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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 118: 08/16/2026



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

Introduction to the First Reading:

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

added in order to provide the reader with a fuller understanding of the text.

First Reading:

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

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

Although Isaiah provided additional information about God's plan of salvation for the Gentiles

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

Introduction to the Second Reading:

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

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

Second Reading:

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

16 If the first piece of dough is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too. 17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among

them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, 18 do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. 19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." 20 Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; 21 for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. 22 Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. 23 And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. 24 For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree? 25 For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery–so that you will not be wise in your own estimation–that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; 26 and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB." 27 "THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS." 28 From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers;

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

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

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

to Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:32, emphasis added). Paul said more about the mystery of the church:

> *4 By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; 6 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, (Ephesians 3:4-6)*

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

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

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

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

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Gospel Reading:

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

The Gentile woman was from a group of people who had always troubled Israel. The Canaanites were first mentioned in the Bible way back in Genesis Chapter 10 (v. 18). They were among the people groups that God promised to drive out during the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt (see Exodus 33:2 and 34:11). They were a people that in Old Testament times lived in the lowland regions west of the Jordan River. Mark called her "a Gentile, of the Syrophoenician race" (Mark 7:26), indicating that she was a Greek. Jews had always been separated from the Greeks (or Gentiles), although the Jews were immersed in a thoroughly Greek culture. As the story plays out, the Gentile woman called out to Jesus with a respectful title, "Lord, Son of David" (v. 22), which indicated that she had some understanding of Jesus. She called Jesus "Lord" three times. The word "Lord" means master, and the one using the term would be implying their submission to His authority in their life. Certainly, she had heard about his healing powers, but now she used a title that was reserved for the Messiah. She was a persistent woman, and Jesus' disciples implored him to send her away "because she keeps shouting at us" (v. 23c). Then Jesus addressed her and said that His ministry was only to the Jews (v. 24). Next, the woman bowed down before Jesus who then used a metaphor and told her that "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs" (v. 27). The "children's bread" referred to God's covenant people the Jews. This meant that since she wasn't a Jew, she was not technically Jesus' first priority during his short earthly ministry, which was to the Jews, not to the Gentiles. Her answer to him was very surprising and was an indication of the faith that she had in the Lord Jesus. "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table" (v. 27). Jesus rewarded her faith by immediately healing her daughter. The Bible is clear that God commends those with faith; He is a "rewarder of those that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). The Gentile woman was rewarded by having her daughter healed. One can only imagine what became of the woman afterward, since Jesus absolutely made a tremendous impression upon her.

What do the readings this week mean to us in our lives? First, God emphasizes the necessity of faith

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

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

Finally, with the privilege of faith, we also have a great responsibility to share with everyone the knowledge of Jesus Christ, whether Jew or Gentile. Jesus didn't give us many commands when He left, but He did leave a clear message about our life's priority. This is called the Great Commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Reflection Questions

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

- Have you made a decision to accept His call and be grafted into the life of Christ?

- What does God's inclusion of Gentiles in the salvation story tell you about His character and

heart?

- How does God's longing to see all people saved encourage you to reach out to others with His good news of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ?

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

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 120: 08-17-2025



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, the three readings focus on the persecution of

believers and the need to assess our allegiances and alliances with those other than God. We believers should expect persecution because others who walked with God before us experienced these things.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The context of the reading is the harsh imprisonment of Jeremiah for the second time. This was as a result of the administration's "kill the messenger" approach, as God brought the truth to the southern kingdom of Judah about their certain destruction at the hands of the Chaldeans unless they repented. After he had been held in the dungeon (Jeremiah 37:15-16), King Zedekiah sent for him there. He spoke with him before releasing him to the "court of the guardhouse" (v. 21). In the reading, we will learn about the increasingly harsh treatment given to God's prophet Jeremiah. Reading the text, we understand why Jeremiah became known as the "weeping prophet."

First Reading:

> *Jeremiah 38:4-10 NAS95 4 Then the officials said to the king, "Now let this man be put to death, inasmuch as he is discouraging the men of war who are left in this city and all the people, by speaking such words to them; for this man is not seeking the well-being of this people but rather their harm." 5 So King Zedekiah said, "Behold, he is in your hands; for the king can do nothing against you." 6 Then they took Jeremiah and cast him into the cistern of Malchijah the king's son, which was in the court of the guardhouse; and they let Jeremiah down with ropes. Now in the cistern there was no water but only mud, and Jeremiah sank into the mud. 7 But Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, a eunuch, while he was in the king's palace, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern. Now the king was sitting in the Gate of Benjamin; 8 and Ebed-melech went out from the king's palace and spoke to the king, saying, 9 "My lord the king, these men have acted wickedly in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet whom they have cast into the cistern; and he will die right where he is because of the famine, for there is no more bread in the city." 10 Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, "Take thirty men from here under your authority and bring up Jeremiah the prophet from the cistern before he dies."*

Zedekiah's ungodly officials advised the king to put Jeremiah to death because of his discouraging words (v. 4). In their wicked eyes, Jeremiah committed treason by supposedly weakening the war against the invading Chaldeans by calling for them to surrender rather than to resist. At this point, the king surrendered Jeremiah into the custody of the "officials," using the term loosely. Once King Zedekiah surrendered his authority over God's prophet, the people, he then took drastic actions against Jeremiah by lowering him into a cistern, an action obviously intended to bring about his death. It took the actions of a Gentile, Ebed-Melech (whose name means "servant of the king"), to bring about Jeremiah's rescue.

There are many parallels between Jeremiah's suffering and that of Jesus during His earthly ministry. Jeremiah, a type of Christ, pointed the way to the future suffering of our Lord Jesus at the hands of the officials of His day. Because they persecuted God and His prophets, we should also expect persecution in our lives when we act against the ungodly officials in our day. Just before his death, Stephen said, "Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become" (Acts 7:52).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading continues the study of the Book of Hebrews and picks up after the section known as the "Hall of Faith." Today's reading relates to what we read about in Jeremiah concerning hostility against believers of the Lord Jesus.

Second Reading:

> *Hebrews 12:1-4 NAS95 1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. 4 You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;*

Taking into account what we learned from chapter 11 ("therefore," v. 1a), we are called to focus upon the ultimate goal of Jesus Christ and forsake our sinful ways (vv. 1-2). We are to do this by

using Jesus as our example. By focusing on Jesus' illustration of resisting sin, we too can be faithful in accomplishing God's purposes. However, in the same way that Jesus and the prophets were persecuted, we too should expect to experience trials when we stand up for the things of God. The author of Hebrews makes it abundantly clear that by taking the testimony of Jesus and the great cloud of witnesses into account, we can persist through the inevitable trials that will come upon us. The reading closes by saying that we haven't taken outrageous measures to eliminate sin in our lives (v. 4). This points the way to the subsequent teaching, where the author explains how God brings chastening into the lives of believers because, as sons of God, this correction is for our ultimate good (Hebrews 12:5-11). In the same way God allowed persecution in the life of Jeremiah, He may also allow it in our lives. As we move to the Gospel reading, we will see similar teachings from Jesus on assessing our alliances in light of God's plans for us.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading from Luke follows a theme I will call "Forsaking allegiances and alliances for Jesus." Jesus was clear that His ministry would be one of division. For John said in the infamous verse regarding the division of the people over Jesus, "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore" (John 6:66). In today's reading we see another of Jesus' 6-6-6 moments, this time in the teaching to His disciples after Peter drew near to him amongst the crowds to ask Him a question. Peter had asked Jesus regarding His telling of the Parable of the Wedding Feast whether this parable was addressed to just His disciples or to the crowd as a whole. As Jesus was fond of doing, he didn't answer Peter's question directly, but did so by asking another question, "Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time?" (Luke 12:42). Jesus then provided yet another parable about the absent master and the behavior of the slaves while he was away (Luke 12:43-48). Jesus' teaching at this point culminated with an extremely important principle. The punishment of the wicked will be according to the degree of knowledge that the person possessed (v. 48). This was obviously addressed to the Pharisees among the crowd, and Judas the betrayer, who would have been among the twelve disciples. By application, the teaching leading up to today's reading brings with it the idea of everyone's call to exercise godly stewardship of the resources which they have been given. The call to godly stewardship may even involve the forsaking of friends and family for the sake of the Gospel.

Gospel Reading:

> *Luke 12:49-53 NAS95 49 "I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled! 50 But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is*

> *accomplished! 51 Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division; 52 for from now on five members in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three. 53 They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."*

In the very first season of the television series *Survivor*, Richard Hatch orchestrated the idea of a voting alliance. The "Tagi Alliance," as it was called, was a brilliant strategy that paved the way for future seasons of the program and showed the necessity of working together to accomplish the impossible in dire conditions. One of the most notable things about an alliance in general and this one in particular is that it excludes members outside of it. As viewers saw in the series, the Tagi Alliance resulted in considerable controversy with non-members as the show played out. In this case, the issue that comes into play is that as the season winds down, the ultimate conclusion requires banishing alliance members from the island. In today's reading, we see how Jesus warned about the dangers of stubbornly clinging to an alliance which, in effect, makes a pledge of allegiance to someone other than God.

Jesus told His disciples, along with a large crowd, how families would be divided from now on because of Him. By application, true followers of Jesus are called to examine their alliances and allegiances and be willing to forsake anything that leads them away from following God's plan for their lives. This may include stepping back from any relationship in which the other person attempts to lead you astray spiritually while praying for the opening of that person's eyes to the light of the Gospel.

Muslim background believers (MBBs) are one shining example of a group who would readily identify with Jesus' teaching, as well as what we learned about persecution in the first reading. Many MBBs have been forced to forsake their mother and father and even their own lives in order to follow the true teaching found only in the God of the Bible. Some readers of Mass Notes will also be able to identify with Jesus' teaching when they, too, found themselves marginalized or even outright rejected by family members (and others) for their faith in Jesus. All three of today's readings point to a single verse from the second reading in Hebrews. "For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Hebrews 12:3). God calls us to focus upon Him to the extent that we are willing to assess any alliances or allegiances we may have that call us away from His plan. This may mean leaving the fellowship of a certain church or losing a relationship with a loved one. Through it all, God calls us to never lose our focus upon Him.

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Would you be willing to share your testimony for posting about the alliance or allegiance you were forced to break on the website? There is a form you may fill out by following this link.

Reflection Questions

1. In what ways do the things that happened to Jeremiah in today's reading mirror the Lord Jesus Christ?

2. What is a particular situation in your life in which you felt called by God to break an alliance or allegiance in order to accomplish God's purpose?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 08-18-2024



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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. In the first reading, we look at the Book of Proverbs, where we see the concept of wisdom personified. The second reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Ephesians and focuses upon the behavior of those enlightened by God through faith in Jesus Christ. We close with a continuation of Jesus' lesson from last week in which Jesus called Himself the "living bread that came down out of heaven" (John 6:51).

Introduction to the First Reading:

The book of Proverbs is full of true, wise sayings about everyday life and relationships. It is similar to poetry in that it often uses figurative language to make its point. Many of the Proverbs were written by King Solomon, considered the wisest man who ever lived. God blessed him with great wisdom and riches, and early in his life he followed God faithfully. Later, he sinned against God by marrying many women who followed after false gods. Sadly, Solomon followed their idolatrous ways. These Proverbs however, were given by God and are still a source of great wisdom today.

The Book of Psalms provides us with an insight concerning wisdom. Psalm 119:102-104 says:

I have not turned aside from Your ordinances, For You Yourself have taught me. How sweet are Your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth! From Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way.

First Reading:

> *Proverbs 9:1-6 NAS95 1 Wisdom has built her house, She has hewn out her seven pillars; 2 She has prepared her food, she has mixed her wine; She has also set her table; 3 She has sent out her maidens, she calls From the tops of the heights of the city: 4 "Whoever is naive, let him turn in here!" To him who lacks understanding she says, 5 "Come, eat of my food And drink of the wine I have mixed. 6 Forsake your folly and live, And proceed in the way of understanding."*

In Proverbs Ch. 9, the writer uses personification (giving human traits to a nonhuman object or idea) to describe wisdom. She (Wisdom) has built a strong house, indicating that wisdom gives us a strong and secure place from which to live. She is like the mistress of the house who prepares all good things for us to enjoy and invites us in to freely partake of it. Wisdom is available to us if we will only forsake our foolish ways and come and dine. Since God is the source of all wisdom, the food we must consume to get wisdom is His Word—the Bible.

Believers grow in their knowledge of God by developing a deeper understanding of God's Wisdom as revealed through the Bible. As we move to the second reading, we will see how Saint Paul calls believers to express their wisdom through godly expressions of spiritual songs, hymns and psalms. These are activities which happen during the fellowship of believers in the church, and they help us to grow in our knowledge of love of the Lord Jesus.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. It begins with the adverb "therefore" which means we must understand the meaning of the verses immediately before to which Paul is referring.

Second Reading:

> *Ephesians 5:15-20 NAS95 15 Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, 16 making the most of your time, because the days are evil. 17 So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; 20 always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;*

The "therefore" refers to the fact that as believers in the Lord Jesus we are "children of the light" (Ephesians 5:8b-c) who were formerly in darkness (v. 8a). Since we are children of the light, we are to produce fruit in keeping with the light, "for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth" (v. 9). Though we live in evil times (days, v. 16b) we are called as believers to be good stewards of the light that we have through our knowledge of God's word in the Bible. Our

understanding of the Bible is how we know God's will (v. 17b). We must let worldly things like wine get in the way of our walking in the truth of the Lord (v. 18), for being drunk is the behavior of the sin darkened unbelievers. One of the ways in which we can express our love for God and also to grow in the knowledge of Him is through "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord" (v. 19). God also calls us to be thankful for the things that God has bestowed upon us (v. 20).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

In the Gospel reading, we continue the discourse that Jesus had with the crowds concerning his teaching as He is the "bread which came down from heaven." The people to whom Jesus was speaking were misunderstanding both the *nature* of the Messiah as well as His *identity* as the One to whom they were listening.

Gospel Reading:

> *John 6:51-58 NAS95 51 "I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh." 52 Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" 53 So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. 54 He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. 55 For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. 56 He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. 57 As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me. 58 This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever."*

Once again, we return to the chapter where Jesus refers to himself by a spiritual metaphor—the bread of life. Many people were following Jesus. They saw his miracles, and they were excited about what Jesus had done and curious about what Jesus would do next. They wanted to be part of his entourage. But was that enough of a commitment to call themselves true followers of Christ? Jesus is going to shock the crowd with a stunning metaphor, designed to separate the curious from the true disciples: *"He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day (John 6:54).* As bread gives life through its nourishment, so Jesus gives life to all who believe in Him. Bread provides its physical benefit, not when it is sitting on the table but when it is

taken into the body. Jesus provides his spiritual benefits not to the followers who are merely curious but to those who make a full commitment to Him from the heart. Romans 10:9 says, "*If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved*." Eating in this case is not physical consumption, but belief from the heart that provides the spiritual benefit of eternal life.

Many could not understand the spiritual nature of Jesus' words. They missed the metaphors, and His talk of eating flesh and drinking blood was offensive to them. They demonstrated the principle that the words of Jesus cannot be understood through human wisdom alone, and no one can come to Jesus unless the Father grants it (v. 65). These disciples, blinded by their own sin, walked away and no longer followed Him.

As Jesus continued His teaching, He began to move deeply in the hearts of the crowd causing them to move closer to the point of decision that we will see next week in John 6:66. In the reading today, Jesus once again used the "I am" phrase, something which His hearers would have understood as a claim to divinity. Jesus told the crowd at least one year before His final Passover meal at what we call the "Last Supper" that it wasn't the bread that would save them, but rather their belief in Him. The manna in the Exodus was something created divinely by God which fell from the sky at night for the Hebrews to collect each day (except on the Sabbath). Even though this special "bread" came directly from God, those that ate this physical provision from God, still died physically (v. 58b). In contrast, those that "feed" upon Jesus are the ones that believe in Him as the Messiah, which is the only way to eternal life (John 14:6). If we read a few verses later in this section, Jesus explained the spiritual analogy He used by calling Himself the bread of God. He said, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life" (John 6:63). The people misunderstood His spiritual metaphor and stumbled upon His identity as the one and only Messiah of God.

The Jews understood that they were prohibited by the Law from the drinking blood. Leviticus says, "You shall not eat anything with the blood" (Leviticus 19:26a). This prohibition from a blood meal was repeated in the New Testament so as not to create a stumbling point with the early Jewish believers. The proclamation in the Book of Acts reads, "that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood …" (Acts 15:29a). The practice of consuming blood would have been deeply offensive to the Jews because of their immersion in the teachings of the Mosaic Law. Jesus, aware of the legalistic Pharisees in the crowd, used this metaphor to further deepen the divide that existed between the true and false followers of God.

This theme of separation continued in John's Gospel beyond this point and reached a climax just after today's reading in John 6:66 where John said, "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore." As we said in the introduction, the people to whom Jesus was speaking were misunderstanding both the nature of the Messiah as well as His identity. Only a small number of them put it all together, those on the narrow road that leads to life (Matthew 7:13). This theme is nowhere more evident that in our current world in which the true followers of the Lord Jesus are in the minority even among cultures which seemingly exalt Christianity.

Reflection Questions

1. Describe in what ways Jesus was truly wisdom personified, taking into account the relationship between the words of Jesus in the Bible and the person of Jesus?

2. The Gospel reading followed a series of miracles that Jesus performed for the crowd including the multiplying of the loaves and fishes. Yet we know that many of the people in the crowd did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah (John 6:66). What miracles from Jesus have you experienced in your own life? Why are your experiences different from the people in the Gospel narrative?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 08-16-2020

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



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

Introduction to the First Reading:

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

First Reading:

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

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

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

them" (Isaiah 9:2). Though the Jews were always a light that pointed to salvation through faith in God, the ultimate light would be the Lord Jesus.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

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

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

Second Reading:

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

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

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

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

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

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

4 By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; 6 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, (Ephesians 3:4-6)

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

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

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

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

Gospel Reading:

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

The Gentile woman was from a group of people who had always troubled Israel. The Canaanites were first mentioned in the Bible way back in Genesis Chapter 10 (v. 18). They were among the people groups that God promised to drive out during the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt (see Exodus 33:2 and 34:11). They were a people that in Old Testament times lived in the lowland regions west of the Jordan River. Mark called her "a Gentile, of the Syrophoenician race" (Mark 7:26), indicating that she was a Greek. Jews had always been separated from the Greeks (or Gentiles) although the Jews were immersed in a thoroughly Greek culture. As the story plays out the Gentile woman called out to Jesus by using a respectful title, "Lord, Son of David" (v.22) and one which elicited that she had some understanding of Jesus. She called Jesus by the name "Lord" three times. The word "Lord" means master and the one using the term would be implying their submission to His authority in their life. Certainly, she had heard about his healing powers, but now she used a title that was reserved for the Messiah. She was a persistent woman, and Jesus' disciples implored him to send her away "because she keeps shouting at us" (v. 23c). Then Jesus addressed her and said that His ministry was only to the Jews (v. 24). Next, the woman bowed down before Jesus and He used a metaphor and told her that "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs" (v. 27). The "children's bread" referred to God's covenant people the Jews. This meant that since she wasn't a Jew she was not technically Jesus' first **priority** during his short earthly ministry, which was to the Jews, not to the Gentiles. Her answer to him was very surprising and was an indication of the faith that she had in the Lord Jesus. "Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table" (v. 27). Jesus rewarded her faith by immediately healing her daughter. The Bible is clear that God commends those with faith, He is a "rewarder of those that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). The Gentile woman was rewarded by having her daughter healed. One can only imagine what became of the woman afterwards since Jesus absolutely made a tremendous impression upon her.

What do the readings this week mean to us in our lives? First, God emphasizes the necessity of faith in the perfect, finished work or Jesus Christ for all people, whether Jew or Gentile, and is no respecter of persons. He "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1

Timothy 2:4). "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). God provided the plan of salvation through Jesus and made this available to everyone. "For the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). God said "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation" Romans 10:9-10).

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

Finally, with the privilege of faith we also have great responsibility to share with everyone the knowledge of Jesus Christ, whether Jew or Gentile. Jesus didn't give us many commands when He left but did leave a clear message about what should be our priority in life. This is called the Great Commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Reflection Questions

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

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

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

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 08-18-2019



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week the three readings follow the theme of persecution of believers and the need for us to assess our allegiances and alliances with those other than God. As believers we should expect persecution in light of the fact that others who walked with God before us experienced these things.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The context of the reading is the harsh imprisonment of Jeremiah, for the second time. This was as a result of the administration's "kill the messenger" approach as God brought the truth to southern

kingdom of Judah about their certain destruction at the hands of the Chaldeans unless they repented. After he had been held in the dungeon (Jeremiah 37:15-16), King Zedekiah sent for him there and spoke with him before releasing him to the "court of the guardhouse" (v. 21). In the reading we will learn about the increasingly harsh treatment given to God's prophet Jeremiah. In reading the text we can begin to understand why Jeremiah became to be known as the "weeping prophet."

First Reading:

> *Jeremiah 38:4-10 NAS95 4 Then the officials said to the king, "Now let this man be put to death, inasmuch as he is discouraging the men of war who are left in this city and all the people, by speaking such words to them; for this man is not seeking the well-being of this people but rather their harm." 5 So King Zedekiah said, "Behold, he is in your hands; for the king can do nothing against you." 6 Then they took Jeremiah and cast him into the cistern of Malchijah the king's son, which was in the court of the guardhouse; and they let Jeremiah down with ropes. Now in the cistern there was no water but only mud, and Jeremiah sank into the mud. 7 But Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, a eunuch, while he was in the king's palace, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern. Now the king was sitting in the Gate of Benjamin; 8 and Ebed-melech went out from the king's palace and spoke to the king, saying, 9 "My lord the king, these men have acted wickedly in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet whom they have cast into the cistern; and he will die right where he is because of the famine, for there is no more bread in the city." 10 Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, "Take thirty men from here under your authority and bring up Jeremiah the prophet from the cistern before he dies."*

Zedekiah's ungodly officials advised the king to put Jeremiah to death because of his discouraging words (v. 4). In their wicked eyes Jeremiah committed treason by supposedly weakening the war against the invading Chaldeans by calling for them to surrender rather than to resist. At this point the king surrendered Jeremiah into the custody of the "officials," using the term loosely. Once King Zedekiah surrendered his authority over God's prophet the people then took drastic actions against Jeremiah by lowering him into a cistern, an action obviously intended to bring about his death. It took the actions of a Gentile, Ebed-melech (whose name means "servant of the king") to bring about Jeremiah's rescue.

There are many parallels between the suffering that Jeremiah endured to that of Jesus during His earthly ministry. Jeremiah, a type of Christ, pointed the way to the future suffering of our Lord Jesus as the hands of the officials of His day. Because they persecuted God and His prophets, we should also expect persecution in our lives when we act against the ungodly officials in our day. Stephen said just before his own death, "Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They

killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become" (Acts 7:52).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading continues the study in the Book of Hebrews and picks up after the section known as the "Hall of Faith." Today's reading relates to what we read about in Jeremiah concerning hostility against believers of the Lord Jesus.

Second Reading:

> *Hebrews 12:1-4 NAS95 1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. 4 You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;*

Taking into account what we learned from chapter 11 ("therefore," v. 1a), we are called to focus upon the ultimate goal of Jesus Christ and forsake our sinful ways (vv. 1-2). We are to do this through using Jesus as our example. By focusing upon Jesus' illustration of resisting sin we too can be faithful in accomplishing the purpose that God has for us. However, in the same way that Jesus and the prophets were persecuted we too should expect to experience trials when we stand up for the things of God. The author of Hebrews makes it abundantly clear that by taking the testimony of Jesus along with the great cloud of witnesses into account we can persist through the inevitable trials that will come upon us. The reading closes by saying that we haven't taken outrageous measures to eliminate sin in our lives (v. 4). This points the way to the subsequent teaching where the author explains how God brings chastening into the lives of believers because as sons of God this correction is for our ultimate good (Hebrews 12:5-11). In the same way that God allowed persecution in the life of Jeremiah, He may also allow it in our lives. As we move to the Gospel reading we will see some similar teaching from Jesus on the need to assess our personal alliances in light of God's plans for us.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading from Luke follows a theme I will call "Forsaking allegiances and alliances for Jesus." Jesus was clear that His ministry would be one of division. For John said in the infamous verse regarding the division of the people over Jesus, "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore" (John 6:66). In today's reading we see another of

Jesus' 6-6-6 moments, this time in the teaching to His disciples after Peter drew near to him amongst the crowds to ask Him a question. Peter had asked Jesus regarding His telling of the Parable of the Wedding Feast whether this parable was addressed to just His disciples or to the crowd as a whole. As Jesus was fond of doing he didn't answer Peter's question directly but did so by asking another question, "Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time?" (Luke 12:42). Jesus then provided yet another parable about the absent master and the behavior of the slaves while he was away (Luke 12:43-48). Jesus' teaching at this point culminated with an extremely important principle. The punishment of the wicked will be according the degree of knowledge that the person possessed (v. 48). This was obviously addressed to the Pharisees among the crowd, and Judas the betrayer who would have been among the twelve disciples. By application the teaching leading up to today's reading brings with the idea of everyone's call to exercise godly stewardship of the resources which they have been given. The call to godly stewardship may even involve the forsaking of friends and family for the sake of the Gospel.

Gospel Reading:

> *Luke 12:49-53 NAS95 49 "I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled! 50 But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished! 51 Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division; 52 for from now on five members in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three. 53 They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."*

In the very first season of the television series *Survivor*, Richard Hatch orchestrated the idea of a voting alliance. The "Tagi Alliance" as it was called, was a brilliant strategy that paved the way for future seasons of the program and showed the necessity of working together to accomplish the impossible in dire conditions. One of the most notable things about an alliance in general and this one in particular is that it excludes members outside of it. As viewers saw in the series, the Tagi Alliance resulted in considerable controversy with non-members as the show played out. In this case the issue that comes into play is that as the season winds down the ultimate conclusion requires the banishment of alliance members from the island. In today's reading we see how Jesus warned about the dangers of stubbornly clinging to an alliance which in effect makes a pledge of allegiance to someone other than God.

Jesus told His disciples along with large crowd how from now on families would be divided because of Him. By application, true followers of Jesus are called to examine their alliances and allegiances and be willing to forsake anything that leads them away from following God's plan for their lives.

This may include stepping back from any relationship in which the other person attempts to lead you astray spiritually while praying for the opening of that person's eyes to the light of the Gospel.

Muslim background believers (MBB's) are one shining example of a group whom would readily identify with Jesus' teaching as well as what we learned about persecution in the first reading. Many MBB's have been forced to forsake their mother and father and even their own lives in order to follow the true teaching found only in the God of the Bible. Other readers of Mass Notes will also be able to identify with Jesus' teaching when they too found themselves marginalized or even outright reject by family members (and others) for their faith in Jesus. All three of today's readings point to a single verse from the second reading in Hebrews. "For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Hebrews 12:3). God calls us to focus upon Him to the extent that we are willing to assess any alliances or allegiances we may have that call us away from His plan. This may mean leaving the fellowship of a certain church or losing a relationship with a loved one. Through it all God calls us to never lose our focus upon Him.

Would you be willing to share your testimony with us for posting on the web site about the particular alliance or allegiance you were forced to break?

Reflection Questions

1. In what ways does the things that happened to Jeremiah in today's reading mirror the Lord Jesus Christ?
2. What is a particular situation in your life in which you felt called by God to break an alliance or allegiance in order to accomplish God's purpose?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 08-19-2018

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. In the first reading, we look at the Book of Proverbs where we see the concept of wisdom personified. The second reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Ephesians and focuses upon the behavior of those enlightened by God through faith in Jesus Christ. We close with a continuation of Jesus' lesson from last week in which Jesus called Himself the "living bread that came down out of heaven" (John 6:51).

Introduction to the First Reading:

The book of Proverbs is full of true, wise sayings about everyday life and relationships. It is similar to poetry in that it often uses figurative language to make its point. Many of the Proverbs were written by King Solomon, considered the wisest man who ever lived. God blessed him with great wisdom and riches, and early in his life he followed God faithfully. Later he sinned against God by marrying many women who followed after false gods. Sadly, Solomon followed their idolatrous ways. These Proverbs however, were given by God and are still a source of great wisdom today.

The Book of Psalms provides us with an insight concerning wisdom. Psalm 119:102-104 says: *I have not turned aside from Your ordinances, For You Yourself have taught me. How sweet are Your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth! From Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way.*

First Reading:

> *Proverbs 9:1-6 NAS95 1 Wisdom has built her house, She has hewn out her seven pillars; 2 She has prepared her food, she has mixed her wine; She has also set her table; 3 She has sent out her maidens, she calls From the tops of the heights of the city: 4 "Whoever is naive, let him turn*

> *in here!" To him who lacks understanding she says, 5 "Come, eat of my food And drink of the wine I have mixed. 6 Forsake your folly and live, And proceed in the way of understanding."*

In Proverbs Ch. 9, the writer uses personification (giving human traits to a nonhuman object or idea) to describe wisdom. She (Wisdom) has built a strong house, indicating that wisdom gives us a strong and secure place from which to live. She is like the mistress of the house who prepares all good things for us to enjoy and invites us in to freely partake of it. Wisdom is available to us if we will only forsake our foolish ways and come and dine. Since God is the source of all wisdom, the food we must consume to get wisdom is His Word—the Bible.

Believers grow in their knowledge of God by developing a deeper understanding of God's Wisdom as revealed through the Bible. As we move to the second reading, we will see how Saint Paul calls believers to express their wisdom through godly expressions of spiritual songs, hymns and psalms. These are activities which happen during the fellowship of believers in the church and they help us to grow in our knowledge of love of the Lord Jesus.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. It begins with the adverb "therefore" which means we must understand the meaning of the verses immediately before to which Paul is referring.

Second Reading:

> *Ephesians 5:15-20 NAS95 15 Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, 16 making the most of your time, because the days are evil. 17 So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; 20 always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;*

The "therefore" refers to the fact that as believers in the Lord Jesus we are "children of the light" (Ephesians 5:8b-c) who were formerly in darkness (v. 8a). Since we are children of the light, we are to produce fruit in keeping with the light, "for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth" (v. 9). Though we live in evil times (days, v. 16b) we are called as believers to be good stewards of the light that we have through our knowledge of God's word in the Bible. Our understanding of the Bible is how we know God's will (v. 17b). We must let worldly things like wine get in the way of our walking in the truth of the Lord (v. 18), for being drunk is the behavior of the sin darkened unbelievers. One of the ways in which we can express our love for God and also to grow in the knowledge of Him is through "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord" (v. 19). God also calls us to be thankful for the things that God has bestowed upon us (v. 20).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

In the Gospel reading, we continue the discourse that Jesus had with the crowds concerning his teaching as He being the "bread which came down from heaven." The people to whom Jesus was speaking were misunderstanding both the *nature* of the Messiah as well as His *identity* as the One to whom they were listening.

Gospel Reading:

> *John 6:51-58 NAS95 51 "I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh." 52 Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" 53 So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. 54 He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. 55 For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. 56 He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. 57 As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me. 58 This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever."*

Once again, we return to the chapter where Jesus refers to himself by a spiritual metaphor—the bread of life. Many people were following Jesus. They saw his miracles, and they were excited about what Jesus had done and curious about what Jesus would do next. They wanted to be part of his entourage. But was that enough of a commitment to call themselves true followers of Christ? Jesus is going to shock the crowd with a stunning metaphor, designed to separate the curious from the true disciples: *"He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day (John 6:54).* As bread gives life through its nourishment, so Jesus gives life to all who believe in Him. Bread provides its physical benefit, not when it is sitting on the table but when it is taken into the body. Jesus provides his spiritual benefits not to the followers who are merely curious but to those who make a full commitment to Him from the heart. Romans 10:9 says, "*If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved*." Eating in this case is not physical consumption but belief from the heart that provides the spiritual benefit of eternal life.

Many could not understand the spiritual nature of Jesus' words. They missed the metaphors, and His talk of eating flesh and drinking blood was offensive to them. They demonstrated the principle that the words of Jesus cannot be understood through human wisdom alone, and no one can come to Jesus unless the Father grants it (v. 65). These disciples, blinded by their own sin, walked away and no longer followed Him.

As Jesus continued His teaching, He began to move deeply in the hearts of the crowd causing them to move closer to the point of decision that we will see next week in John 6:66. In the reading today Jesus once again used the "I am" phrase, something which His hearers would have understood as a claim to divinity. Jesus told the crowd at least one year before His final Passover meal at what we call the "Last Supper" that it wasn't the bread that would save them, but rather their belief in Him.

The manna in the Exodus was something created divinely by God which fell from the sky at night for the Hebrews to collect each day (except on the Sabbath). Even though this special "bread" came directly from God, those that ate this physical provision from God still died physically (v. 58b). In contrast, those that "feed" upon Jesus are the ones that believe in Him as the Messiah, which is the only way to eternal life (John 14:6). If we read a few verses later in this section, Jesus explained the spiritual analogy He was using by calling Himself the bread of God. He said, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life" (John 6:63). The people misunderstood His spiritual metaphor and stumbled upon His identity as the one and only Messiah of God.

The Jews understood that they were prohibited by the Law from the drinking blood. Leviticus says, "You shall not eat anything with the blood" (Leviticus 19:26a). This prohibition from a blood meal was repeated in the New Testament so as not to create a stumbling point with the early Jewish believers. The proclamation in the Book of Acts reads, "that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood …" (Acts 15:29a). The practice of consuming blood would have been deeply offensive to the Jews because of their immersion in the teachings of the Mosaic Law. Jesus, aware of the legalistic Pharisees in the crowd, used this metaphor to further deepen the divide that existed between the true and false followers of God.

This theme of separation continued in John's Gospel beyond this point and reached a climax just after today's reading in John 6:66 where John said, "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore." As we said in the introduction, the people to whom Jesus was speaking were misunderstanding both the nature of the Messiah as well as His identity. Only a small number of them put it all together, those on the narrow road that leads to life (Matthew 7:13). This theme is nowhere more evident that in our current world in which the true followers of the Lord Jesus are in the minority even among cultures which seemingly exalt Christianity.

Reflection Questions

1. Describe in what ways Jesus was truly wisdom personified, taking into account the relationship between the words of Jesus in the Bible and the person of Jesus?
2. The Gospel reading followed a series of miracles that Jesus performed for the crowd including the multiplying of the loaves and fishes. Yet we know that many of the people in the crowd did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah (John 6:66). What miracles from Jesus have you experienced in your own life? Why are your experiences different from the people in the Gospel narrative?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 8-20-2017



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

Introduction to the First Reading:

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

First Reading:

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

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

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

Introduction to the Second Reading:

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

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

Second Reading:

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

16 If the first piece of dough is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too. 17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, 18 do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. 19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." 20 Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; 21 for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. 22 Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. 23 And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. 24 For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree? 25 For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery–so that you will not be wise in your own estimation–that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; 26 and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB." 27 "THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS." 28 From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers;

29 for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 30 For just as you once were disobedient to

God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, 31 so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. 32 For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all. (Romans 11:13-32)

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

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

4 By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; 6 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, (Ephesians 3:4-6)

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

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

In today's Gospel lesson remember that at this point the church age was still hidden and God's plan of salvation for the Gentiles through faith in Jesus' perfect sacrifice on the cross wasn't in view yet.

The context of the Gospel reading is just after Peter (and Jesus) walked on the waters of the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 14:25-31) that we studied last week. After Jesus had calmed the wind and the waves they crossed the lake and came to the region of Gennesaret (14:34) located on the northwest shore of the lake. A series of events preceding this caused Jesus to leave this Jewish region. This included the unwillingness of the Jewish people to repent (Matthew 11:20-24), the rejection of Jesus by the people in his own hometown of Nazareth (Matthew 13:53-58), and the arrest and execution of John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1-10). Jesus' movement to this region spoke symbolically of the future ministry to the Gentiles that some of the disciples would have.

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

Gospel Reading:

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

The Gentile woman was from a group of people who had always troubled Israel. The Canaanites were first mentioned in the Bible way back in Genesis Chapter 10 (v. 18). They were among the people groups that God promised to drive out during the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt (see Exodus 33:2 and 34:11). They were a people that in Old Testament times lived in the lowland regions west of the Jordan River. Mark called her "a Gentile, of the Syrophoenician race" (Mark 7:26), indicating that she was a Greek. Jews had always been separated from the Greeks (or Gentiles) although the Jews were immersed in a thoroughly Greek culture. As the story plays out the Gentile woman called out to Jesus by using a respectful title, "Lord, Son of David" (v.22) and one which elicited that she had some understanding of Jesus. She called Jesus by the name "Lord" three times. The word "Lord" means master and the one using the term would be implying their submission to His authority in their life. Certainly, she had heard about his healing powers, but now she used a title that was reserved for the Messiah. She was a persistent woman, and Jesus' disciples implored him to send her away "because she keeps shouting at us" (v. 23c). Then Jesus addressed her and said that His ministry was only to the Jews (v. 24). Next, the woman bowed down before Jesus and He used a metaphor and told her that "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs" (v.

27). The "children's bread" referred to God's covenant people the Jews. This meant that since she wasn't a Jew she was not technically Jesus' first **priority** during his short earthly ministry, which was to the Jews, not to the Gentiles. Her answer to him was very surprising and was an indication of the faith that she had in the Lord Jesus. "Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table" (v. 27). Jesus rewarded her faith by immediately healing her daughter. The Bible is clear that God commends those with faith, He is a "rewarder of those that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). The Gentile woman was rewarded by having her daughter healed. One can only imagine what became of the woman afterwards since Jesus absolutely made a tremendous impression upon her.

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

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

Finally, with the privilege of faith we also have great responsibility to share with everyone the knowledge of Jesus Christ, whether Jew or Gentile. Jesus didn't give us many commands when He left but did leave a clear message about what should be our priority in life. This is called the Great Commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Reflection Questions

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

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

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

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