, I can post it on this website even with real names removed. Follow this link if you would be willing to write something up for our testimony section.

Reflection Questions

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

Exodus 34

2 Corinthians 13

John 3

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

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

- To receive His free gift of eternal life by believing in Jesus
- To receive His forgiveness for a particular sin that you previously thought was too big for God to forgive
- To treat another Christian as a brother/sister
- To recognize your identity as a saint and make choices based on this
- To be "like-minded" with other Christians over the truth
- To be comforted by the God of all comfort
- To let God's compassion and grace be your interpretive framework for the circumstances of your life

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 166: 06-15-2025



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we examine a reading from Proverbs and learn something about the Person of Jesus Christ. In the second reading, we see how God uses trials in the life of a believer, making them grow in their faith and trust in Him. In the Gospel reading, we learn how Jesus promised His disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit to empower them to accomplish His work and persevere through the tribulations that He predicted would come upon them.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Proverbs is a Book that provides wisdom from God on various matters. Most of the Proverbs were written by King Solomon. While reading this Bible section, we must remember that these biblical principles were delivered to a people bound to the Mosaic Law. Additionally, we must remember

that they are general proscriptive principles and not prescriptive in every case. For example, Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old, he will not depart from it." While this is a good and godly principle, all of us are acquainted with circumstances of parents who closely followed this principle yet had wayward children. Proverbs 8 begins with the personification of wisdom, a common theme in this Book. "Does not wisdom call, And understanding lift up her voice?"

First Reading:

> *Proverbs 8:22-31 NAS95 22 "The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way, Before His works of old. 23 From everlasting I was established, From the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth. 24 When there were no depths I was brought forth, When there were no springs abounding with water. 25 Before the mountains were settled, Before the hills I was brought forth; 26 While He had not yet made the earth and the fields, Nor the first dust of the world. 27 When He established the heavens, I was there, When He inscribed a circle on the face of the deep, 28 When He made firm the skies above, When the springs of the deep became fixed, 29 When He set for the sea its boundary So that the water would not transgress His command, When He marked out the foundations of the earth; 30 Then I was beside Him, as a master workman; And I was daily His delight, Rejoicing always before Him, 31 Rejoicing in the world, His earth, And having my delight in the sons of men."*

The reading opens with the idea of the eternity of a particular person, "me" in verse 22. While we can say that God foreknew those whom He also "predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:29) and therefore knew us as believers in eternity past, the plain sense of these verses points to the "eternality" of the Person of Jesus Christ. The wording used by the author aligns with what John said about Jesus Christ in his Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). The proverb says about this Person that He was established from everlasting, "From the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth" (v. 23a). John said about Jesus, "We was in the beginning with God" (John 1:2). The proverb also speaks to the role of Jesus as the creator, while at the same time brings out the unity that exists between the Father God and the Son. Verse 30 says, "Then I was beside Him, as a master workman; And I was daily His delight, Rejoicing always before Him." Colossians 1:16 says, "For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities–all things have been created through Him and for Him." Yet Isaiah said, "Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, and the one who formed you from the womb, "I, the Lord, am the maker of all things, stretching out the heavens by Myself, and spreading out the earth all alone." Finally, in Genesis 1:2, we see that "the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters" during creation. Therefore, the Trinity of God was involved in the creation process; we see a sense of this in today's reading.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The context of the second reading from Romans follows Saint Paul's teaching on justification by faith alone. Today's reading opens with the word "therefore," as always, we need to reflect upon what this word is "there for." In the following reading, the "therefore" links Paul's persuasive argument to the Christians in Rome regarding how God had justified them through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Paul looked back to how "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Romans 4:3) Paul taught how Jesus "was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification" (Romans 4:25). Paul's point was that as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ we inherit the righteousness of God through our faith in Him, "just as if" we had never sinned at all. Understanding the legal concept of justification is essential because otherwise, our salvation will result from our "good" works. Salvation is something which God has stated expressly we cannot earn. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Through our faith in the finished work of the Lord Jesus on the cross, we have a new judicial standing before the throne of God, "just as if" we had never sinned. For once we believe God has "removed our sins as far as the east is from west" (Psalms 103:12). Our faith is crucial in the eyes of God, for God sees us through the righteousness of Christ (Romans 13;14, Galatians 3:27, Job 29:14, Isaiah 61:10, Revelation 3:4).

[Note: Our online readers will benefit by being able to quickly peruse these verses by the verse lookup feature by hovering over each of them. We encourage everyone to study the quoted verses used each week in Mass Notes.]

Second Reading:

> *Romans 5:1-5 NAS95 1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. 3 And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; 4 and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; 5 and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*

Paul taught how through our faith we are justified and "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 1). Paul taught in Colossians how as nonbelievers we were alienated from God

(Colossians 1:21). Interestingly, in that same section of Colossians, Paul continued with the concept of rejoicing in suffering (Colossians 1:24), which is precisely what Paul did in verse three of today's reading. Paul said, "We also exult in our tribulations" (v. 3a). He said that the reason we are called to do this is because it builds perseverance, which leads to godly character, then onwards to hope (v. 4).

In applying today's reading, we may ask how tribulation produces perseverance, character, and hope. Tribulation, a word which literally means "suffering," is any type of test to your faith. This includes things like health problems, broken or strained relationships, persecution by nonbelievers, financial concerns, and the death of a loved one. If we turn to God during our trials, we can expect to experience growth in our faith as we see how God delivers us through them. God may deliver us from them, or sometimes He may. But regardless, the promise in today's reading is that if we persist in faith, God will use our trials to conform us more perfectly to the image of Jesus Christ, the Suffering Servant of God (Isaiah 53:1-12).

As I was reflecting upon how God has worked in my own life (see study question #2), I reviewed some of the thoughts I had written in one of my prayer journals. In one journal entry dated 9/13/2011, my wife and I had been praying for a man we know to find a godly wife. I am pleased to report that he married in the summer of 2015 to a godly young woman he met at church. In another entry dated 12/4/2011, I prayed for God to provide a means to pay off a $25,000 surgical bill. In that case, God provided through a combination of insurance and provisions through bonuses and my salary at work. As I continued to review my prayer journal, I saw how God has worked in so many different people's lives. Yet some of the people for whom we have been praying continue to struggle. One in particular has had a half-year-long struggle in her life with chronic pain in her back. Perhaps God desires us to continue pulling together as believers to pray for her, and I am confident He will continue to work in her life.

More recently, however, God has been working miraculously in my life. Men frequently don't share the struggles with their wives that they may have in their thought life. However, we should share with God and, when appropriate, with a prayer partner of the same sex who would understand. Recently, after watching a Christian movie that focused on how God can produce miracles in the lives of people who pray boldly with faith, I sensed a calling from God to present to Him a particular struggle I was having with my thought life. After I was all pumped up spiritually after watching that Christian film, I brought this matter boldly to the Lord in prayer. After a week in which I did not struggle with this thought pattern, I thought that perhaps God was up to something in my life. After a month, I began to understand that God had indeed intervened in my life, and then began to focus on ways to prevent myself from falling into this particular pattern again. What are some areas in which you are struggling? We encourage you to bring these to God and expect His answer as you

persist in prayer to Him. If you feel your faith is weak, pray that God would first give you the faith you need. Perhaps he will lead you to study a particular book or meet with a particular person. But do expect God to show up when you boldly pray to Him.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading from John chapter 16 is Jesus' counsel to His disciples about how they will be able to prosper once He leaves the world through His sending of the Holy Spirit. They are to expect great persecution and be "outcasts from the synagogue" (John 16:2). In fact, the deception of nonbelievers in the world will be so bad that "everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God" (v. 2b). Jesus promised how then when He went away He would send the "Helper," Who would "convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" (v. 8).

Gospel Reading:

> *John 16:12-15 NAS95 12 "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. 14 He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. 15 All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you."*

Jesus taught His disciples how the Holy Spirit would "guide them into all the truth" (v. 13b). The prophecy of the Holy Spirit led to the inspiration of our Holy Bible. Peter spoke about this by saying, "For no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:21). The Word of God is but one of many ministries of the Holy Spirit that we as believers possess. The Spirit also works to draw unbelievers to faith in the Lord Jesus, convict both believers and nonbelievers of their sin, regenerate our spirits making us "born from above" (John 3:3), sanctify us in the Lord, help us in prayer, guide us in understand Scripture, provide us with comfort through His divine power dwelling within us, and provides us with gifts and fruits of the Spirit. Although Jesus' disciples certainly couldn't understand the implications of His prophecy concerning the coming of the Spirit, they spent their lives living out the fullness of all that the Spirit had to offer them, even though they endured unparalleled tribulation.

We, too, are called to partake of God's divine gift through the ministry offered to us in the Holy

Spirit that lives within us. It is this Spirit that empowers us to live lives pleasing to God. To take advantage of the Spirit's guidance "into all the truth" mentioned in today's reading, we must endeavor to become students of God's Word in the Bible. We pray that these weekly studies will prompt you to further study God's word, and "test all things, holding fast to that which is true" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. What is something through which you either are suffering or have suffered in recent years? In what ways have you seen how God produced in you the character qualities noted by Paul of increased faith, perseverance, and character?

2. Perhaps one of the most useful ways in which you can learn from the tribulations allowed by God in your life is to journal about your experiences and then look back upon how God used these circumstances for His eternal purposes and your own good (Romans 8:28). If you have written down anything in past years, retrieve these journal entries and review the changes that have occurred since then. In what ways can you see how God actively used these trials to produce perseverance and character in your life?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 05-26-2024

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. Our first reading is from one of the first five books of Bible, the Books of the Law. The second reading is from the letter of St. Paul to the church in Rome, which explains the basic elements of the Gospel. Finally, the reading from St. Matthew includes the final instructions of Jesus to his disciples.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Deuteronomy, the name which means "second law." In reading Deuteronomy it's helpful to remember that God is not only reminding Israel the law but also of her special place in his love; they are his chosen people. Furthermore, in this repeating of the law given to Moses, God is reminding the nation of their responsibility to live within the sphere of that love. Special privilege, as God's chosen people, always means increased spiritual responsibility. This last Book of the Law was written by Moses near the end of his life. Just before today's reading we learn that God forbid Moses from entering the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 3:36). Although God didn't oblige Moses' request to go and visit the land, He did provide Moses with a panoramic view of the land from on top of Mount Pisgah (v. 27).

Today's As you read the passage, reflect on God's special love for those who follow Him, and how

this love is played out through God's protection and sovereign control of circumstances.

First Reading:

> *Deuteronomy 4:32-40 NAS95 32 Indeed, ask now concerning the former days which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and inquire from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything been done like this great thing, or has anything been heard like it? 33 Has any people heard the voice of God speaking from the midst of the fire, as you have heard it, and survived? 34 Or has a god tried to go to take for himself a nation from within another nation by trials, by signs and wonders and by war and by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm and by great terrors, as the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? 35 To you it was shown that you might know that the LORD, He is God; there is no other besides Him. 36 Out of the heavens He let you hear His voice to discipline you; and on earth He let you see His great fire, and you heard His words from the midst of the fire. 37 Because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them. And He personally brought you from Egypt by His great power, 38 driving out from before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in and to give you their land for an inheritance, as it is today. 39 Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, that the LORD, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other. 40 So you shall keep His statutes and His commandments which I am giving you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may live long on the land which the LORD your God is giving you for all time.*

In this passage, God reminds his people of his miraculous care for them up to this point as they journey on to the Promised Land. He has provided for them as for no other people. He delivered them miraculously from slavery in Egypt, and He was delivering them from nations much larger and more powerful than they. He has spoken to them through Moses, and He had disciplined them for their failures, but always in order to restore them. God reminded them of the conditional nature of His covenant with Moses, where obedience was required in order to obtain the promised blessings. "So you shall keep His statutes and His commandments which I am giving you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you" (v. 40). God had repeatedly warned the Hebrew people about this necessity, and we know from the later Books in the Bible that they missed the mark in obeying Him.

In applying today's reading to our lives, we recognize that we are under a New Covenant with God made through the blood of Jesus Christ. We entered this covenant when we placed our trust in Him

and not in any merit found in ourselves (Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, Ephesians 2:8-9). As believers in Jesus Christ, we are in a unique position in contrast to those we just read about who were under the Mosaic Law. God has provided us with His Holy Spirit Who lives in our hearts which provides us with the ability to obey Him. While we live under God's grace, His Holy Spirit compels us with the ability to obey Him while we can look back at the Old Testament Law and observe How God cared for and guided His people. We will learn more about how God empowers us through His Spirit in the second reading.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The first reading is from Paul's Letter to the Romans. The context is how as believers we are heirs with Christ, not only in His exultation but also in His suffering (Romans 5:3, Romans 8:17). As we just looked at God's warning given to Moses about the requirement for obedience, we see in the verses in Romans leading up to today's reading how God provides us with the Holy Spirit to empower us to obey. "[F]or if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (Romans 8:13-14). We pick up with today's reading in verse 14.

Second Reading:

> *Romans 8:14-17 NAS95 14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.*

In the reading we see the relationship of the Christian to God. It's not an association of fear, as one who is under the bond of slavery. Rather, the person who is "led by the Spirit of God" is considered an adopted son and can rightfully speak of God as his father. What's more, as an adopted son, he is also an heir; he has an unspeakable inheritance (which Paul writes about in his letter to the Ephesians). In fact, the Christian is a co-heir with Christ. All that God has planned for Jesus, who obeyed the Father even to His death and resurrection, will be shared with his adopted brothers. There is a word of caution, however. Paul writes that the Christian will suffer with Christ (see also Romans 5:3) and later be glorified with Him. If our faith in Jesus is genuine, we will be willing to

suffer for Him, not to earn salvation in any way, because He has paid the full price for that, but to demonstrate our love, obedience, and loyalty to Him.

Saint John said, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). We see this in today's reading where the Holy Spirit Who lives within us cries out "with our spirit that we are children of God" (Romans 8:16b). How glorious is it that we have God's living testimony within our hearts to help us especially during our times of doubt!

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Today's Gospel reading is from Saint Matthew. The context is the very closing of the Book where Jesus met with His disciples just prior to His ascension back to heaven.

Gospel Reading:

> *Matthew 28:16-20 NAS95 16 But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. 17 When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful. 18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

These verses are known as Jesus' "Great Commission." Here, Jesus provides a summary commandment to His disciples, and by means of application to all believers regarding the work that He left us here on earth to accomplish. The question of obedience that we saw in the first reading is also mentioned in this reading. In these few verses, we hear Jesus making His final appeal to his disciples, giving them instructions, clearly stating what his purpose is for them. To settle the doubts of some, Jesus makes it abundantly clear that He has all necessary authority to commission them, and, what's more, He assures them of his presence with them throughout the future. Jesus is the God that we heard speaking with authority in the first reading, and the God that lives within us and testifies to us that we saw in the second reading. God had promised (especially in John's Gospel) that He would send his Holy Spirit to lead, teach, and counsel them in his absence. Sandwiched between

the statement of his authority and the promise of his presence is the distinct purpose which He has for them. They are to go, make disciples, baptize them (in the name of the Holy Trinity), and teach them to obey all that He has commanded (vv. 19 – 20).

Jesus' calling makes it clear that in our day we are to make disciples, that is, we are to take the gospel message to the world and encourage them to put their faith in the Son of God who sacrificed his life to pay the penalty for mankind's sin. The evidence of that believing faith is baptism into the name of the triune God. But there's something beyond faith and baptism. We are to teach new disciples "to observe (or obey) all" of Christ's commands.

Reflection Questions

1. In the first reading we saw how Moses relayed God's message of the need for obedience to the people under the Law. In what ways do we as believers in the New Covenant have it "easier" to obey God?

2. In the second reading, Paul said, "but you have received a spirit of **adoption** as sons by which we cry out, " Abba! Father!" (Romans 8:15). How might this verse resonate with someone who was adopted into their family? In what ways could this speak to the person who never experienced a loving, human father? In what ways can you relate, and how does knowing God make the difference?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 06-12-2022

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we examine a reading from Proverbs and learn something about the Person of Jesus Christ. In the second reading we see how God uses trials in the life of a believer, making them grow in their faith and trust in Him. In the Gospel reading we learn about how Jesus promised His disciples how He would send the Holy Spirit to empower them to accomplish His work and to persevere through the tribulations that He predicted would come upon them.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Proverbs is a Book that provides wisdom from God on a variety of matters. Most of the Proverbs were written by King Solomon. While reading this section of the Bible, we have to remember that these biblical principles were delivered to a people bound to the Mosaic Law. Additionally, we must keep in mind that they are general proscriptive principles and not prescriptive in every case. For example, Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it." While this is a good and godly principle, all of us are acquainted with circumstances of parents who closely followed this principle but yet had wayward children. Proverbs 8 begins with the personification of wisdom, a common theme in this Book. "Does not wisdom call,

And understanding lift up her voice?"

First Reading:

Proverbs 8:22-31 NAS95 22 "The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way, Before His works of old. 23 From everlasting I was established, From the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth. 24 When there were no depths I was brought forth, When there were no springs abounding with water. 25 Before the mountains were settled, Before the hills I was brought forth; 26 While He had not yet made the earth and the fields, Nor the first dust of the world. 27 When He established the heavens, I was there, When He inscribed a circle on the face of the deep, 28 When He made firm the skies above, When the springs of the deep became fixed, 29 When He set for the sea its boundary So that the water would not transgress His command, When He marked out the foundations of the earth; 30 Then I was beside Him, as a master workman; And I was daily His delight, Rejoicing always before Him, 31 Rejoicing in the world, His earth, And having my delight in the sons of men."

The reading opens with the idea of the eternity of a certain person, "me" in verse 22. While we can say that God foreknew those whom He also "predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:29) and therefore knew us as believers in eternity past, the plain sense of these verses points to the "eternality" of the Person of Jesus Christ. The wording used by the author aligns with what John said about Jesus Christ in his Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). The proverb says about this Person that He was established from everlasting, "From the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth" (v. 23a). John said about Jesus, "We was in the beginning with God" (John 1:2). The proverb also speaks to the role of Jesus as the creator, while at the same time brings out the unity that exists between the Father God and the Son. Verse 30 says, "Then I was beside Him, as a master workman; And I was daily His delight, Rejoicing always before Him." Colossians 1:16 says, "For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities–all things have been created through Him and for Him." Yet Isaiah said, "Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, and the one who formed you from the womb, "I, the Lord, am the maker of all things, stretching out the heavens by Myself, and spreading out the earth all alone." Finally, in Genesis 1:2 we see that "the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters" during creation. Therefore, the Trinity of God was involved in the creation process, we see a sense of this in today's reading.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The context of the second reading from Romans follows Saint Paul's teaching on justification by faith alone. Today's reading opens with the word "therefore," and as always, we need to reflect upon what this word is "there for." In the reading that follows, the "therefore" provides the linkage to Paul's persuasive argument to the Christians in Rome regarding how God had justified them through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Paul looked back to how "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Romans 4:3) Paul taught how Jesus "was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification" (Romans 4:25). Paul's point was that as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ we inherit the righteousness of God through our faith in Him, "just as if" we had never sinned at all. Understanding the legal concept of justification is essential because otherwise it makes our salvation the result of our "good" works. Salvation is something which God has stated expressly we cannot earn. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Through our faith in the finished work of the Lord Jesus on the cross we have a new judicial standing before the throne of God, "just as if" we had never sinned. For once we believe God has "removed our sins as far as the east is from west" (Psalms 103:12). Our faith is extremely important in the eyes of God, for God sees us through the righteousness of Christ (Romans 13;14, Galatians 3:27, Job 29:14, Isaiah 61:10, Revelation 3:4).

[Note: Our online readers will benefit by being able to quickly peruse these verses by the verse lookup feature by hovering over each of them. We encourage everyone to study all of the quoted verses used each week in Mass Notes.]

Second Reading:

Romans 5:1-5 NAS95 1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. 3 And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; 4 and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; 5 and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Paul taught how through our faith we are justified and "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 1). Paul taught in Colossians how as nonbelievers we were alienated from God (Colossians 1:21). Interestingly, in that same section of Colossians, Paul continued with the concept of rejoicing in suffering (Colossians 1:24), which is exactly what Paul did in verse three of today's reading. Paul said, "we also exult in our tribulations" (v. 3a). He said that the reason we are called to

do this is because it builds perseverance which leads to godly character, then onwards to hope (v. 4).

In applying today's reading we may ask how tribulation produces perseverance, character, and hope? Tribulation, a word which literally means "suffering," are any type of tests to your faith. This includes things like health problems, broken or strained relationships, persecution by nonbelievers, financial concerns, and the death of a loved one. If we turn to God during our trials, we can expect to experience growth in our faith as we see how God delivers us through them. God may deliver us from them, or sometimes He may. But regardless, the promise in today's reading is that if when we persist in faith, God will use our trials to conform us more perfectly to the image of Jesus Christ, the Suffering Servant of God (Isaiah 53:1-12).

As I was reflecting upon the ways in which God has worked in my own life (see study question #2), I reviewed some of the thoughts that I had written in one of my prayer journals. In one journal entry dated 9/13/2011 me and my wife had been praying for a man we know to find a godly wife. I am pleased to report that he got married in the summer of 2015 to a very godly young woman whom he met at church. In another entry dated 12/4/2011 I had been praying for God to provide a means for me to pay off a $25,000 surgical bill. In that case God provided through a combination of insurance and provisions through bonuses and my salary at work. As I continued to review my prayer journal I see how God has worked in so many different people's lives. Yet some of the people for whom we have been praying continue to struggle. One in particular has had a half-down year long struggle in her life with chronic pain in her back. Perhaps God desires us to continue to pull together as believers to pray for her, and I am confident that He will continue to work in her life.

More recently, however, God has been working in a miraculous way in my life. Men frequently don't share the struggles with their wives that they may have in their thought life. We should, however, share these both with God and when appropriate with a prayer partner of the same sex who would understand. Recently, after watching a Christian movie that focused upon how God is able to produce miracles in the lives of people who pray boldly with faith, I sensed a calling from God to present to Him a particular struggle that I was having with my thought life. After I was all pumped up spiritually after watching that Christian film, I brought this matter boldly to the Lord in prayer. After a week went by in which I did not struggle with this particular thought pattern, the thought occurred to me that perhaps God was up to something in my life. After a month had gone by I began to understand that God had indeed intervened in my life, and then began to focus upon ways to prevent myself from falling into this particular pattern again. What are some areas in which you are struggling? We encourage you to bring these to God and expect His answer as you persist in prayer to Him. If you feel your faith is weak, pray that God would first give you the faith that you need. Perhaps He will lead you to study a particular book, or meet with a particular person. But do expect God to show up when you come to Him boldly in prayer.

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Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading from John chapter 16 is Jesus' counsel to His disciples about how they will be able to prosper once He leaves the world through His sending of the Holy Spirit. They are to expect great persecution and be "outcasts from the synagogue" (John 16:2). In fact, the deception of nonbelievers in the world will be so bad that "everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God" (v. 2b). Jesus promised how then when He went away He would send the "Helper," Who would "convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" (v. 8).

Gospel Reading:

John 16:12-15 NAS95 12 "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. 14 He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. 15 All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you."

Jesus taught His disciples how the Holy Spirit would "guide them into all the truth" (v. 13b). The prophecy of the Holy Spirit led to the inspiration of our Holy Bible. Peter spoke about this by saying, "for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:21). The Word of God is but one of many ministries of the Holy Spirit that we as believers possess. The Spirit also works to draw unbelievers to faith in the Lord Jesus, convict both believers and nonbelievers of their sin, regenerate our spirits making us "born from above" (John 3:3), sanctify us in the Lord, help us in prayer, guide us in understand Scripture, provide us with comfort through His divine power dwelling within us, and provides us with gifts and fruits of the Spirit. Although Jesus' disciples certainly couldn't understand the implications of His prophecy concerning the coming of the Spirit, they spent their lives living out the fullness of all that the Spirit had to offer them even though they endured unparalleled tribulation in their lives.

We too are called to partake of God's divine gift through the ministry offered to us in the Holy Spirit that lives within us. It is this Spirit that empowers us to live lives pleasing to God. In order to take advantage of the Spirit's guidance "into all the truth" mentioned in today's reading, we must endeavor to become students of God's Word in the Bible. Our prayer is that these weekly studies will prompt you to go further in your study of God's word, and "test all things, holding fast to that which is true" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

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Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. What is something through which you either are suffering, or have suffered in recent years? In what ways have you seen how God produced in you the character qualities noted by Paul of increased faith, perseverance and character?

2. Perhaps one of the most useful ways in which you can learn from the tribulations allowed by God in your life is to journal about your experiences and then look back upon how God used these circumstances for His eternal purposes and your own good (Romans 8:28). If you have written down anything in past years, retrieve these journal entries and review the changes that have occurred since then. In what ways can you see how God actively used these trials to produce perseverance and character in your life?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 05-30-2021



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. Our first reading is from one of the first five books of Bible, the Books of the Law. The second reading is from the letter of St. Paul to the church in Rome, which explains the basic elements of the Gospel. Finally, the reading from St. Matthew includes the final instructions of Jesus to his disciples.

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Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Deuteronomy, the name which means "second law." In reading Deuteronomy it's helpful to remember that God is not only reminding Israel the law but also of her special place in his love; they are his chosen people. Furthermore, in this repeating of the law given to Moses, God is reminding the nation of their responsibility to live within the sphere of that love. Special privilege, as God's chosen people, always means increased spiritual responsibility. This last Book of the Law was written by Moses near the end of his life. Just before today's reading we learn that God forbid Moses from entering the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 3:36). Although God didn't oblige Moses' request to go and visit the land, He did provide Moses with a panoramic view of the land from on top of Mount Pisgah (v. 27).

Today's As you read the passage, reflect on God's special love for those who follow Him, and how this love is played out through God's protection and sovereign control of circumstances.

First Reading:

Deuteronomy 4:32-40 NAS95 32 Indeed, ask now concerning the former days which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and inquire from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything been done like this great thing, or has anything been heard like it? 33 Has any people heard the voice of God speaking from the midst of the fire, as you have heard it, and survived? 34 Or has a god tried to go to take for himself a nation from within another nation by trials, by signs and wonders and by war and by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm and by great terrors, as the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? 35 To you it was shown that you might know that the LORD, He is God; there is no other besides Him. 36 Out of the heavens He let you hear His voice to discipline you; and on earth He let you see His great fire, and you heard His words from the midst of the fire. 37 Because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them. And He personally brought you from Egypt by His great power, 38 driving out from before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in and to give you their land for an inheritance, as it is today. 39 Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, that the LORD, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other. 40 So you shall keep His statutes and His commandments which I am giving you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may live long on the land which the LORD your God is giving you for all time.

In this passage, God reminds his people of his miraculous care for them up to this point as they journey on to the Promised Land. He has provided for them as for no other people. He delivered them miraculously from slavery in Egypt, and He was delivering them from nations much larger and more powerful than they. He has spoken to them through Moses, and He had disciplined them for their failures, but always in order to restore them. God reminded them of the conditional nature of His covenant with Moses, where obedience was required in order to obtain the promised blessings. "So you shall keep His statutes and His commandments which I am giving you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you" (v. 40). God had repeatedly warned the Hebrew people about this necessity, and we know from the later Books in the Bible that they missed the mark in obeying Him.

In applying today's reading to our lives, we recognize that we are under a New Covenant with God made through the blood of Jesus Christ. We entered this covenant when we placed our trust in Him and not in any merit found in ourselves (Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, Ephesians 2:8-9). As believers in Jesus Christ we are in a unique position in contrast to those we just read about who were under the Mosaic Law. God has provided us with His Holy Spirit Who lives in our hearts which provides us with the ability to obey Him. While we live under God's grace His Holy Spirit compels us with the ability to obey Him while we can look back at the Old Testament Law and observe How God cared for and guided His people. We will learn more about how God empowers us through His Spirit in the second reading.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The first reading is from Paul's Letter to the Romans. The context is how as believers we are heirs with Christ, not only in His exultation but also in His suffering (Romans 5:3, Romans 8:17). As we just looked at God's warning given to Moses about the requirement for obedience, we see in the verses in Romans leading up to today's reading how God provides us with the Holy Spirit to empower us to obey. "[F]or if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (Romans 8:13-14). We pick up with today's reading in verse 14.

Second Reading:

Romans 8:14-17 NAS95 14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of

adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

In the reading we see the relationship of the Christian to God. It's not an association of fear, as one who is under the bond of slavery. Rather, the person who is "led by the Spirit of God" is considered an adopted son and can rightfully speak of God as his father. What's more, as an adopted son, he is also an heir; he has an unspeakable inheritance (which Paul writes about in his letter to the Ephesians). In fact, the Christian is a co-heir with Christ. All that God has planned for Jesus, who obeyed the Father even to His death and resurrection, will be shared with his adopted brothers. There is a word of caution, however. Paul writes that the Christian will suffer with Christ (see also Romans 5:3) and later be glorified with Him. If our faith in Jesus is genuine, we will be willing to suffer for Him, not to earn salvation in any way, because He has paid the full price for that, but to demonstrate our love, obedience, and loyalty to Him.

Saint John said, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). We see this in today's reading where the Holy Spirit Who lives within us cries out "with our spirit that we are children of God" (Romans 8:16b). How glorious is it that we have God's living testimony within our hearts to help us especially during out times of doubt!

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lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

These verses are known as Jesus' "Great Commission." Here Jesus provides a summary commandment to His disciples, and by means of application to all believers regarding the work that He left us here on earth to accomplish. The question of obedience that we saw in the first reading is also mentioned in this reading. In these few verses, we hear Jesus making His final appeal to his disciples, giving them instructions, clearly stating what his purpose is for them. To settle the doubts of some, Jesus makes it abundantly clear that He has all necessary authority to commission them, and, what's more, He assures them of his presence with them throughout the future. Jesus is the God that we heard speaking with authority in the first reading, and the God that lives within us and testifies to us that we saw in the second reading. God had promised (especially in John's Gospel) that He would send his Holy Spirit to lead, teach, and counsel them in his absence. Sandwiched between the statement of his authority and the promise of his presence is the distinct purpose which He has for them. They are to go, make disciples, baptize them (in the name of the Holy Trinity), and teach them to obey all that He has commanded (vv. 19 – 20).

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Reflection Questions

1. In the first reading we saw how Moses relayed God's message of the need for obedience to the people under the Law. In what ways do we as believers in the New Covenant have it "easier" to obey God?

2. In the second reading Paul said, "but you have received a spirit of **adoption** as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" (Romans 8:15). How might this verse resonate with someone who was adopted into their family? In what ways could this speak to the person who never experienced a loving, human father? In what ways can you relate, and how does knowing God make the difference?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 06-16-2019



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The reading opens with the idea of the eternity of a certain person, "me" in verse 22. While we can say that God foreknew those whom He also "predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:29) and therefore knew us as believers in eternity past, the plain sense of these verses points to the eternality of the Person of Jesus Christ. The wording used by the author aligns with what John said about Jesus Christ in his Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). The proverb says about this Person that He was established from everlasting, "From the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth" (v. 23a). John said about Jesus, "We was in the beginning with God" (John 1:2). The proverb also speaks to the role of Jesus as the creator, while at the same time brings out the unity that exists between the Father God and the Son. Verse 30 says, "Then I was beside Him, as a master workman; And I was daily His delight, Rejoicing always before Him." Colossians 1:16 says, "For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities–all things have been created through Him and for Him." Yet Isaiah said, "Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, and the one who formed you from the womb, "I, the Lord, am the maker of all things, stretching out the heavens by Myself, and spreading out the earth all alone." Finally, in Genesis 1:2 we see that "the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters" during creation. Therefore, the Trinity of God was involved in the creation process, we see a sense of this in today's reading.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The context of the second reading from Romans follows Saint Paul's teaching on justification by faith alone. Today's reading opens with the word "therefore," and as always, we need to reflect upon what

this word is "there for." In the reading that follows, the "therefore" provides the linkage to Paul's persuasive argument to the Christians in Rome regarding how God had justified them through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Paul looked back to how "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Romans 4:3) Paul taught how Jesus "was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification" (Romans 4:25). Paul's point was that as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ we inherit the righteousness of God through our faith in Him, "just as if" we had never sinned at all. Understanding the legal concept of justification is essential because otherwise it makes our salvation the result of our "good" works. Salvation is something which God has stated expressly we cannot earn. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Through our faith in the finished work of the Lord Jesus on the cross we have a new judicial standing before the throne of God, "just as if" we had never sinned. For once we believe God has "removed our sins as far as the east is from west" (Psalms 103:12). Our faith is extremely important in the eyes of God, for God sees us through the righteousness of Christ (Romans 13;14, Galatians 3:27, Job 29:14, Isaiah 61:10, Revelation 3:4).

[Note: Our online readers will benefit by being able to quickly peruse these verses by the verse lookup feature by hovering over each of them. We encourage everyone to study all of the quoted verses used each week in Mass Notes.]

Second Reading:

> *Romans 5:1-5 NAS95 1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. 3 And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; 4 and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; 5 and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*

Paul taught how through our faith we are justified and "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 1). Paul taught in Colossians how as nonbelievers we were alienated from God (Colossians 1:21). Interestingly, in that same section of Colossians Paul continued with the concept of rejoicing in suffering (Colossians 1:24), which is exactly what Paul did in verse three of today's reading. Paul said, "we also exult in our tribulations" (v. 3a). He said that the reason we are called to do this is because it builds perseverance which leads to godly character, then onwards to hope (v. 4).

In applying today's reading, we may ask how tribulation produces perseverance, character, and hope? Tribulation, a word which literally means "suffering," are any type of tests to your faith. This

includes things like health problems, broken or strained relationships, persecution by nonbelievers, financial concerns, and the death of a loved one. If we turn to God during our trials, we can expect to experience growth in our faith as we see how God delivers us through them. God may deliver us from them, or sometimes He may. But regardless, the promise in today's reading is that if when we persist in faith God will use our trials to conform us more perfectly to the image of Jesus Christ, the Suffering Servant of God (Isaiah 53:1-12).

As I was reflecting upon the ways in which God has worked in my own life (see study question #2), I reviewed some of the thoughts that I had written in one of my prayer journals. In one journal entry dated 9/13/2011 me and my wife had been praying for a man we know to find a godly wife. I am pleased to report that he got married in the summer of 2015 to a very godly young woman whom he met at church. In another entry dated 12/4/2011 I had been praying for God to provide a means for me to pay off a $25,000 surgical bill. In that case God provided through a combination of insurance and provisions through bonuses and my salary at work. As I continued to review my prayer journal, I see how God has worked in so many different people's lives. Yet some of the people whom we have been praying continue to struggle. One in particular has had a half-down year long struggle in her life with chronic pain in her back. Perhaps God desires us to continue to pull together as believer to pray for her, and I am confident that He will continue to work in her life.

More recently however, God has been working in a miraculous way in my life. Men frequently don't share the struggles with their wives that they may have in their thought life. We should however share these both with God and when appropriate with a prayer partner of the same sex who would understand. Recently after watching a Christian movie that focused upon how God is able to produce miracles in the lives of people who pray boldly with faith, I sensed a calling from God to present to Him a particular struggle that I was having with my thought life. After I was all pumped up spiritually after watching that Christian film, I brought this matter boldly to the Lord in prayer. After a week went by in which I did not struggle with this particular thought pattern, the thought occurred to me that perhaps God was up to something in my life. After a month had gone by, I began to understand that God had indeed intervened in my life, and then began to focus upon ways to prevent myself from falling into this particular pattern again. What are some areas in which you are struggling? We encourage you to bring these to God and expect His answer as you persist in prayer to Him. If you feel your faith is weak, pray that God would first give you the faith that you need. Perhaps He will lead you to study a particular book, or meet with a particular person. But do expect God to show up when you come to Him boldly in prayer.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading from John chapter 16 is Jesus' counsel to His disciples about how they will be able to prosper once He leaves the world through His sending of the Holy Spirit. They are to expect great persecution and be "outcasts from the synagogue" (John 16:2). In fact, the deception of nonbelievers in world will be so bad that "everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God" (v. 2b). Jesus promised that after He had gone away He would send the "Helper," Who would "convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" (v. 8).

Gospel Reading:

> *John 16:12-15 NAS95 12 "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. 14 He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. 15 All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you."*

Jesus taught His disciples how the Holy Spirit would "guide them into all the truth" (v. 13b). The prophecy of the Holy Spirit led to the inspiration of our Holy Bible. Peter spoke about this by saying, "for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:21). The Word of God is but one of many ministries of the Holy Spirit that we as believers possess. The Spirit also works to draw unbelievers to faith in the Lord Jesus, convict both believers and nonbelievers of their sin, regenerate our spirits making us "born from above" (John 3:3), sanctify us in the Lord, help us in prayer, guide us in understand Scripture, provide us with comfort through His divine power dwelling within us, and provides us with gifts and fruits of the Spirit. Although Jesus' disciples certainly couldn't understand the implications of His prophecy concerning the coming of the Spirit, they spent their lives living out the fullness of all that the Spirit had to offer them even though they endured unparalleled tribulation in their lives.

We too are called to partake of God's divine gift through the ministry offered to us in the Holy Spirit that lives within us. It is this Spirit that empowers us to live lives pleasing to God. In order to take advantage of the Spirit's guidance "into all the truth" mentioned in today's reading, we must endeavor to become students of God's Word in the Bible. Our prayer is that these weekly studies will prompt you to go further in your study of God's word, and "test all things, holding fast to that which is true" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

Reflection Questions

1. What is something through which you either are suffering, or have suffered in recent years? In what ways have you seen how God produced in you the character qualities noted by Paul of increased faith, perseverance and character?
2. Perhaps one of the most useful ways in which you can learn from the tribulations allowed by God in your life is to journal about your experiences and then look back upon how God used these circumstances for His eternal purposes and your own good (Romans 8:28). If you have written down anything in past years, retrieve these journal entries and review the changes that have occurred since then. In what ways can you see how God actively used these trials to

produce perseverance and character in your life?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 05-27-2018



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. Our first reading is from one of the first five books of Bible, the Books of the Law. The second reading is from the letter of St. Paul to the church in Rome, which explains the basic elements of the Gospel. Finally, the reading from St. Matthew includes the final instructions of Jesus to his disciples.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Deuteronomy, the name which means "second law." In reading Deuteronomy it's helpful to remember that God is not only reminding Israel the law but also of her special place in his love; they are his chosen people. Furthermore, in this repeating of the law given to Moses, God is reminding the nation of their responsibility to live within the sphere of that love. Special privilege, as God's chosen people, always means increased spiritual responsibility. This last

Book of the Law was written by Moses near the end of his life. Just before today's reading we learn that God forbid Moses from entering the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 3:36). Although God didn't oblige Moses' request to go and visit the land, He did provide Moses with a panoramic view of the land from on top of Mount Pisgah (v. 27).

Today's As you read the passage, reflect on God's special love for those who follow Him, and how this love is played out through God's protection and sovereign control of circumstances.

First Reading:

> *Deuteronomy 4:32-40 NAS95 32 Indeed, ask now concerning the former days which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and inquire from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything been done like this great thing, or has anything been heard like it? 33 Has any people heard the voice of God speaking from the midst of the fire, as you have heard it, and survived? 34 Or has a god tried to go to take for himself a nation from within another nation by trials, by signs and wonders and by war and by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm and by great terrors, as the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? 35 To you it was shown that you might know that the LORD, He is God; there is no other besides Him. 36 Out of the heavens He let you hear His voice to discipline you; and on earth He let you see His great fire, and you heard His words from the midst of the fire. 37 Because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them. And He personally brought you from Egypt by His great power, 38 driving out from before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in and to give you their land for an inheritance, as it is today. 39 Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, that the LORD, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other. 40 So you shall keep His statutes and His commandments which I am giving you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may live long on the land which the LORD your God is giving you for all time.*

In this passage, God reminds his people of his miraculous care for them up to this point as they journey on to the Promised Land. He has provided for them as for no other people. He delivered them miraculously from slavery in Egypt, and He was delivering them from nations much larger and more powerful than they. He has spoken to them through Moses, and He had disciplined them for their failures, but always in order to restore them. God reminded them of the conditional nature of His covenant with Moses, where obedience was required in order to obtain the promised blessings. "So you shall keep His statutes and His commandments which I am giving you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you" (v. 40). God had repeatedly warned the Hebrew people about this necessity, and we know from the later Books in the Bible that they missed the mark in obeying Him.

In applying today's reading to our lives, we recognize that we are under a New Covenant with God made through the blood of Jesus Christ. We entered this covenant when we placed our trust in Him and not in any merit found in ourselves (Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, Ephesians 2:8-9). As believers in Jesus Christ we are in a unique position in contrast to those we just read about who were under

the Mosaic Law. God has provided us with His Holy Spirit Who lives in our hearts which provides us with the ability to obey Him. While we live under God's grace His Holy Spirit compels us with the ability to obey Him while we can look back at the Old Testament Law and observe How God cared for and guided His people. We will learn more about how God empowers us through His Spirit in the second reading.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The first reading is from Paul's Letter to the Romans. The context is how as believers we are heirs with Christ, not only in His exultation but also in His suffering (Romans 5:3, Romans 8:17). As we just looked at God's warning given to Moses about the requirement for obedience, we see in the verses in Romans leading up to today's reading how God provides us with the Holy Spirit to empower us to obey. "[F]or if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (Romans 8:13-14). We pick up with today's reading in verse 14.

Second Reading:

> *Romans 8:14-17 NAS95 14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.*

In the reading we see the relationship of the Christian to God. It's not an association of fear, as one who is under the bond of slavery. Rather, the person who is "led by the Spirit of God" is considered an adopted son and can rightfully speak of God as his father. What's more, as an adopted son, he is also an heir; he has an unspeakable inheritance (which Paul writes about in his letter to the Ephesians). In fact, the Christian is a co-heir with Christ. All that God has planned for Jesus, who obeyed the Father even to His death and resurrection, will be shared with his adopted brothers. There is a word of caution, however. Paul writes that the Christian will suffer with Christ (see also Romans 5:3) and later be glorified with Him. If our faith in Jesus is genuine, we will be willing to suffer for Him, not to earn salvation in any way, because He has paid the full price for that, but to demonstrate our love, obedience, and loyalty to Him.

Saint John said, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). We see this in today's reading where the Holy Spirit Who lives within us cries out "with our spirit that we are children of God" (Romans 8:16b). How glorious is it that we have God's living testimony within our hearts to help us especially during out times of doubt!

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Today's Gospel reading is from Saint Matthew. The context is the very closing of the Book where

Jesus met with His disciples just prior to His ascension back to heaven.

Gospel Reading:

> *Matthew 28:16-20 NAS95 16 But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. 17 When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful. 18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

These verses are known as Jesus' "Great Commission." Here Jesus provides a summary commandment to His disciples, and by means of application to all believers regarding the work that He left us here on earth to accomplish. The question of obedience that we saw in the first reading is also mentioned in this reading. In these few verses, we hear Jesus making His final appeal to his disciples, giving them instructions, clearly stating what his purpose is for them. To settle the doubts of some, Jesus makes it abundantly clear that He has all necessary authority to commission them, and, what's more, He assures them of his presence with them throughout the future. Jesus is the God that we heard speaking with authority in the first reading, and the God that lives within us and testifies to us that we saw in the second reading. God had promised (especially in John's Gospel) that He would send his Holy Spirit to lead, teach, and counsel them in his absence. Sandwiched between the statement of his authority and the promise of his presence is the distinct purpose which He has for them. They are to go, make disciples, baptize them (in the name of the Holy Trinity), and teach them to obey all that He has commanded (vv. 19 – 20).

Jesus' calling makes it clear that in our day we are to make disciples, that is, we are to take the gospel message to the world and encourage them to put their faith in the Son of God who sacrificed his life to pay the penalty for mankind's sin. The evidence of that believing faith is baptism into the name of the triune God. But there's something beyond faith and baptism. We are to teach new disciples "to observe (or obey) all" of Christ's commands.

Reflection Questions

1. In the first reading we saw how Moses relayed God's message of the need for obedience to the people under the Law. In what ways do we as believers in the New Covenant have it "easier" to obey God?

2. In the second reading Paul said, "but you have received a spirit of **adoption** as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" (Romans 8:15). How might this verse resonate with someone who was adopted into their family? In what ways could this speak to the person who never experienced a loving, human father? In what ways can you relate, and how does knowing God make the difference?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 6-11-2017



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

Introduction to the First Reading:

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

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First Reading:

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

The importance of this passage may be missed by its brevity and simplicity. But let us not underestimate the foundational nature of this revelation of the character of God to His people. Remember, the newly released Hebrew people had just been delivered from being ruled by the Egyptians as slaves. You can take the slave out of Egypt, but something internal has to happen in order to take the mentality of a slave out of the person of God. A revelation of God's true nature would be the antidote to the slave mentality. Here is what we learn about God from this passage:

- God is a self-disclosing, self-revealing God. He desires to make Himself known to His people. Without God first revealing Himself to people, humans would have no way of knowing Him. The Hebrew people were his special chosen people to reveal His character. How would they reveal His character without knowing Him? The self-revealing nature of God is the foundation of relationship with God to all people. This is His grace.
- The word "LORD" which is used as His special covenantal name for the Jewish people, means "I AM". This reveals that God is ever-present and absolutely existent. The Hebrew people needed to know that the God of their fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, was also their ever-present Father as well.
- God is compassionate and gracious. These words are packed with depth and the rest of the Bible should be understood in light of God's character of compassion and grace. Here are some helpful definitions. **Compassionate:** refers to deep love (usually of a superior for an inferior) rooted in some natural bond (i.e. Mother to child; Father to child). Compassion is the deep feeling one for another who is totally helpless, and usually results in providing aid to the one who is in need. Mercy and forgiveness go hand in hand with compassion.

Gracious: unmerited favor, the root word depicts a heartfelt response by someone who has something to give to one who has a need; it is an adjective that describes the generous acts of Yahweh. It is generous in the sense that it is not deserved. Mercy is when you don't get the bad that you deserve; Grace is when you get the good that you don't deserve. God demonstrates both compassion and grace toward us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

- God is slow to anger: contrary to popular belief, God is not capricious in His display of anger, nor is He looking for people to burn up with His wrath. He is patient and wanting people to repent, not desiring that any should perish (1 Timothy 2:4).
- God is abounding in love and faithfulness. Abounding connotes the overflowing and abundant nature of God's love and faithfulness. He's not going to run out! The word for love used here means loving-kindness. The two characteristics put together mean that God is fiercely loyal to His children. We can count on Him to love and to forgive.
- God is also just. He will punish the sin of the guilty who have not brought themselves to Him in surrender. It would be unloving for God to allow injustice to prevail. So even in His punishment of wickedness, God is exercising His loving faithfulness.

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

- When God's glory is revealed, the only appropriate place for humans to be is bowed to the ground, worshiping.
- When God's glory is revealed, Moses wanted God to go with him and the people. He could not envision being alone in this world. God's presence is appealing, we do not have to protect ourselves from getting "too much of God."
- When God's glory is revealed, Moses recognized the sinful state of himself and the people. God's glory makes us more self-aware of our own short-comings. Our shabby excuses don't really hold up in God's presence, therefore we must rely on God's grace in order to stand in His presence.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

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

Second Reading:

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

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

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

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

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

Gospel Reading:

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

We see in this passage once again that God's love is the foundation for life that is eternal. It is God's love that moved Him to give His one and only Son. "Begotten" is a translation of a Greek word that has the connation of being unique. So, to clarify, John is saying that there is no one else like God's Son Jesus. He is the only one of His kind and He was given to us to provide the one and only way to eternal life. As we said earlier, God does not want people to perish (1 Tim. 2:4). His love compelled Him to send His Son into the world to be our Savior. So, what separates those who have eternal life and those who are perishing? Belief in Jesus Christ. Belief is a robust word that connotes trust, relationship, and knowledge that is applied to one's life. While we grow in our belief in Jesus, we must clarify whether we truly believe or not. We must have a place of entry into the life of Christ. Do we want Him or not? If we reject Him, then we stand condemned already. Our unforgiven sin leaves no other option than to be judged by God at the end of our lives. But if we turn to Jesus in faith and rest our hope for salvation in Him, then we are saved. That is why He came to this world, to save. Have you entered into the life of Christ by putting your faith in His atoning death on the cross and receiving His resurrection power for daily living? If you want to do so, you can make that decision right now and talk to God about wanting to put your faith in Christ. The following prayer may help you to express your heart to God:

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

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

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Reflection Questions

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

Exodus 34

2 Corinthians 13

John 3

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

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

- To receive His free gift of eternal life by believing in Jesus
- To receive His forgiveness for a particular sin that you previously thoughts was too big for God to forgive
- To treat another Christian as a brother/sister
- To recognize your identity as a saint and make choices based on this
- To be "like-minded" with other Christians over the truth
- To be comforted by the God of all comfort
- To let God's compassion and grace be your interpretive framework for the circumstances of your life

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