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Sunday Mass Study Notes for 11-03-2024



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we learn from the Book of Deuteronomy about the nature of God as One and the greatest commandment. We also discover the crucially important truths about God's one time sacrifice He made on our behalf and learn something about the shadowy priest figure known Melchizedek. Finally, in the Gospel we learn more about God's greatest commandment.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading from Deuteronomy, a word meaning "second law," is from chapter 6. This section opens with the words fitting for a title of the entire book. "Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the LORD your God has commanded me to teach you, that you might do them in the land where you are going over to possess it" (Deut 6:1). Notice the use of the singular in the first phrase, "the commandment." The Book of the Law, the Pentateuch, contained in the first five Books of the Bible is "the Law" or the commandment together as a whole. However, as we will see in the reading that follows there is one commandment given by God to His people that is the capstone of them all, the calling for God's covenant people to make Him the center of their lives.

We will see how this plays out in today's reading.

First Reading:

> *Deuteronomy 6:2-6 NAS95 2 so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. 3 "O Israel, you should listen and be careful to do it, that it may be well with you and that you may multiply greatly, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey. 4 "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! 5 "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart.*

As we saw in the introduction, God called the people to follow His commandments in the land to which they were going, meaning the Promised Land in Israel into which they were preparing to cross after a forty year wait (Joshua 5:6). God called the people to keep His commandments (v. 2a) so that their days would "be prolonged" (v. 2d). The Mosaic Covenant was conditional in nature, and in order to reap the benefits of it the people had to be obedient to the Law as given by Moses through the intercession of angels on the Mountain of God (Galatians 3:19, Exodus 19:3). If they people kept the commandments, they would be blessed by God. One of the blessings of God is the honor (and responsibility) granted to Israel to understand the nature of God in order to get to know Him better. Verse 4 contains what is known as the "Shema Yisrael." This is a statement about the nature of God Who is one in contrast to the polytheism that existing in the worship of many gods during that era. The reading closes with perhaps the greatest single commandment, to "love the LORD your God with all [their hearts] and with all [their] soul and might" (v 5).

What does it mean for **us** to follow God's commandments and love Him with all of our heart, mind and soul? Following God means to put God at the center of our lives, to put and keep God in everything that we do. We are enabled in achieving this high calling by God's Holy Spirit Who was given to us the moment we truly understand and trusted in God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9). Jesus said, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28). As Christians, we can proclaim that although we are freed from the heavy constraints of the Mosaic Law covered in Deuteronomy, we are free to worship the Lord God in His Oneness through the empowerment that He has given to us through faith in his Son and His indwelling Holy Spirit.

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Introduction to the Second Reading:

Today's reading from Hebrews 7 is very important because it describes how Jesus fulfilled and set aside the Old Testament Law including the bloody sacrificial system. The first part of chapter 7 records the ministry of a mysterious priestly figure known as Melchizedek. Understanding the person of Melchizedek is of crucial importance to us as believers in Jesus Christ. This is because he came not from the line of Aaron which was completed after the cross but instead of a priestly line of Jesus that continues forever (Hebrews 7:3).

Second Reading:

> *Hebrews 7:23-28 NAS95 23 The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, 24 but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. 25 Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. 26 For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; 27 who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. 28 For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever.*

Unlike the Levitical priests whose death prevented them from continuing forever, the Melchizedekian line, consisting only of Melchizedek and Jesus, continues forever since the resurrected Jesus lives forever. Today's reading also reveals the one-time nature of Jesus' sacrifice in contrast to the repeated sacrificed offered by the priest which could never erase the sins of the people. Instead, these sacrifices pointed forward to the ultimate, one-time, willing sacrifice of Jesus Christ Himself for our sins. Jesus gave His life, not as a victim, but as a victor, as our High Priest Who lives forever.

As Christians living in the era after the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, we are freed from obedience to the long line of Levitical priests which never took away the remembrance of sins from the people. Instead, we see later in Hebrews what this new, permanent, one and only successor to Priest Melchizedek means for us. "Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for

all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD" (Hebrews 10:11-12). We now have only one Priest, and that Priest is Jesus Christ Himself who bore the penalty for our sins on the cross for us once and for all.

In closing, let's read what the author of Hebrews said as a summary statement in this section.

> *Hebrews 10:15-18 NAS95 15 And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying, 16 "THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART, AND ON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM," He then says, 17 "AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE." 18 Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.*

The moment we believed, God placed His law in our hearts through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit. At that same moment He forgave us of past sins, present sins, and future sins. Finally, He did away with the sacrificial system which required priests to make offerings on our behalf.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Today's reading provides a fitting close to what we read in the first reading from Deuteronomy about the greatest commandment.

Gospel Reading:

> *Mark 12:28-34 NAS95 28 One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" 29 Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD; 30 AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.' 31 "The second is this, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' There is no other commandment greater than these." 32 The scribe said to Him, "Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that HE IS ONE, AND THERE IS NO ONE ELSE BESIDES HIM; 33 AND TO LOVE HIM*

> *WITH ALL THE HEART AND WITH ALL THE UNDERSTANDING AND WITH ALL THE STRENGTH, AND TO LOVE ONE'S NEIGHBOR AS HIMSELF, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." 34 When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions.*

A scribe, someone whom we could equate to as a lawyer or a legal scholar in our day, approached Jesus with a most important question. "*What commandment is the foremost of all?"* Jesus' answer left this scribe speechless. Jesus repeated the Shema, and then added, "Love one's neighbor as Himself" (v. 33b). Loving one's neighbor was indeed a very high calling in an era when neighbors may include Roman soldiers or even Samaritans since Jerusalem from which Jesus was speaking was such a crossroads of trade and culture. Interestingly, Jesus commended the scribe by telling him that he was "not far from the kingdom of God" (v. 34). This was, it seems, because this particular scribe properly understood that the heavy matters of the Law and its sacrificial system were greatly outweighed by the spiritual component: loving the Lord God with all of his heart, mind, and soul (Deuteronomy 6:5). The scribes, as representatives of the Law, pointed the people to how they were to observe the Law and through the presentation of various sacrifices of the Levitical Priesthood. We saw in the second reading how the priesthood could never take away the people's sins. Instead, it only pointed the way to the one time, forever sacrifice that Jesus would make to take away people's sins forever. The scribe rightly understood the full meaning of the Law, the way in which it pointed people to love God, and not only God but also his neighbor.

The whole of today's readings provides substantial implication for us as Christians living with the knowledge of Jesus' fulfillment and completion of the Old Testament Law. Consider the following points in the light of all of today's readings.

- Jesus is our High Priest and the Priest for all, including both Jews and Gentiles, in contrast to the Old Testament sacrificial system which required conversion to Judaism in order to take part in the sacrificial system. However, the old sacrificial system always pointed towards its fulfillment through Jesus Christ, which then terminated the sacrifices forever.

- We no longer require priests to stand as a mediator between us and God. "For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).

- The Old Testament sacrificial system repeatedly cost the worshipers money to provide the necessary sacrifices. In contrast, Jesus paid the price for our sins and redeemed us from the curse of the Law (Galatians 3:13). The cost that we pay is in the giving of our lives to Him for our service (Ephesians 2:10).

- In contrast to the repeated offerings of sacrifices in the old system, Jesus died once for our sins forever. Students of the Bible know that the biblical authors use repetition to draw particular focus to a given concept. The author of Hebrews used repetition to show us how Jesus died once for sins and that His sacrifice could never be repeated:

  *Heb 7:27 who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did **once** for all when He offered up Himself.*
  *Heb 9:12 and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place **once** for all, having obtained eternal redemption.*
  *Heb 9:26-27 Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now **once** at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.*
  *Heb 9:27-28 And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, 28 so Christ also, having been offered **once** to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.*
  *Heb 10:10 By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ **once** for all.*
  *Heb 10:12 but He, having offered **one sacrifice** for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD,*
  *Heb 10:14 For by **one** offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.*

For us, loving God with all of our heart, mind, and soul, and loving our neighbor as ourselves is indeed a high calling. In the Gospel reading, Jesus commended the scribe in his recognition of this grandest aspect of the Law, to love God with all our mind, heart, and soul. This is in contrast to the prevailing religious system in that Jewish culture which was predicated upon the works of the people in paying for and offering sacrifices through the priestly system. We can rest in the fact that Jesus set aside the old system and now calls us to a new, fuller understanding of what it means to love God.

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Reflection Questions

1. In light of the increasing secularism of the culture in America and the world, what does it mean for YOU to follow God's commandments and love Him with all of your heart, mind and soul?

2. What is the significance of the single, one-time, forever offering of the Lord Jesus Christ willingly (not as a victim) for our sins in contrast to the ongoing, repeated ministry of the Old Testament Priests? In what ways do knowing this change the way in which you worship of God?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 11-05-2023



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we will see in the readings the frailty and difficulty of the Old Testament priesthood. We will learn about Paul's heart in serving the believers in Thessalonica and conclude with Jesus' teaching regarding the prideful religious leaders during the time of His earthly ministry.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The main theme of the Book of Malachi is the corruption that had occurred among the Levitical Priesthood. This was during the time just after the restoration of the temple and the walls of Jerusalem as recorded in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah. The priests were corrupt in many ways including offering as animal sacrifices those which were less than perfect such as the ones that were blind, lame, or sick (Ezra 1:8). As spiritual leaders, the corruption of the priests extended to the people who withheld their perfect animals and brought the imperfect ones to the them as a less than perfect offering. Such is the indictment brought by God in the opening verse.

First Reading:

Malachi 1:14 NAS95 14 "But cursed be the swindler who has a male in his flock and vows it, but sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord, for I am a great King," says the LORD of hosts, "and My name is feared among the nations."

Malachi 2:1-2 NAS95 1 "And now this commandment is for you, O priests. 2 "If you do not listen, and if you do not take it to heart to give honor to My name," says the LORD of hosts, "then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings; and indeed, I have cursed them already, because you are not taking it to heart.

Malachi 2:8-10 NAS95 8 "But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi," says the LORD of hosts. 9 "So I also have made you despised and abased before all the people, just as you are not keeping My ways but are showing partiality in the instruction. 10 "Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant of our fathers?

The lawsuit brought against the people and the priests was twofold. First, the people brought imperfect sacrifices to the priests, and second, the priests went along with this ungodly folly. Beginning in the first verse of chapter 2, God addressed the priests and promised them a curse unless they "take heart to give honor to My name" (v. 1). Verses 3 -7, which were omitted from the reading, continued the theme of God's curse upon the priests. These intervening verses also

included a reminder about God's original call to Levi who had himself walked with God in purity, provided true instruction, and "turned many from iniquity" (Ezra 2:6). When we pick up again in verse 8 the indictment continues against the corrupted priesthood. God says they "have corrupted the covenant of Levi" after which God "despised and abased [them] before the people" (v. 9). In closing, God reminded them of their fatherhood of God the Father who created them and the fact that they had profaned their covenant with Him (v. 10).

The big idea in the reading is the moral decline of the spiritual leadership of the Nation which caused the violation of their covenant with God who created them (v. 10). In light of the whole biblical context, the human priesthood founded upon Levi was always beset by sin because of the weakness inherent in every human being (except Jesus). We see this in the Book of Hebrews where it says about these priests, "he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness" (Hebrews 5:2). The Old Testament priests, even with all their failings and sin, pointed the way towards the coming Perfect, High Priest Jesus. God called the people under the authority of those priests to look beyond their earthly ministry and rather towards Jesus, the "author and finisher of their faith" (Hebrews 12:2).

As we reflect upon the declining morality and evil among the priests in today's Old Testament reading, we aren't ignoring the sinful behavior of the priests. Rather, we are to understand that the prophets predicted this spiritual decline of the Israelites and that it would culminate with the murder of the Greatest Prophet of them all, Jesus (Isaiah 53:8-9). In our day, we must recognize the prophecy that the world will grow worse and worse with evil men and seducers misleading many until the return of the Lord Jesus (2 Timothy 3:13).

In contrast to the imperfect priesthood of the Old Testament, God has provided us with a Great High Priest, Jesus the Son of God (Hebrews 4:14). Jesus is the last and only priest in the line of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:15-16), something totally unique because it was in the line of Judah, not Levi. Jesus, the "antitype" of Melchizedek the King of Jerusalem from way back during the time of Abraham, is the final, one and only High Priest Who is also a King. Jesus, called the Son of David some seventeen times in the New Testament, fulfills the prophecy made by Malachi just a few verses past the ending of today's reading. "And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to his temple" (Malachi 3:1).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The context second reading from Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians was his explanation to the church there about how the Gospel came to them. Early on in this chapter, he reminded them about how the good news came amongst severe opposition, and how he came with gentleness of speech (vv. 5-7). He also affirmed how he was "approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel" (v. 4a).

We include verses 10 – 12 from the text which were omitted from the lectionary.

Second Reading:

1 Thessalonians 2:7-13 NAS95 7 But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. 8 Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us. 9 For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. 10 You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; 11 just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, 12 so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory. 13 For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

Paul explained to the Thessalonians how he gently cared for his flock gently, like a "nursing mother" (v. 7b) while working to support himself such as not to be a burden to them (v. 9b). Paul led the church by setting the example of godly behavior while encouraging others to do the same (vv. 10 -11). Finally, Paul commends the believers for receiving his message not just as his words, but as the word given from God (v. 13).

Paul recognized that his message of the Gospel, the good news, was divinely given to him not as the words of men, like the philosophers of the day, but rather as the Word of God. Saint Peter later affirmed this fact when he said, "just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16b-17, emphasis added). Paul recognized that the power of his ministry and the empowerment of the believers came not from man but from God Himself.

God calls us as believers to look beyond the human sources of His message and instead towards God Himself. As fellow ministers of the Gospel, we are to follow Paul's example of pointing people to focus not upon ourselves, but rather upon God's message sent through us. We are to walk humbly before God and not be burdensome to those whom we may be discipling as well as to be very careful in our behavior since we represent the image of Christ until His return. This is an important point to remember, especially in terms when we find ourselves relying perhaps too heavily upon the personality of a spiritual leader therefore we at least partially forsake the source of their message. This is true even when the message the leader brings to us is completely true. However, the same caution applies even more profoundly when the spiritual leader upon whom we are relying presents a message contradictory to the clear teaching of Scripture. This is what we will explore in next in the Gospel lesson.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Just before today's reading the Pharisees had heard that Jesus had "silenced the Sadducees" (Matt 22:34), who were the ruling body of the Jews referred to throughout the Bible as the "scribes." This provoked the Pharisees to further attack Jesus for His teachings throughout the balance of chapter 22. Jesus then silenced the Pharisees, at least for a time. Matthew said, "And no one was able to answer Him a word" (Matt 22:46a). Jesus' argument with them was regarding the Sonship of the Messiah, ultimately the divinity of the "Son of David" (Matt 22:42b). Jesus quoted from Psalm 110 in order to show the Pharisees that the "Christ," or Messiah, was both the Lord God and the Son of David, therefore the Son of God. This was a profound statement of Jesus' divinity because Jesus' nemesis, the Pharisees knew that the people recognized Him as the Christ. Matthew recorded this earlier when, "the children crying out in the temple, 'Hosanna to the Son of David'" (Matt 21:15). Although many of the common people understood that Jesus was the Messiah, the scribes and the Pharisees most certainly did not. Further, all of these spiritual leaders, misunderstood the nature of the promised Messiah of God, expecting more a civil leader Who would overthrow the rulership of the Romans.

Jesus' had earlier responded to the Jews' question regarding whether He was the Messiah. We see in John's Gospel where they asked Him, "If you are the Christ, tell us plainly" (John 10:24c). Jesus responded by telling them, "I told you, and you do not believe" (John 10:25a). Jesus explained His divinity to them further, saying "I and the Father are one" "John 10:30). This created a further division between the believers whom Jesus calls His sheep (John 10:3), and the unbelievers, the thieves or robbers (John 10:8). This division between the sheep and the goats (the nonbelievers) is a continuing theme throughout the Gospels, especially in John, for example in John 6:66, where most of Jesus' disciples walked away from Him.

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Gospel Reading:

Matthew 23:1-12 NAS95 1 Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, 2 saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; 3 therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them. 4 They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger. 5 But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments. 6 They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, 7 and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men. 8 But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. 9 Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. 10 Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. 11 But the greatest among you shall be your servant. 12 Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted."

Jesus opened the reading by lumping together the ruling body of the Sadducees (the scribes) and the legalistic lay people (the Pharisees) into a single ruling body who held sway over the spiritual beliefs of the people (vv. 2-3). He told the crowds how the religious authorities positioned themselves in the seat of spiritual power (v. 2), while living lives of hypocrisy (v. 4). These leaders did things to be noticed (vv. 5 – 8) while coveting titles such as "Rabbi," "Father," and leader (vv. 7 – 10). Jesus taught the people that they were not to assign honor to these ungodly spiritual leaders who coveted these titles. Rather, they were to reserve such honor only to 1. The Father in Heaven (v. 8), 2. The One Leader Jesus Christ (v. 10), and 3. By implication the Holy Spirit as Teacher (v. 8b). Finally, Jesus affirmed the true problem of the false religious leaders, their pride (v. 12).

What does Jesus message mean to us today, are we not to call anyone father, leader, or teacher? Many of us have had, or have had spiritual fathers. Any of us who have been blessed to know their early father most certainly call him father. We see in the Scriptures that Saint Paul called himself both "father" (1 Corinthians 4:15, Philippians 2:22), and teacher (1 Timothy 2:7, 2 Timothy 1:11). And whom among us has never called their teacher, teacher? No, Jesus is telling us something else.

In light of the biblical context, and including all of the readings that we have considered today, what Jesus is teaching is an admonition against given anyone in a position of spiritual leadership **inappropriate** honor. Spiritual leaders most certainly play an important role in our lives, as do our human fathers and teachers. However, in today's reading Jesus calls us to look behind the humanity of those people, and towards the message of God and taught to us through the power of the Holy

Spirit.

In Jesus' day, the scribes and Pharisees were held by the people as the unquestionable religious authorities, not as we see them as the hypocrites described by Jesus with the benefit of 2,000 years of hindsight. Had the Jews in biblical times not obeyed these teachers they would have been subject to great scorn, discipline, and possibly even expulsion from the Jewish community. Such can be the case for us today should we reject the teachings of any spiritual leader who contradicts the clear teachings of Scripture. The Pharisees clearly did contradict Scripture, as Jesus earlier had told them that they were of their father the devil (John 8:44). In our day, God calls us to use spiritual discernment, to "test all things and hold fast that which is true" (1 Thess 5:21).

As believers in the finished work of the Lord Jesus on the cross Who bore the penalty for our sins, we can trust that Jesus has perfectly completed the work begun by the imperfect priests we read about in the first reading. These human priests, beset by sins as all humans are (Romans 3:23), pointed the way to the perfect, sinless King Priest. The priests' repeated sacrifices never took away the people's sins, it was just a covering until Jesus came. We see this in the Book of Hebrews:

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

The priestly system under the Law pointed the way towards the one single, bloody sacrifice of Jesus who willingly presented Himself on the cross in order to bear our sins. Jesus willingly gave His life and poured out His blood for us, because "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin" (Hebrews 9:22). As Christians, we remember Jesus' sacrifice for us each time we take communion, until the time when Jesus returns.

Reflection Questions

1. In the first reading we saw the corruption of the Levitical Priesthood. In verse 10 the text reads,

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"Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us?" What does the fatherhood of God for believers have to do with the condemnation that preceded this? What are some ways in which answering this question addressed specifically to the priests speaks to your own life?

2. Considering the difficulties of the human spiritual teachers we saw today, list three ways in which you can find comfort in the perfect, High Priest Jesus who completed the sacrificial system once and for all through the perfect sacrifice of His own body for us.

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 10-30-2022



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we look at a reading from Saint Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians and then the Gospel reading from Saint Luke.

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First Reading:

The first reading is from the Apocryphal book of Wisdom.

Before the LORD the whole universe is as a grain from a balance
or a drop of morning dew come down upon the earth.
But you have mercy on all, because you can do all things;
and you overlook people's sins that they may repent.
For you love all things that are
and loathe nothing that you have made;
for what you hated, you would not have fashioned.
And how could a thing remain, unless you willed it;
or be preserved, had it not been called forth by you?
But you spare all things, because they are yours,
O LORD and lover of souls,
for your imperishable spirit is in all things!
Therefore you rebuke offenders little by little,
warn them and remind them of the sins they are committing,
that they may abandon their wickedness and believe in you, O LORD!
Wisdom WIS 11:22-12:2

The reading from the Book of Wisdom affirms the biblical value that God places upon repentance. God is patient with us as sinners so that He gives us the time and wisdom we need to repent. Saint Peter affirmed this. "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). God calls us, as the reading says, to "abandon (our) wickedness and believe in (Him)", the only source of total and true forgiveness. "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Even though "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a), "the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23b).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

It was a very windy midsummer day in northern Michigan as I raced my windsurf board across the Straits of Mackinaw on my way back from Mackinaw Island, Michigan. Earlier, I sailed between the towers of the mighty Mackinaw Bridge and then returned to the shore of Lake Huron to make a few

adjustments on my sail. Next, I sailed seven miles across the Straits to Mackinaw Island and was on my way back towards the campground where we were staying. At this point the wind began calming and shifting in a direction that was going to make it very difficult to return to the spot from where I had launched. Eventually I made it back to the sandy shore of Lake Huron but was a few miles down from where I launched. I walked up the hill, borrowed a cell phone from someone, and called my wife to pick me up. I heard a strange silence on the other end, and she said, "You're alive!" As it turned out someone had given some bad information to the police who then called the Coast Guard thinking that I had gone down somewhere in the Straits. This led to a series of cascading events including a large manhunt with a helicopter, rescue divers, and local police operating from a command center in a marina in Mackinaw City. Evidently, a fellow camper had been watching me from the shore and at some point, she couldn't locate me. She then proceeded to tell one of the authorities at the campground who then called the police. The police then alerted the Coast Guard and the manhunt was on! The whole affair began from one piece of bad information. [*If you are interested you can read the story online here:*

http://www.cheboygannews.com/article/20130720/NEWS/130719421]

In the same way that a false report led to a series of cascading events that day while I was windsurfing, false information in the church can lead to a plethora of serious effects on the Christian church. This was the case in the second reading today from Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians. This was Paul's second written communication to this group of believers who had believed some false information concerning the timing of and events surrounding the return of the Lord Jesus. The overall purpose of the letter also included the encouragement of the believers in Thessalonica during their ongoing persecution for their faith.

Read the text including verses 3 – 12 which were skipped in the lectionary and are necessary to understand the context and the points which Paul was addressing.

Second Reading:

11 With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. 12 We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. 2:1 Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, 2 not to become easily unsettled

or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. 3 Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. 4 He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. 5 Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? 6 And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. 7 For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie 12 and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness. (2 THES 1:11-2: 12 NIV)

The key verses that revealed the context of Paul's address in this section were chapter 2 verses 1-2. "Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come." Evidently, the people had believed a false report from a forged letter reportedly written by Paul that Jesus had already returned. This news was very disturbing to the Thessalonians because they were enduring persecution for Jesus and if He had already returned then they had possibly been suffering for nothing. Paul had explained in his first letter to them how believers would meet the Lord Jesus upon his return. "According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever" (1Th 4:15-17). The phrase "caught up" in the original language is the word "harpazo" which means to snatch or take away. The same word translated in the Latin is "rapturo." Although the timing of this biblical event is unknown, Paul's teaching provided hope for the Thessalonian believers who were undergoing persecution. Paul was clear that Jesus' return wasn't something that they possibly could have missed since every single believer would be affected.

The Day of the Lord (DOL) is a very significant topic in both the Old and New Testaments. The DOL is the time when Jesus will return for His Church and the Father will pour out His wrath on unbelievers. The interpretation of the meaning of DOL depends upon the theological grid from which you view the events of the end times. Most scholars believe that the DOL occurs in the middle of

what is called the tribulation period, what the Book of Daniel calls this period the 70'th week. "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city" (Daniel 9:24). The DOL marks the beginning of the second half of the period known as the Great Tribulation. Joel said about this period, "Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand–a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as never was of old nor ever will be in ages to come" (Joel 2:1-2). He also said that this was a time of redemption, for many people (especially Jews) will come to faith. "And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the survivors whom the LORD calls" (v.32). Like the "catching up" from 1 Thess 4:17, the DOL wasn't something that the believers wouldn't notice. The purpose of Paul's writing to the church in Thessalonica was to correct this erroneous belief.

Paul continued with a very detailed explanation of the series of events that would lead up to the return of the Lord Jesus to carry away His Church. Paul said that a "man of lawlessness" would be revealed, a future world leader known throughout the Scripture as the "Antichrist." This satanic person would "oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God" (v.4). The lawlessness of this end time will be held back by the power of God until the time that the man of sin is revealed (vv. 7-8). The man of sin will be accompanied by "the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders" (v. 9). The people that remain on the earth during this time will "refuse to love the truth and so be saved" (v. 10b). This leads to a terrible conclusion. "For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness" (vv. 11-12). The powerful delusion is partly the counterfeit miracles, signs, and wonders brought about through satanic powers that are allowed to rule the earth during this terrible period of time. The satanic deception of the Antichrist, the person known as the False Prophet, and Satan constitute an unholy trinity that will wage war upon the people left on earth during the end times. To read about these three evil personalities read Revelation Chapters 12 and 13.

After the believers in Thessalonica read Paul's prophecy about what would happen around the time of the Lord's return, they would have been comforted to know that they hadn't missed Jesus as they had heard among the rumors that had been circulating. Paul's teaching about the end times helped them to view their suffering in light of the epic battle that would rage in the era when the Lord Jesus really did return. The "battle" though, is no battle at all, for "the Lord Jesus will overthrow [him] with the breath of his mouth" (v. 8). That shows us the undisputed ruling power of our Lord, which should bring us hope and comfort, just as it did for the Thessalonian Church.

Our take away from this passage is to heed Paul's warning. Don't be deceived – the Day of the Lord is still to come. Therefore, love the truth and let it lead you to safety. Many books have been written on the subject of the end times and we hope that everyone investigates these matters for themselves by carefully reading and studying the Bible. The brief introduction that we gave today perhaps raises more questions than it answered! We will close this brief introduction to *eschatology*, or the study of the things of the end, and move onto the Gospel lesson.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson for today is from Luke Chapter 19. It is essential to survey the context of the verses we are studying today in order to understand the full context and therefore the meaning of the text. If we back up to Luke 18:18 – 27 we found an occasion where Jesus was confronted by a certain person that was both a ruler and chief tax collector. This ruler asked Jesus, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (v. 18). Jesus explained to him the requirements of the Jewish Law, and then addressed wealth, the particular obstacle to finding God that existed in the ruler's heart. "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (18b). Read the subsequent verses in this section.

23 When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. 24 Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! 25 Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." 26 Those who heard this asked, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus replied, "What is impossible with men is possible with God." (Luke 18:23-27).

Jesus mentioned the impossibility of a camel being able to pass through the eye of a needle. Throughout the ages, a story circulated that goes something like this. Somewhere along the wall in Jerusalem there was a gate called the "eye of the needle" which required a man to dismount his animal in order to pass through at night when all of the other gates were closed. As the saying goes, the existence of this certain gate meant that when Jesus spoke of a camel going through the eye of a needle he was referring to this particular feature in Jerusalem. The legend went on to say that in this Gospel story Jesus wasn't actually saying that it was impossible for a rich man to enter heaven because he was referring to this certain pint-sized entrance along the wall of Jerusalem. What he meant was that for a man to be saved he would have to prostrate himself before God and crawl on his knees in the same way that he could fit through the tiny gate. God does require a humble and prostrate heart in order to come to faith and to a certain extent, this legend is helpful if interpreted that way. Many people have researched this matter and have found that no such gate has ever

existed in Jerusalem. Jesus gave an even better explanation of the whole matter in the text itself. Jesus knew that this young man was relying heavily upon his wealth and that it would be very difficult for him to lay it down in order to rely only upon Jesus for salvation. Jesus clarified that it wasn't impossible for rich people to be saved, but this could *only happen through the power of God*.

With this context in mind, let's move onto the Gospel lesson in Luke Chapter 19 in which Jesus encounters an unusual rich man that *does* receive salvation through the power of God. He didn't even have to locate the fictitious "eye of the needle" in Jerusalem!

Gospel Reading:

1 Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. 3 He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. 5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." 6 So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. 7 All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'" 8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." 9 Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." Luke 19:1-10

Zacchaeus' statement about giving away his wealth and repaying those he had cheated provided a glimpse into the true condition of his repentant heart. Jesus, who through the power of the Holy Spirit was able to read people's minds, understood that Zacchaeus truly did turn from pursuing wealth as his god and instead to rely upon God for his salvation. With the exhibition of his faith, Zacchaeus revealed that he was saved through belief in God. Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this house" (v. 9b). Once again, we saw that Jesus chose someone to pursue, whom everyone in the community knew was a lost sinner, to "save what was lost" (v. 10b). As we have pointed out in last week's study notes, good works and intentions do not make us a Christian, they merely reveal the condition of our heart. In this case, Zacchaeus' good works indicated that his heart had truly been changed by God's power.

What does it take for a person with power, privileges and wealth to become a Christian? The story

about the Philippian jailor in the Book of Acts helps to shed light on what it takes for a person of authority like Zacchaeus in Luke's Gospel to be saved. In this particular story, the gates of the prison flew open after an earthquake, and the jailor feared for his life because he was responsible for the security of the men inside. If one person escaped, it might mean the death penalty for him. After the jailor awoke from the earthquake, he was sure that the prisoners were gone. Instead, he found Paul and Silas inside. "He then brought them out and asked, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' They replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved– you and your household'" (Acts 16:30-31). Rich people and people in positions of authority, such as this jailor can have a very difficult time coming to faith in Jesus Christ. However, through the power of God, even the hardest hearts can be broken. The conclusion of the story is as follows. "Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had *come to believe in God*— he and his whole family" (Acts 16:32, 34 emphasis added). The Philippian jailor was saved in the same way as Zacchaeus, through faith in Jesus Christ by the hearing of the Word of God.

Reflection Questions

1. Paul told the Thessalonians not to be deceived, but instead to love the truth that will save them. Read the following list of false beliefs. With which of these false beliefs can you identify? Pick one and then study the corresponding verses such that you understand the corresponding truth.

A. False Belief: All religions lead to God. Anyone that acts according to their conscience, even if they don't trust in Jesus, will go to heaven.

John 3:16-21 NIV 16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. 19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

Acts 4:8-12 NIV 8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! 9 If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, 10 then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. 11 He is "'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.' 12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

John 14:6 NIV 6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Matthew 13:40-43 NIV 40 "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. 42 They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

Mt 25:41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

B. False Belief: God doesn't provide salvation to people who "just" repent and believe, salvation can only come through the authority of the Church.

Luke 23:32-43 NIV 32 Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. 33 When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals– one on his right, the other on his left. 34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. 35 The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One." 36 The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar 37 and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." 38 There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. 39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" 40 But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." 42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 Jesus answered him,

"I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

C. False Belief: I'm basically a good person. If I go to church every Sunday and Holy Day as well as adhere to most of the teachings of the Church, I will go to heaven.

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

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

1Corinthians 6:9-11 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

John 14:6 NIV 6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Acts 4:12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

John 3:3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

2. Now that you see these false beliefs contradict the truth, meditate on the following scripture. Then, take some time to talk to God, confess any false beliefs that you may hold, and ask God the Father to help you love the truth.

Romans 10:9-13 NIV 9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your

heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. 11 As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." 12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile– the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, 13 for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for 10-31-2021



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we learn from the Book of Deuteronomy about

the nature of God as One and the greatest commandment. We also discover the crucially important truths about God's one time sacrifice He made on our behalf and learn something about the shadowy priest figure known Melchizedek. Finally, in the Gospel we learn more about God's greatest commandment.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading from Deuteronomy, a word meaning "second law," is from chapter 6. This section opens with words fitting for a title of the entire book. "Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the LORD your God has commanded me to teach you, that you might do them in the land where you are going over to possess it" (Deut 6:1). Notice the use of the singular in the first phrase, "the commandment." The Book of the Law, the Pentateuch, contained in the first five Books of the Bible is "the Law" or the commandment together as a whole. However, as we will see in the reading that follows there is one commandment given by God to His people that is the capstone of them all, the calling for God's covenant people to make Him the center of their lives. We will see how this plays out in today's reading.

First Reading:

Deuteronomy 6:2-6 NAS95 2 so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. 3 "O Israel, you should listen and be careful to do it, that it may be well with you and that you may multiply greatly, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey. 4 "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! 5 "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart.

As we saw in the introduction, God called the people to follow His commandments in the land to which they were going, meaning the Promised Land in Israel into which they were preparing to cross after a forty year wait (Joshua 5:6). God called the people to keep His commandments (v. 2a) so that their days would "be prolonged" (v. 2d). The Mosaic Covenant was conditional in nature, and in order to reap the benefits of it the people had to be obedient to the Law as given by Moses

through the intercession of angels on the Mountain of God (Galatians 3:19, Exodus 19:3). If they people kept the commandments, they would blessed by God. One of the blessings of God is the honor (and responsibility) granted to Israel to understand the nature of God in order to get to know Him better. Verse 4 contains what is known as the "Shema Yisrael." This is a statement about the nature of God Who is one in contrast to the polytheism that existing in the worship of many gods during that era. The reading closes with perhaps the greatest single commandment, to "love the LORD your God with all [their hearts] and with all [their] soul and might" (v 5).

What does it mean for **us** to follow God's commandments and love Him with all of our heart, mind and soul? Following God means to put God at the center of our lives, to put and keep God in everything that we do. We are enabled in achieving this high calling by God's Holy Spirit Who was given to us the moment we truly understand and trusted in God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9). Jesus said, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28). As Christians, we can proclaim that although we are freed from the heavy constraints of the Mosaic Law covered in Deuteronomy, we are free to worship the Lord God in His Oneness through the empowerment that He has given to us through faith in his Son and His indwelling Holy Spirit.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Today's reading from Hebrews 7 is very important because it describes how Jesus fulfilled and set aside the Old Testament Law including the bloody sacrificial system. The first part of chapter 7 records the ministry of a mysterious priestly figure known as Melchizedek. Understanding the person of Melchizedek is of crucial importance to us as believers in Jesus Christ. This is because he came not from the line of Aaron which was completed after the cross but instead of a priestly line of Jesus that continues forever (Hebrews 7:3).

Second Reading:

Hebrews 7:23-28 NAS95 23 The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, 24 but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. 25 Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. 26 For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; 27 who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up

sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. 28 For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever.

Unlike the Levitical priests whose death prevented them from continuing forever, the Melchizedekian line, consisting only of Melchizedek and Jesus, continues forever since the resurrected Jesus lives forever. Today's reading also reveals the one-time nature of Jesus' sacrifice in contrast to the repeated sacrificed offered by the priest which could never erase the sins of the people. Instead, these sacrifices pointed forward to the ultimate, one-time, willing sacrifice of Jesus Christ Himself for our sins. Jesus gave His life, not as a victim, but as a victor, as our High Priest Who lives forever.

As Christians living in the era after the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, we are freed from obedience to the long line of Levitical priests which never took away the remembrance of sins from the people. Instead, we see later in Hebrews what this new, permanent, one and only successor to Priest Melchizedek means for us. "Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD" (Hebrews 10:11-12). We now have only one Priest, and that Priest is Jesus Christ Himself who bore the penalty for our sins on the cross for us once and for all.

In closing, let's read what the author of Hebrews said as a summary statement in this section.

Hebrews 10:15-18 NAS95 15 And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying, 16 "THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART, AND ON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM," He then says, 17 "AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE." 18 Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.

The moment we believed, God placed His law in our hearts through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit. At that same moment He forgave us of past sins, present sins, and future sins. Finally, He did away with the sacrificial system which required priests to make offerings on our behalf.

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

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Today's reading provides a fitting close to what we read in the first reading from Deuteronomy about the greatest commandment.

Gospel Reading:

Mark 12:28-34 NAS95 28 One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" 29 Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD; 30 AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.' 31 "The second is this, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' There is no other commandment greater than these." 32 The scribe said to Him, "Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that HE IS ONE, AND THERE IS NO ONE ELSE BESIDES HIM; 33 AND TO LOVE HIM WITH ALL THE HEART AND WITH ALL THE UNDERSTANDING AND WITH ALL THE STRENGTH, AND TO LOVE ONE'S NEIGHBOR AS HIMSELF, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." 34 When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions.

A scribe, someone whom we could equate to as a lawyer or a legal scholar in our day, approached Jesus with a most important question. "*What commandment is the foremost of all?*" Jesus' answer left this scribe speechless. Jesus repeated the Shema, and then added, "Love one's neighbor as Himself" (v. 33b). Loving one's neighbor was indeed a very high calling in an era when neighbors may include Roman soldiers or even Samaritans since Jerusalem from which Jesus was speaking was such a crossroads of trade and culture. Interestingly, Jesus commended the scribe by telling him that he was "not far from the kingdom of God" (v. 34). This was, it seems, because this particular scribe properly understood that the heavy matters of the Law and its sacrificial system were greatly outweighed by the spiritual component: loving the Lord God with all of his heart, mind, and soul (Deuteronomy 6:5). The scribes, as representatives of the Law, pointed the people to how they were to observe the Law and through the presentation of various sacrifices of the Levitical Priesthood. We saw in the second reading how the priesthood could never take away the people's sins. Instead, it only pointed the way to the one time, forever sacrifice that Jesus would make to take away people's sins forever. The scribe rightly understood the full meaning of the Law, the way in which it pointed people to love God, and not only God but also his neighbor.

The whole of today's readings provides substantial implication for us as Christians living with the knowledge of Jesus' fulfillment and completion of the Old Testament Law. Consider the following points in light of all of today's readings.

- Jesus is our High Priest and the Priest for all, including both Jews and Gentiles, in contrast to the Old Testament sacrificial system which required conversion to Judaism in order to take part in the sacrificial system. However, the old sacrificial system always pointed towards its fulfillment through Jesus Christ, which then terminated the sacrifices forever.
- We no longer require priests to stand as a mediator between us and God. "For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).
- The Old Testament sacrificial system repeatedly cost the worshipers money to provide the necessary sacrifices. In contrast, Jesus paid the price for our sins and redeemed us from the curse of the Law (Galatians 3:13). The cost that we pay is in the giving of our lives to Him for our service (Ephesians 2:10).
- In contrast to the repeated offerings of sacrifices in the old system, Jesus died once for our sins forever. Students of the Bible know that the biblical authors use repetition to draw particular focus to a given concept. The author of Hebrews used repetition to show us how Jesus died once for sins and that His sacrifice could never be repeated:

*Heb 7:27 who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did **once** for all when He offered up Himself.*

*Heb 9:12 and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place **once** for all, having obtained eternal redemption.*

*Heb 9:26-27 Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now **once** at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.*

*Heb 9:27-28 And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, 28 so Christ also, having been offered **once** to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.*

*Heb 10:10 By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ **once** for all.*

*Heb 10:12 but He, having offered **one sacrifice** for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD,*

*Heb 10:14 For by **one** offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.*

For us, loving God with all of our heart, mind, and soul, and loving our neighbor as ourselves is indeed a high calling. In the Gospel reading Jesus commended the scribe in his recognition of this grandest aspect of the Law, to love God with all our mind, heart, and soul. This is in contrast to the prevailing religious system in that Jewish culture which was predicated upon the works of the people in paying for and offering sacrifices through the priestly system. We can rest in the fact that Jesus set aside the old system and now calls us to a new, fuller understanding of what it means to love God.

Reflection Questions

1. In light of the increasing secularism of the culture in America and the world, what does it mean for YOU to follow God's commandments and love Him with all of your heart, mind and soul?

2. What is the significance of the single, one-time, forever offering of the Lord Jesus Christ willingly (not as a victim) for our sins in contrast to the ongoing, repeated ministry of the Old Testament Priests? In what ways does knowing this change the way in which you worship of God?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 11-03-2019



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we look at a reading from Saint Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians and then the Gospel reading from Saint Luke.

First Reading:

The first reading is from the Apocryphal book of Wisdom.

> *Before the LORD the whole universe is as a grain from a balance*
>
> *or a drop of morning dew come down upon the earth.*
>
> *But you have mercy on all, because you can do all things;*
>
> *and you overlook people's sins that they may repent.*
>
> *For you love all things that are*
>
> *and loathe nothing that you have made;*
>
> *for what you hated, you would not have fashioned.*

And how could a thing remain, unless you willed it;

or be preserved, had it not been called forth by you?

But you spare all things, because they are yours,

O LORD and lover of souls,

for your imperishable spirit is in all things!

Therefore you rebuke offenders little by little,

warn them and remind them of the sins they are committing,

that they may abandon their wickedness and believe in you, O LORD!

Wisdom WIS 11:22-12:2

The reading from the Book of Wisdom affirms the biblical value that God places upon repentance. God I patient with us as sinners so that He gives us the time and wisdom we need to repent. Saint Peter affirmed this. "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). God calls us, as the reading says, to "abandon (our) wickedness and believe in (Him)", the only source of total and true forgiveness. "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Even though "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a), "the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23b).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

It was a very windy midsummer day in northern Michigan as I raced my windsurf board across the Straits of Mackinaw on my way back from Mackinaw Island, Michigan. Earlier, I sailed between the towers of the mighty Mackinaw Bridge and then returned to the shore of Lake Huron to make a few adjustments on my sail. Next, I sailed seven miles across the Straits to Mackinaw Island and was on my way back towards the campground where we were staying. At this point the wind began calming and shifting in a direction that was going to make it very difficult to return to the spot from where I had launched. Eventually I made it back to the sandy shore on Lake Huron, but was a few miles down from where I launched. I walked up the hill, borrowed a cell phone from someone, and called my wife to pick me up. I heard a strange silence on the other end and she said, "You're alive!" As it turned out someone had given some bad information to the police who then called the Coast Guard thinking that I had gone down somewhere in the Straits. This led to a series of cascading events including a large manhunt with a helicopter, rescue divers, and local police operating from a command center in a marina in Mackinaw City. Evidently, a fellow camper had been watching me

from the shore and at some point, she couldn't locate me. She then proceeded to tell one of the authorities at the campground who then called the police. The police then alerted the Coast Guard and the manhunt was on! The whole affair began by one piece of bad information. [*If you are interested you can read the story online here:*

http://www.cheboygannews.com/article/20130720/NEWS/130719421]

In the same way that a false report led to a series of cascading events that day while I was windsurfing, false information in the church can lead to a plethora of serious effects in the Christian church. This was the case in the second reading today from Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians. This was Paul's second written communication to this group of believers who had believed some false information concerning the timing of and events surrounding the return of the Lord Jesus. The overall purpose of the letter also included the encouragement of the believers in Thessalonica during their ongoing persecution for their faith.

Read the text including verses 3 – 12 which were skipped in the lectionary and are necessary understand the context and the points which Paul were addressing.

Second Reading:

> *11 With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. 12 We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. 2:1 Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, 2 not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. 3 Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. 4 He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. 5 Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? 6 And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. 7 For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie 12 and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness. (2 THES 1:11-2: 12 NIV)*

The key verses that revealed the context of Paul's address in this section were chapter 2 verses 1-2. "Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come." Evidently, the people had believed a false report from a forged letter reportedly written by Paul that Jesus had already returned. This news was very disturbing to the Thessalonians because they were enduring persecution for Jesus and if He had already returned then they had possibly been suffering for nothing. Paul had explained in his first letter to them how believers would meet the Lord Jesus upon his return. "According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever" (1Th 4:15-17). The phrase "caught up" in the original language is the word "harpazo" which means to snatch or take away. The same word translated in the Latin is "rapturo." Although the timing of this biblical event is unknown, Paul's teaching provided hope for the Thessalonian believers who were undergoing persecution. Paul was clear that Jesus' return wasn't something that they possibly could have missed since every single believer would be affected.

The Day of the Lord (DOL) is a very significant topic in both the Old and New Testament. The DOL is the time when Jesus will return for His Church and the Father will pour out His wrath on unbelievers. The interpretation of the meaning of DOL depends upon the theological grid from which you view the events of the end times. Most scholars believe that the DOL occurs in the middle of what is called the tribulation period, what the Book of Daniel calls this period the 70'th week. "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city" (Daniel 9:24). The DOL marks the beginning of the second half of the period known as the Great Tribulation. Joel said about this period, "Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand–a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as never was of old nor ever will be in ages to come" (Joel 2:1-2). He also said that this was a time of redemption, for many people (especially Jews) will come to faith. "And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the survivors whom the LORD calls" (v.32). Like the "catching up" from 1 Thess 4:17, the DOL wasn't something that the believers wouldn't notice. The purpose of Paul's writing to the church in Thessalonica was to correct this erroneous belief.

Paul continued with a very detailed explanation of the series of events that would lead up to the return of the Lord Jesus to carry away His Church. Paul said that a "man of lawlessness" would be revealed, a future world leader known throughout the Scripture as the "Antichrist." This satanic

person would "oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God" (v.4). The lawlessness of this end time will be held back by the power of God until the time that the man of sin is revealed (vv.7-8). The man of sin will be accompanied by "the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders" (v.9). The people that remain on the earth during this time will "refuse to love the truth and so be saved" (v.10b). This leads to a terrible conclusion. "For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness" (vv. 11-12). The powerful delusion is partly the counterfeit miracles, signs, and wonders brought about through satanic powers that are allowed to rule the earth during this terrible period of time. The satanic deception of the Antichrist, the person known as the False Prophet, and Satan constitute an unholy trinity that will wage war upon the people left on earth during the end times. To read about these three evil personalities read Revelation Chapters 12 and 13.

After the believers in Thessalonica read Paul's prophecy about what would happen around the time of the Lord's return, they would have been comforted to know that they hadn't missed Jesus as they had heard among the rumors that had been circulating. Paul's teaching about the end times helped them to view their suffering in light of the epic battle that would rage in the era when the Lord Jesus really did return. The "battle" though is no battle at all, for "the Lord Jesus will overthrow [him] with the breath of his mouth" (v.8). That shows us the undisputed ruling power of our Lord, which should bring us hope and comfort, just as it did for the Thessalonian Church.

Our take away from this passage is to heed Paul's warning. Don't be deceived – the Day of the Lord is still to come. Therefore, love the truth and let it lead you to safety. Many books have been written on the subject of the end times and we hope that everyone investigates these matters for themselves by carefully reading and studying the Bible. The brief introduction that we gave today perhaps raises more questions than it answered! We will close this brief introduction to *eschatology*, or the study of the things of the end, and move onto the Gospel lesson.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson for today is from Luke Chapter 19. It is essential to survey the context of the verses we are studying today in order to understand the full context and therefore the meaning of the text. If we back up to Luke 18:18 – 27 we found an occasion where Jesus was confronted by a certain person that was both a ruler and chief tax collector. This ruler asked Jesus, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (v. 18). Jesus explained to him the requirements of the Jewish Law, and then addressed wealth, the particular obstacle to finding God that existed in the ruler's heart. "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (18b). Read the subsequent verses in this section.

> *23 When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. 24 Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! 25 Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of*

> *God." 26 Those who heard this asked, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus replied, "What is impossible with men is possible with God." (Luke 18:23-27).*

Jesus mentioned the impossibly of a camel being able to pass through the eye of a needle. Throughout the ages, a story circulated that goes something like this. Somewhere along the wall in Jerusalem there was a gate called the "eye of the needle" which required a man to dismount his animal in order to pass through at night when all of the other gates were closed. As the saying goes, the existence of this certain gate meant that when Jesus spoke of a camel going through the eye of a needle he was referring to this particular feature in Jerusalem. The legend went on to say that in this Gospel story Jesus wasn't actually saying that it was impossible for a rich man to enter heaven because he was referring to this certain pint-sized entrance along the wall of Jerusalem. What he meant was that for a man to be saved he would have to prostrate himself before God and crawl on his knees in the same way that he could fit through the tiny gate. God does require a humble and prostrate heart in order to come to faith and to a certain extent, this legend is helpful if interpreted that way. Many people have researched this matter and have found that no such gate has ever existed in Jerusalem. Jesus gave an even better explanation of the whole matter in the text itself. Jesus knew that this young man was relying heavily upon his wealth and that it would be very difficult for him to lay it down in order to rely only upon Jesus for salvation. Jesus clarified that it wasn't impossible for rich people to be saved, but this could *only happen through the power of God*.

With this context in mind, let's move onto the Gospel lesson in Luke Chapter 19 in which Jesus encounters an unusual rich man that *does* receive salvation through the power of God. He didn't even have to locate the fictitious "eye of the needle" in Jerusalem!

Gospel Reading:

> *1 Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. 3 He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. 5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." 6 So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. 7 All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'" 8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." 9 Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." Luke 19:1-10*

Zacchaeus' statement about giving away his wealth and repaying those he had cheated provided a

glimpse into the true condition of his repentant heart. Jesus, who through the power of the Holy Spirit was able to read people's minds, understood that Zacchaeus truly did turn from pursuing wealth as his god rely upon God for his salvation. With the exhibition of his faith, Zacchaeus revealed that he was saved through belief in God. Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this house" (v.9b). Once again, we saw that Jesus chose someone to pursue whom everyone in the community knew was a lost sinner, to "save what was lost" (v.10b). As we have pointed out in last week's study notes, good works and intentions do not make us a Christian, they merely reveal the condition of our heart. In this case, Zacchaeus' good works indicated that his heart had truly been changed by God's power.

What does it take for a person with power, privileges and wealth to become a Christian? The story about the Philippian jailor in the Book of Acts helps to shed light on what it takes for a person of authority like Zacchaeus in Luke's Gospel to be saved. In this particular story, the gates of the prison flew open after an earthquake, and the jailor feared for his life because he was responsible for the security of the men inside. If one person escaped, it might mean the death penalty for him. After the jailor awoke from the earthquake, he was sure that the prisoners were gone. Instead, he found Paul and Silas inside. "He then brought them out and asked, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' They replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved– you and your household'" (Acts 16:30-31). Rich people and people in positions of authority such as this jailor can have a very difficult time coming to faith in Jesus Christ. However, through the power of God even the hardest hearts can be broken. The conclusion of the story is as follows. "Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had *come to believe in God*— he and his whole family" (Acts 16:32,34 emphasis added). The Philippian jailor was saved in the same way as Zacchaeus, through faith in Jesus Christ by the hearing of the Word of God.

Reflection Questions

1. Paul told the Thessalonians not to be deceived but instead to love the truth that will save them. Read the following list of false beliefs. With which of these false beliefs can you identify? Pick one and then study the corresponding verses such that you understand the corresponding truth.

A. False Belief: All religions lead to God. Anyone that acts according to their conscience, even if they don't trust in Jesus, will go to heaven.

> *John 3:16-21 NIV 16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. 19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly*

that what he has done has been done through God."

Acts 4:8-12 NIV 8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! 9 If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, 10 then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. 11 He is "'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.' 12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

John 14:6 NIV 6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Matthew 13:40-43 NIV 40 "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. 42 They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

Mt 25:41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

B. False Belief: God doesn't provide salvation to people who "just" repent and believe, salvation can only come through the authority of the Church.

Luke 23:32-43 NIV 32 Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. 33 When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals– one on his right, the other on his left. 34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. 35 The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One." 36 The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar 37 and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." 38 There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. 39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" 40 But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our

> *deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." 42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."*

C. False Belief: I'm basically a good person. If I go to church every Sunday and Holy Day as well as adhere to most of the teachings of the Church, I will go to heaven.

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

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

> *1Corinthians 6:9-11 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

> *John 14:6 NIV 6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

> *Acts 4:12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."*

> *John 3:3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."*

2. Now that you see these false beliefs contradict the truth, meditate on the following scripture. Then, take some time to talk to God, confess any false beliefs that you may hold, and ask God the Father to help you love the truth.

> *Romans 10:9-13 NIV 9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. 11 As the*

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> *Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." 12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile– the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, 13 for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

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Mass-Study-Notes-for-Sunday_11-03-2019.pdfDownload

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 11-04-2018



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we learn from the Book of Deuteronomy about the nature of God as One and the greatest commandment. We also discover the crucially important

truths about God's one time sacrifice He made on our behalf and learn something about the shadowy priest figure known Melchizedek. Finally, in the Gospel we learn more about God's greatest commandment.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading from Deuteronomy, a word meaning "second law," is from chapter 6. This section opens with words fitting for a title of the entire book. "Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the LORD your God has commanded me to teach you, that you might do them in the land where you are going over to possess it" (Deut 6:1). Notice the use of the singular in the first phrase, "the commandment." The Book of the Law, the Pentateuch, contained in the first five Books of the Bible is "the Law" or the commandment together as a whole. However, as we will see in the reading that follows there is one commandment given by God to His people that is the capstone of them all, the calling for God's covenant people to make Him the center of their lives. We will see how this plays out in today's reading.

First Reading:

> *Deuteronomy 6:2-6 NAS95 2 so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. 3 "O Israel, you should listen and be careful to do it, that it may be well with you and that you may multiply greatly, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey. 4 "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! 5 "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart.*

As we saw in the introduction, God called the people to follow His commandments in the land to which they were going, meaning the Promised Land in Israel into which they were preparing to cross after a forty year wait (Joshua 5:6). God called the people to keep His commandments (v. 2a) so that their days would "be prolonged" (v. 2d). The Mosaic Covenant was conditional in nature, and in order to reap the benefits of it the people had to be obedient to the Law as given by Moses through the intercession of angels on the Mountain of God (Galatians 3:19, Exodus 19:3). If they people kept the commandments, they would blessed by God. One of the blessings of God is the honor (and responsibility) granted to Israel to understand the nature of God in order to get to know Him better. Verse 4 contains what is known as the "Shema Yisrael." This is a statement about the nature of God Who is one in contrast to the polytheism that existing in the worship of many gods during that era. The reading closes with perhaps the greatest single commandment, to "love the LORD your God with all [their hearts] and with all [their] soul and might" (v 5).

What does it mean for **us** to follow God's commandments and love Him with all of our heart, mind and soul? Following God means to put God at the center of our lives, to put and keep God in everything that we do. We are enabled in achieving this high calling by God's Holy Spirit Who was

given to us the moment we truly understand and trusted in God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9). Jesus said, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28). As Christians we can proclaim that although we are freed from the heavy constraints of the Mosaic Law covered in Deuteronomy, we are free to worship the Lord God in His Oneness through the empowerment that He has given to us through faith in his Son and His indwelling Holy Spirit.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Today's reading from Hebrews 7 is very important because it describes how Jesus fulfilled and set aside the Old Testament Law including the bloody sacrificial system. The first part of chapter 7 records the ministry of a mysterious priestly figure known as Melchizedek. Understanding the person of Melchizedek is of crucial importance to us as believers in Jesus Christ. This is because he came not from the line of Aaron which was completed after the cross but instead of a priestly line of Jesus that continues forever (Hebrews 7:3).

Second Reading:

> *Hebrews 7:23-28 NAS95 23 The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, 24 but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. 25 Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. 26 For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; 27 who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. 28 For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever.*

Unlike the Levitical priests whose death prevented them from continuing forever, the Melchizedekian line, consisting only of Melchizedek and Jesus, continues forever since the resurrected Jesus lives forever. Today's reading also reveals the one-time nature of Jesus' sacrifice in contrast to the repeated sacrificed offered by the priest which could never erase the sins of the people. Instead, these sacrifices pointed forward to the ultimate, one-time, willing sacrifice of Jesus Christ Himself for our sins. Jesus gave His life not as a victim, but as a victor, as our High Priest Who lives forever.

As Christians living in the era after the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, we are freed from obedience to the long line of Levitical priests which never took away the remembrance of sins from the people. Instead, we see later in Hebrews what this new, permanent, one and only successor to Priest Melchizedek means for us. "Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD" (Hebrews 10:11-12). We now have only one

Priest, and that Priest is Jesus Christ Himself who bore the penalty for our sins on the cross for us once and for all.

In closing, let's read what the author of Hebrews said as a summary statement in this section.

> *Hebrews 10:15-18 NAS95 15 And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying, 16 "THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART, AND ON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM," He then says, 17 "AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE." 18 Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.*

The moment we believed, God placed His law in our hearts through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit. At that same moment He forgave us of past sins, present sins, and future sins. Finally, He did away with the sacrificial system which required priests to make offerings on our behalf.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Today's reading provides a fitting close to what we read in the first reading from Deuteronomy about the greatest commandment.

Gospel Reading:

> *Mark 12:28-34 NAS95 28 One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" 29 Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD; 30 AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.' 31 "The second is this, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' There is no other commandment greater than these." 32 The scribe said to Him, "Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that HE IS ONE, AND THERE IS NO ONE ELSE BESIDES HIM; 33 AND TO LOVE HIM WITH ALL THE HEART AND WITH ALL THE UNDERSTANDING AND WITH ALL THE STRENGTH, AND TO LOVE ONE'S NEIGHBOR AS HIMSELF, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." 34 When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions.*

A scribe, someone whom we could equate to as a lawyer or legal scholar in our day, approached Jesus with a most important question. "*What commandment is the foremost of all?*" Jesus' answer left this scribe speechless. Jesus repeated the Shema, and then added, "Love one's neighbor as Himself" (v. 33b). Loving one's neighbor was indeed a very high calling in an era when neighbors may include Roman soldiers or even Samaritans since Jerusalem from which Jesus was speaking was such a crossroads of trade and culture. Interestingly, Jesus commended the scribe by telling him that he was "not far from the kingdom of God" (v. 34). This was, it seems, because this particular scribe properly understood that the heavy matters of the Law and it's sacrificial system were greatly

outweighed by the spiritual component: loving the Lord God with all of his heart, mind, and soul (Deuteronomy 6:5). The scribes, as representatives of the Law, pointed the people to how they were to observe the Law and through the presentation of various sacrifices through the Levitical Priesthood. We saw in the second reading how the priesthood could never take away the people's sins. Instead, it only pointed the way to the one time, forever sacrifice that Jesus would make to take away people's sins forever. The scribe rightly understood the fuller meaning of the Law, the way in which it pointed people to love God, and not only God but also his neighbor.

The whole of today's readings provides substantial implication for us as Christians living with the knowledge of Jesus' fulfillment and completion of the Old Testament Law. Consider the following points in light of all of today's readings.

- Jesus is our High Priest and the Priest for all, including both Jews and Gentiles, in contrast to the Old Testament sacrificial system which required conversion to Judaism in order to take part in the sacrificial system. However, the old sacrificial system always pointed towards its fulfillment through Jesus Christ which then terminate the sacrifices forever.
- We no longer require priests to stand as a mediator between us and God. "For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).
- The Old Testament sacrificial system repeatedly cost the worshipers money to provide the necessary sacrifices. In contrast, Jesus paid the price for our sins and redeemed us from the curse of the Law (Galatians 3:13). The cost that we pay is in the giving of our lives to Him for our service (Ephesians 2:10).
- In contrast to the repeated offerings of sacrifices in the old system, Jesus died once for our sins forever. Students of the Bible know that the biblical authors use repetition to draw particular focus to a given concept. The author of Hebrews used repetition to show us how Jesus died once for sins and that His sacrifice could never be repeated:
    - *Heb 7:27 who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did **once** for all when He offered up Himself.*
    - *Heb 9:12 and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place **once** for all, having obtained eternal redemption.*
    - *Heb 9:26-27 Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now **once** at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.*
    - *Heb 9:27-28 And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, 28 so Christ also, having been offered **once** to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.*
    - *Heb 10:10 By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ **once** for all.*
    - *Heb 10:12 but He, having offered **one sacrifice** for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD,*
    - *Heb 10:14 For by **one** offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.*

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For us, loving God with all of our heart, mind, and soul, and loving our neighbor as ourselves is indeed a high calling. In the Gospel reading Jesus commended the scribe in his recognition of this grandest aspect of the Law, to love God with all our mind, heart, and soul. This is in contrast to the prevailing religious system in that Jewish culture which was predicated upon the works of the people in paying for and offering sacrifices through the priestly system. We can rest in the fact that Jesus set aside the old system and now calls us to a new, fuller understanding of what it means to love God.

Reflection Questions

1. In light of the increasing secularism of the culture in America and the world, what does it mean for YOU to follow God's commandments and love Him with all of your heart, mind and soul?
2. What is the significance of the single, one-time, forever offering of the Lord Jesus Christ willingly (not as a victim) for our sins in contrast to ongoing, repeated ministry of the Old Testament Priests? In what ways does knowing this change the way you view your worship of God?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 11-05-2017

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we will see in the readings the frailty and difficulty of the Old Testament priesthood. We will learn about Paul's heart in serving the believers in Thessalonica and conclude with Jesus' teaching regarding the prideful religious leaders during the time of His earthly ministry.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The main theme of the Book of Malachi is the corruption that had occurred among the Levitical Priesthood. This was during the time just after the restoration of the temple and walls of Jerusalem as recorded in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah. The priests were corrupt in many ways including offering animal sacrifices less than perfect animals such as ones that were blind, lame, or sick (Ezra 1:8).

As spiritual leaders, the corruption of the priests extended to the people who withheld their perfect animals and brought the imperfect ones to the them as a less than perfect offering. Such is the indictment brought by God in the opening verse.

First Reading:

Malachi 1:14 NAS95 14 "But cursed be the swindler who has a male in his flock and vows it, but sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord, for I am a great King," says the LORD of hosts, "and My name is feared among the nations."

Malachi 2:1-2 NAS95 1 "And now this commandment is for you, O priests. 2 "If you do not listen, and if you do not take it to heart to give honor to My name," says the LORD of hosts, "then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings; and indeed, I have cursed them already, because you

are not taking it to heart.

Malachi 2:8-10 NAS95 8 "But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi," says the LORD of hosts. 9 "So I also have made you despised and abased before all the people, just as you are not keeping My ways but are showing partiality in the instruction. 10 "Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant of our fathers?

The lawsuit brought by against the people and the priests was twofold. First, the people brought imperfect sacrifices to the priests and second, the priests went along with this ungodly folly. Beginning in the first verse of chapter 2, God addressed the priests and promised them a curse unless they "take heart to give honor to My name" (v. 1). Verses 3 -7, which were omitted from the reading, continued the theme of God's curse upon the priests. These intervening verses also included a reminder about God's original call to Levi who had himself walked with God in purity, provided true instruction, and "turned many from iniquity" (Ezra 2:6). When we pick up again in verse 8 the indictment continues against the corrupted priesthood. God says they "have corrupted the covenant of Levi" after which God "despised and abased [them] before the people" (v. 9). In closing, God reminded them of their fatherhood in God the Father who created them and the fact that they had profaned their covenant with Him (v. 10).

The big idea in the reading is the moral decline of the spiritual leadership of the Nation which caused the violation of their covenant with God who created them (v. 10). In light of the whole biblical context the priesthood the human priesthood founded upon Levi was always beset by sin because of the weakness inherent in every human being (except Jesus). We see this in the Book of Hebrews where it says about these priests, "he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness" (Hebrews 5:2). The Old Testament priests, even with all their failings and sin, pointed the way towards the coming Perfect, High Priest Jesus. God called the people under the authority of those priests to look beyond their earthly ministry and rather towards Jesus, the "author and finisher of their faith" (Hebrews 12:2).

As we reflect upon the declining morality and evil among the priests in today's Old Testament reading, we aren't to ignore the sinful behavior of the priests. Rather, we are to understand that the prophets predicted this spiritual decline of the Israelites and that it would culminate with the murder of the Greatest Prophet of them all, Jesus (Isaiah 53:8-9). In our day, we must recognize the prophecy that the world will grow worse and worse with evil men and seducers misleading many until the return of the Lord Jesus (2 Timothy 3:13).

In contrast to the imperfect priesthood of the Old Testament, God has provided us with a Great High Priest, Jesus the Son of God (Hebrews 4:14). Jesus is the last and only priest in the line of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:15-16), something totally unique because it was in the line of Judah not Levi. Jesus, the "antitype" of Melchizedek the King of Jerusalem from way back during the time of Abraham, is the final, one and only High Priest Who is also a King. Jesus, called the Son of David

some seventeen times in the New Testament, fulfills the prophecy made by Malachi just a few verses past the ending of today's reading. "And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to his temple" (Malachi 3:1).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The context second reading from Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians was his explanation to the church there about how the Gospel came to them. Early on in this chapter he reminded them about how the good news came amongst severe opposition, and how he came with gentleness of speech (vv. 5-7). He also affirmed how he was "approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel" (v. 4a).

We include verses 10 – 12 from the text which were omitted from the lectionary.

Second Reading:

1 Thessalonians 2:7-13 NAS95 7 But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. 8 Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us. 9 For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. 10 You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; 11 just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, 12 so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory. 13 For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

Paul explained to the Thessalonians how he gently cared for his flock gently, like a "nursing mother" (v. 7b) while working to support himself such as not to be a burden to them (v. 9b). Paul led the church by setting the example of godly behavior while encouraging others to do the same (vv. 10 -11). Finally, Paul commends the believers for receiving his message not just as his words, but as the word given from God (v. 13).

Paul recognized that his message of the Gospel, the good news, was divinely given to him not as the words of men, like the philosophers of the day, but rather as the Word of God. Saint Peter later affirmed this fact when he said, "just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16b-17, emphasis added). Paul recognized that the power of his ministry and the empowerment of the believers came not from man but from God Himself.

God calls us as believers to look beyond the human sources of His message and instead towards God Himself. As fellow ministers of the Gospel we are to follow Paul's example of pointing people to focus

not upon ourselves but rather upon God's message sent through us. We are to walk humbly before God and not be burdensome to those whom we may be discipling as well as to be very careful in our behavior since we represent the image of Christ until His return. This is an important point to remember especially in terms when we find ourselves relying perhaps too heavily upon the personality of a spiritual leader wherefore we at least partially forsake the source of their message. This is true even when the message the leader brings to us is completely true. However, the same caution applies even more profoundly when the spiritual leader upon whom we are relying presents a message contradictory to the clear teaching of Scripture. This is what we will explore in next in the Gospel lesson.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Just before today's reading the Pharisees had heard that Jesus had "silenced the Sadducees" (Matt 22:34), who were the ruling body of the Jews referred to throughout the Bible as the "scribes." This provoked the Pharisees to further attack Jesus for His teachings throughout the balance of chapter 22. Jesus then silenced the Pharisees, at least for a time. Matthew said, "And no one was able to answer Him a word" (Matt 22:46a). Jesus' argument with them was regarding the Sonship of the Messiah, ultimately the divinity of the "Son of David" (Matt 22:42b). Jesus quoted from Psalm 110 in order to show the Pharisees that the "Christ," or Messiah, was both the Lord God and the Son of David, therefore the Son of God. This was a profound statement of Jesus' divinity because Jesus' nemesis the Pharisees knew that the people recognized Him as the Christ. Matthew recorded this earlier when, "the children crying out in the temple, 'Hosanna to the Son of David'" (Matt 21:15). Although many of the common people understood that Jesus was the Messiah, the scribes and the Pharisees most certainly did not. Further, all of these spiritual leaders, misunderstood the nature of the promised Messiah of God, expecting more a civil leader Who would overthrow the rulership of the Romans.

Jesus' had earlier responded to the Jews' question regarding whether He was the Messiah. We see in John's Gospel where they asked Him, "If you are the Christ, tell us plainly" (John 10:24c). Jesus responded by telling them, "I told you, and you do not believe" (John 10:25a). Jesus explained His divinity to them further, saying "I and the Father are one" "John 10:30). This created a further division between the believers whom Jesus calls His sheep (John 10:3), and the unbelievers, the thieves or robbers (John 10:8). This division between the sheep and the goats (the nonbelievers) is a continuing theme throughout the Gospels, especially in John, for example in John 6:66, where most of Jesus' disciples walked away from Him.

Gospel Reading:

Matthew 23:1-12 NAS95 1 Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, 2 saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; 3 therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them. 4 They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger. 5 But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they

broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments. 6 They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, 7 and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men. 8 But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. 9 Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. 10 Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. 11 But the greatest among you shall be your servant. 12 Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted."

Jesus opened the reading by lumping together the ruling body of the Sadducees (the scribes) and the legalistic lay people (the Pharisees) into a single ruling body who held sway over the spiritual beliefs of the of the people (vv. 2-3). He told the crowds how the religious authorities positioned themselves in the seat of spiritual power (v. 2), while living lives of hypocrisy (v. 4). These leaders did things to be noticed (vv. 5 – 8) while coveting titles such as "Rabbi," "Father," and leader (vv. 7 – 10). Jesus taught the people that they were not to assign honor to these ungodly spiritual leaders who coveted these titles. Rather, they were to reserve such honor only to 1. the Father in Heaven (v. 8), 2. the One Leader Jesus Christ (v. 10), and 3. by implication the Holy Spirit as Teacher (v. 8b). Finally, Jesus affirmed the true problem of the false religious leaders, their pride (v. 12).

What does Jesus message mean to us today, are we not to call anyone father, leader, or teacher? Many of us have had, or have had spiritual fathers. Any of us who have been blessed to know their early father most certainly call him father. We see in the Scriptures that Saint Paul called himself both "father" (1 Corinthians 4:15, Philippians 2:22), and teacher (1 Timothy 2:7, 2 Timothy 1:11). And whom among us has never called their teacher, teacher? No, Jesus is telling us something else.

In light of the biblical context, and including all of the readings that we have considered today, what Jesus is teaching is an admonition against given anyone in a position of spiritual leadership **inappropriate** honor. Spiritual leaders most certainly play an important role in our lives, as do our human fathers and teachers. However, in today's reading Jesus calls us to look behind the humanity of those people, and towards the message of God and taught to us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In Jesus' day, the scribes and Pharisees were held by the people as the unquestionable religious authorities, not as we see them as the hypocrites described by Jesus with the benefit of 2,000 years of hindsight. Had the Jews in biblical times not obeyed these teachers they would have been subject to great scorn, discipline, and possibly even expulsion from the Jewish community. Such can be the case for us today should we reject the teachings of any spiritual leader who contradicts the clear teachings of Scripture. The Pharisees clearly did contradict Scripture, as Jesus earlier had told them that they were of their father the devil (John 8::44). In our day, God calls us to use spiritual discernment, to "test all things and hold fast that which is true" (1 Thess 5:21).

As believers in the finished work of the Lord Jesus on the cross Who bore the penalty for our sins, we can trust that Jesus has perfectly completed the work began by the imperfect priests we read about in the first reading. These human priests, beset by sins as all humans are (Romans 3:23), pointed the

way to the perfect, sinless King Priest. The priests' repeated sacrifices never took away the people's sins, it was just a covering until Jesus came. We see this in the Book of Hebrews:

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

The priestly system under the Law pointed the way towards the one single, bloody sacrifice of Jesus who willingly presented Himself on the cross in order to bear our sins. Jesus willingly gave His life and poured out His blood for us, because "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin" (Hebrews 9:22). As Christians we remember Jesus' sacrifice for us each time we take communion, until the time when Jesus returns.

Reflection Questions

1. In the first reading we saw the corruption of the Levitical Priesthood. In verse 10 the text read, "Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us?" What does the fatherhood of God for believers have to do with the condemnation that preceded this? What are some ways in which answering this question addressed specifically to the priests speaks to your own life?

2. Considering the difficulties of the human spiritual teachers we saw today, list three ways in which you can find comfort in the perfect, High Priest Jesus who completed the sacrificial system once and for all through the perfect sacrifice of His own body for us.

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday,

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10-30-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we look at a reading from Saint Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians and then the Gospel reading from Saint Luke. The first reading is from the Apocrypha and will not be covered.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

It was a very windy midsummer day in northern Michigan as I raced my windsurf board across the Straits of Mackinaw on my way back from Mackinaw Island, Michigan. Earlier, I sailed between the towers of the mighty Mackinaw Bridge and then returned to the shore of Lake Huron to make a few adjustments on my sail. Next, I sailed seven miles across the Straits to Mackinaw Island and was on my way back towards the campground where we were staying. At this point the wind began calming and shifting in a direction that was going to make it very difficult to return to the spot from where I had launched. Eventually I made it back to the sandy shore on Lake Huron, but was a few miles down from where I launched. I walked up the hill, borrowed a cell phone from someone, and called my wife to pick me up. I heard a strange silence on the other end and she said, "You're alive!" As it turned out someone had given some bad information to the police who then called the Coast Guard thinking that I had gone down somewhere in the Straits. This led to a series of cascading events including a large manhunt with a helicopter, rescue divers, and local police operating from a command center in a marina in Mackinaw City. Evidently, a fellow camper had been watching me from the shore and at some point, she couldn't locate me. She then proceeded to tell one of the authorities at the campground who then called the police. The police then alerted the Coast Guard and the manhunt was on! The whole affair began by one piece of bad information. [*If you are*

interested you can read the story online here:

http://www.cheboygannews.com/article/20130720/NEWS/130719421]

In the same way that a false report led to a series of cascading events that day while I was windsurfing, false information in the church can lead to a plethora of serious effects in the Christian church. This was the case in the second reading today from Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians. This was Paul's second written communication to this group of believers who had believed some false information concerning the timing of and events surrounding the return of the Lord Jesus. The overall purpose of the letter also included the encouragement of the believers in Thessalonica during their ongoing persecution for their faith.

Read the text including verses 3 – 12 which were skipped in the lectionary and are necessary understand the context and the points which Paul were addressing.

Second Reading:

11 With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. 12 We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. 2:1 Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, 2 not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. 3 Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. 4 He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. 5 Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? 6 And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. 7 For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie 12 and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness. (2 THES 1:11-2: 12 NIV)

The key verses that revealed the context of Paul's address in this section were chapter 2 verses 1-2. "Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come." Evidently, the people had believed a false report from a forged letter reportedly written by Paul that Jesus had already

returned. This news was very disturbing to the Thessalonians because they were enduring persecution for Jesus and if He had already returned then they had possibly been suffering for nothing. Paul had explained in his first letter to them how believers would meet the Lord Jesus upon his return. "According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever" (1Th 4:15-17). The phrase "caught up" in the original language is the word "harpazo" which means to snatch or take away. The same word translated in the Latin is "rapturo." Although the timing of this biblical event is unknown, Paul's teaching provided hope for the Thessalonian believers who were undergoing persecution. Paul was clear that Jesus' return wasn't something that they possibly could have missed since every single believer would be affected.

The Day of the Lord (DOL) is a very significant topic in both the Old and New Testament. The DOL is the time when Jesus will return for His Church and the Father will pour out His wrath on unbelievers. The interpretation of the meaning of DOL depends upon the theological grid from which you view the events of the end times. Most scholars believe that the DOL occurs in the middle of what is called the tribulation period, what the Book of Daniel calls this period the 70'th week. "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city" (Daniel 9:24). The DOL marks the beginning of the second half of the period known as the Great Tribulation. Joel said about this period, "Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand–a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as never was of old nor ever will be in ages to come" (Joel 2:1-2). He also said that this was a time of redemption, for many people (especially Jews) will come to faith. "And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the survivors whom the LORD calls" (v.32). Like the "catching up" from 1 Thess 4:17, the DOL wasn't something that the believers wouldn't notice. The purpose of Paul's writing to the church in Thessalonica was to correct this erroneous belief.

Paul continued with a very detailed explanation of the series of events that would lead up to the return of the Lord Jesus to carry away His Church. Paul said that a "man of lawlessness" would be revealed, a future world leader known throughout the Scripture as the "Antichrist." This satanic person would "oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God" (v.4). The lawlessness of this end time will be held back by the power of God until the time that the man of sin is revealed (vv.7-8). The man of sin will be accompanied by "the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders" (v.9). The people that remain on the earth during this time will "refuse to love the truth and so be saved" (v.10b). This leads to a terrible conclusion. "For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness" (vv. 11-12). The powerful delusion is partly the counterfeit miracles, signs, and wonders brought about through

satanic powers that are allowed to rule the earth during this terrible period of time. The satanic deception of the Antichrist, the person known as the False Prophet, and Satan constitute an unholy trinity that will wage war upon the people left on earth during the end times. To read about these three evil personalities read Revelation Chapters 12 and 13.

After the believers in Thessalonica read Paul's prophecy about what would happen around the time of the Lord's return, they would have been comforted to know that they hadn't missed Jesus as they had heard among the rumors that had been circulating. Paul's teaching about the end times helped them to view their suffering in light of the epic battle that would rage in the era when the Lord Jesus really did return. The "battle" though is no battle at all, for "the Lord Jesus will overthrow [him] with the breath of his mouth" (v.8). That shows us the undisputed ruling power of our Lord, which should bring us hope and comfort, just as it did for the Thessalonian Church.

Our take away from this passage is to heed Paul's warning. Don't be deceived – the Day of the Lord is still to come. Therefore, love the truth and let it lead you to safety. Many books have been written on the subject of the end times and we hope that everyone investigates these matters for themselves by carefully reading and studying the Bible. The brief introduction that we gave today perhaps raises more questions than it answered! We will close this brief introduction to *eschatology*, or the study of the things of the end, and move onto the Gospel lesson.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson for today is from Luke Chapter 19. It is essential to survey the context of the verses we are studying today in order to understand the full context and therefore the meaning of the text. If we back up to Luke 18:18 – 27 we found an occasion where Jesus was confronted by a certain person that was both a ruler and chief tax collector. This ruler asked Jesus, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (v. 18). Jesus explained to him the requirements of the Jewish Law, and then addressed wealth, the particular obstacle to finding God that existed in the ruler's heart. "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (18b). Read the subsequent verses in this section.

23 When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. 24 Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! 25 Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." 26 Those who heard this asked, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus replied, "What is impossible with men is possible with God." (Luke 18:23-27).

Jesus mentioned the impossibly of a camel being able to pass through the eye of a needle. Throughout the ages, a story circulated that goes something like this. Somewhere along the wall in Jerusalem there was a gate called the "eye of the needle" which required a man to dismount his animal in order to pass through at night when all of the other gates were closed. As the saying goes, the existence of this certain gate meant that when Jesus spoke of a camel going through the eye of a needle he was referring to this particular feature in Jerusalem. The legend went on to say that in

this Gospel story Jesus wasn't actually saying that it was impossible for a rich man to enter heaven because he was referring to this certain pint-sized entrance along the wall of Jerusalem. What he meant was that for a man to be saved he would have to prostrate himself before God and crawl on his knees in the same way that he could fit through the tiny gate. God does require a humble and prostrate heart in order to come to faith and to a certain extent, this legend is helpful if interpreted that way. Many people have researched this matter and have found that no such gate has ever existed in Jerusalem. Jesus gave an even better explanation of the whole matter in the text itself. Jesus knew that this young man was relying heavily upon his wealth and that it would be very difficult for him to lay it down in order to rely only upon Jesus for salvation. Jesus clarified that it wasn't impossible for rich people to be saved, but this could *only happen through the power of God*.

With this context in mind, let's move onto the Gospel lesson in Luke Chapter 19 in which Jesus encounters an unusual rich man that *does* receive salvation through the power of God. He didn't even have to locate the fictitious "eye of the needle" in Jerusalem!

Gospel Reading:

1 Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. 3 He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. 5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." 6 So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. 7 All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'" 8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." 9 Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." Luke 19:1-10

Zacchaeus' statement about giving away his wealth and repaying those he had cheated provided a glimpse into the true condition of his repentant heart. Jesus, who through the power of the Holy Spirit was able to read people's minds, understood that Zacchaeus truly did turn from pursuing wealth as his god rely upon God for his salvation. With the exhibition of his faith, Zacchaeus revealed that he was saved through belief in God. Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this house" (v.9b). Once again, we saw that Jesus chose someone to pursue whom everyone in the community knew was a lost sinner, to "save what was lost" (v.10b). As we have pointed out in last week's study notes, good works and intentions do not make us a Christian, they merely reveal the condition of our heart. In this case, Zacchaeus' good works indicated that his heart had truly been changed by God's power.

What does it take for a person with power, privileges and wealth to become a Christian? The story about the Philippian jailor in the Book of Acts helps to shed light on what it takes for a person of

authority like Zacchaeus in Luke's Gospel to be saved. In this particular story, the gates of the prison flew open after an earthquake, and the jailor feared for his life because he was responsible for the security of the men inside. If one person escaped, it might mean the death penalty for him. After the jailor awoke from the earthquake, he was sure that the prisoners were gone. Instead, he found Paul and Silas inside. "He then brought them out and asked, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' They replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved– you and your household'" (Acts 16:30-31). Rich people and people in positions of authority such as this jailor can have a very difficult time coming to faith in Jesus Christ. However, through the power of God even the hardest hearts can be broken. The conclusion of the story is as follows. "Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had *come to believe in God*— he and his whole family" (Acts 16:32,34 emphasis added). The Philippian jailor was saved in the same way as Zacchaeus, through faith in Jesus Christ by the hearing of the Word of God.

Reflection Questions

1. Paul told the Thessalonians not to be deceived but instead to love the truth that will save them. Read the following list of false beliefs. With which of these false beliefs can you identify? Pick one and then study the corresponding verses such that you understand the corresponding truth.

A. False Belief: All religions lead to God. Anyone that acts according to their conscience, even if they don't trust in Jesus, will go to heaven.

John 3:16-21 NIV 16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. 19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

Acts 4:8-12 NIV 8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! 9 If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, 10 then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. 11 He is "'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.' 12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to

men by which we must be saved."

John 14:6 NIV 6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Matthew 13:40-43 NIV 40 "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. 42 They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

Mt 25:41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

B. False Belief: God doesn't provide salvation to people who "just" repent and believe, salvation can only come through the authority of the Church.

Luke 23:32-43 NIV 32 Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. 33 When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals– one on his right, the other on his left. 34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. 35 The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One." 36 The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar 37 and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." 38 There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. 39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" 40 But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." 42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

C. False Belief: I'm basically a good person. If I go to church every Sunday and Holy Day as well as adhere to most of the teachings of the Church, I will go to heaven.

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

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

1Corinthians 6:9-11 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

John 14:6 NIV 6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Acts 4:12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

John 3:3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

2. Now that you see these false beliefs contradict the truth, meditate on the following scripture. Then, take some time to talk to God, confess any false beliefs that you may hold, and ask God the Father to help you love the truth.

Romans 10:9-13 NIV 9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. 11 As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." 12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile– the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, 13 for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

For Further Study

Sam was a devout Jew who was a gifted piano performer. He was very religious on the outside, however on the inside, his heart was bent on sin and he knew something was terribly wrong. Listen to Sam's compelling story (25 minutes, Words to Live By radio program):

http://words.net/2013/10/25/no-man-in-human-history-ever-said-words-like-that-sams-story/

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Keywords: Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time, Lectionary 153, misunderstandings, DOL, Day of the Lord, repentance, faith, salvation

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