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

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 121: 08/23/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the first reading from Isaiah, where we see and explain the meaning of the phrase "the key of the house of David." Then we move to the second reading from Romans 11, where you will read many additional verses beyond what was published in the lectionary in order to understand the meaning of God's Word based on its context. Finally, we conclude with the Gospel message from Matthew 16 and study the meaning of a phrase similar to what we saw in the first reading, "the keys of the kingdom of heaven," in which Jesus emphasized Peter's importance as the first among equals among the disciples.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Before we begin, I will briefly review the format and method of these weekly study notes. The format can be understood through the acronym A-B-C, starting with "C" and working backward: context, big idea, and application. First, we provide the full scriptural context for the text, including verses omitted from the reading. We also provide the historical context, along with the author's background

and setting. Second, we study the text in light of its historical context to determine the theological big idea. We develop this in light of a "Christological" focus, that is, upon the redemptive message found throughout the Bible: salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, whether in a future context, as in the Old Testament, or in a present or historical context, as in the New Testament. We do not rely upon an allegorical interpretation, but instead use the historical-critical method and refer to the original languages and parallel passages whenever necessary. Finally, we provide several applications of the text for the present-day Christian. Although there is usually only one main interpretation of the text, there are many possible applications. With these guiding principles in mind, let's move on to the first reading.

The first reading is from the Prophet Isaiah. The reading is a parenthesis in Chapter 22, meaning that it was a pause or temporary transition from the main theme. The theme Isaiah described in the chapter before this parenthesis was the future destruction of Jerusalem, which we know occurred over 125 years later, in 586 B.C. Isaiah wrote just prior to the destruction of the Northern Kingdom by Assyria in 722 B.C. The context of the reading is that an evil man named Shebna, who was the secretary of the treasury under King Hezekiah, built himself a royal tomb so that his name would be remembered after his death. Evidently, this Shebna was misappropriating funds (see 2 Kings 18:18, 19:2, and Isaiah 36:3, 37:2). This reading includes verses 15-18 and verses 24-25, in order for you to read the whole section of Scripture.

First Reading:

> *15 Thus says the Lord GOD of hosts, "Come, go to this steward, To Shebna, who is in charge of the royal household, 16 'What right do you have here, And whom do you have here, That you have hewn a tomb for yourself here, You who hew a tomb on the height, You who carve a resting place for yourself in the rock? 17 Behold, the LORD is about to hurl you headlong, O man. And He is about to grasp you firmly 18 And roll you tightly like a ball, To be cast into a vast country; There you will die And there your splendid chariots will be, You shame of your master's house.'*
> *19 I will depose you from your office, And I will pull you down from your station. 20 Then it will come about in that day, That I will summon My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, 21 And I will clothe him with your tunic And tie your sash securely about him. I will entrust him with your authority, And he will become a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. 22 Then I will set the key of the house of David on his shoulder, When he opens no one will shut, When he shuts no one will open. 23 "I will drive him like a peg in a firm place, And he will become a throne of glory to his father's house.*
> *24 So they will hang on him all the glory of his father's house, offspring and issue, all the least of vessels, from bowls to all the jars. 25 "In that day," declares the LORD of hosts, "the peg*

> *driven in a firm place will give way; it will even break off and fall, and the load hanging on it will be cut off, for the LORD has spoken." (Isaiah 22:15-25)*

God was angry with ungodly Shebna and Isaiah said that he would be deposed (v. 19) and replaced by godly Eliakim the son of Hilkiah (v. 20). Shebna squandered resources to build a tomb to enthrone his name in history (v. 16). The focus of the reading is upon the great contrast between Eliakim, a type of Christ, and Shebna, a type of Antichrist, and by application (and prophesy) between Christ and the Antichrist. Remember that a type is when persons (or statements) in the Old Testament prefigure the person of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. For example, the Prophet Jonah, who spent three days and nights in the belly of the great fish (Jonah 1:17), was a type of Christ, in the same way that Jesus spent three days and three nights in the belly of the earth (Matthew 12:40). Eliakim typified the Person of Jesus Christ (as we see in verses 21-24). Jesus, Isaiah prophesied, would "be entrusted with authority (v. 21), become a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah" (v. 21), and possess the "key of the house of David on his shoulder" (v. 24).

Jesus quoted from this passage, as we will see later in the Gospel lesson when He addressed Peter after this important disciple had confessed Jesus as the Messiah. There is a parallel between the trusted servant Eliakim and Peter the disciple of Jesus who came along much later. Both Eliakim and Peter were trusted servants, the latter so much so that Jesus said he would build His church upon him along with the other ten trusted disciples. There are other parallels that exist in the New Testament. The phrase in verse 22, "the key of the house of David," is very similar to a phrase used in the Book of Revelation. Saint John, the author of the Book said, "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this" (Revelation 3:7). John said that Jesus was the One Who "is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens" (v. 7). Jesus alone holds the keys to the kingdom.

The closing of this section of text is marked by a view of the end-time tribulation period in which the false Christ, the Antichrist typified by Isaiah as Shebna, will be taken down (v. 25, Revelation 19:19-20). Isaiah said that the Antichrist, "the peg driven in a firm place will give way; it will even break off and fall, and the load hanging on it will be cut off" (v. 25). We can trust that the true Jesus will overcome the false Christ but not until God has tolerated the hardness of almost the entire world's heart against believing in the Gospel message. Though God will speak the Good News to the world all at the same time through the voice of an angel (Revelation 14:6), precious few will believe. At the end of time, God will call and redeem all of Israel (Romans 11:26).

One takeaway from the first reading is God's eventual judgment of sin. Shebna, though he was rich and powerful, was not immune to God's judgment and the consequences of trusting in himself to make it through life. This is the essence of what it means to be "anti-Christ"—having a posture of self-reliance. In contrast, the Christ-follower is one who recognizes his or her need for a Savior and invites Jesus into the daily stuff of life to let Christ rule and reign in his or her heart.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

As we move on to the second reading from Romans Chapter 11, we need to discuss a portion of the text before the reading to bring out its meaning. The context is Paul's discussion of Israel's future. Romans 9 dealt with Israel's past, Romans 10 with the present (in Paul's time), and Romans 11 with the future. As you read this first omitted section (Chapter 11 vv. 25-32), keep in mind the study last week regarding the unfolding of the revelation of the mystery of God's plan of salvation for the Gentiles.

> *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 11:25-32)*

Paul said that the reason God allowed the Jews to harden their hearts against the Messiah Jesus was to allow for the salvation of the Gentiles in the church. God loved the world so much that He allowed this mystery to accomplish His saving work for the Gentiles, as prophesied in the Old Testament (Isaiah 49:6). Paul, moved by the Holy Spirit, wrote about the unveiling of this phenomenal mystery.

Now let's read the actual second reading.

Second Reading:

> *33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! 34 For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? 35 Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? 36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:33-36)*

Paul marveled at the wisdom and knowledge of God (v. 33). How could God tolerate the hard-hearted Jews in order to provide for the salvation of the Gentiles? The ways of God are unfathomable (v. 33). The implication of this in our own lives is multi-dimensional. As we go through life, there are so many things beyond our control that we do not understand. We know that God has the power to change things—yet sometimes he doesn't act according to what we think is best. This is the crisis of faith. Will we trust that God is wiser and more knowledgeable than we ourselves are? Or will we rail at God for being unloving and incompetent in our lives? While God doesn't cause evil, He does permit it (as in allowing the hearts of the Jews to be hardened). There is a choice that each believer in God has to make at some point in their relationship with God: Am I going to trust God's ways or am I going to trust in my ways above His ways? Throughout the Bible, God uses His divine agents to accomplish His work, be they angels, prophets, animals, or even people like us. As we transition to the Gospel lesson, meditate upon the depth of the wisdom of God in the past biblical record in order to trust Him in the midst of any present-day confusing circumstances in your own life.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading this week is from Matthew 16. Jesus had just shown the disciples His supernatural power through the feeding of the 5,000 and a separate incident of feeding the 4,000. After He did this, Jesus warned them to beware of "the leaven of the Pharisees" (Matthew 16:11), and then He traveled with them to the region known as Caesarea Philippi. It is in this region that many pagans believed to be the seat of the underworld, a place where immoral practices were done on a regular basis to appease the gods from the "gates of hell." There were even niches carved into the rock cliff to display the idols worshipped in this area. It is in this ominous and evil place that Jesus taught His disciples a valuable lesson.

Gospel Reading:

> *13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" 14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." 15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." 20 Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ. (Matthew 16:13-20)*

In the reading, Jesus clearly emphasized Peter as the foremost among the disciples, and this, along with other New Testament readings, indicates that this disciple was something like "first among equals." Jesus told Peter that He would build His church upon both Peter and his confession of Jesus as the Christ. As we delve further into the analysis of the reading, we ask our readers to contemplate how Jesus could place any authority to give the Gospel message to the world on anyone, even Peter. Peter, like many of us, was impulsive and impatient, always wanting to take action but maybe never thinking things through as thoroughly as he would later in his life.

Several significant points jump out of the text. First, Peter, the undisputed leader of the disciples, made the marvelous statement, with the help of God the Father, that Jesus was indeed the Messiah (v. 16). Jesus affirmed Peter's confession and went on to elaborate on it. What did Jesus mean when He told Peter, "upon this rock I will build my church" (v. 18b)? Jesus' meaning is clear when we look one level deeper into the plain meaning found in the original language. Peter, whose name in Greek is "Petros", literally means "rock." However, the foundation on which Jesus spoke about building the church is a different Greek word, "petra," which means a mass or rock. In context, what Jesus said was close to this paraphrase: "Simon, I am changing your name to Petros, and upon this petra (foundational mass of rock) I will build my church." Jesus said that He would build His church upon the foundation (petra, meaning a mass of rock or many large rocks), which, in context, refers to Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ. However, Jesus clearly indicated that Peter was the foremost of these building blocks, the "first among equals." Peter, with his heart changed by the Holy Spirit of God so as to confess Jesus as the Christ, was the foundation of the church. Jesus entrusted this authority to him, as we saw with Eliakim in the first reading. Peter, as first among equals, shared this authority with the other disciples. Peter, the Rock, was the leader of the church among the Jews, the people to whom God first granted the understanding of the mystery of the church, before Paul spread the message to the Gentiles.

Peter clarified this meaning in the First Epistle of Peter. Peter said, "you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). Although Peter used the word "lithos" for stone, he stated how the individual stones are built up into a holy priesthood of believers "through Jesus Christ." The church is the collection of spiritual rocks that are built on the "petra" or foundation that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16) through whom is the only way to eternal life (John 14:6).

Saint Paul used a similar analogy in explaining how God empowered him as the leader and builder of the church among the Gentiles (Ephesians 3:1), in the same way that Peter was the builder of the church among the Jews (Galatians 2:8). Paul said, "According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:10-11). In Ephesians, Paul clarified how Jesus intended the church to interpret this passage by pointing out that our faith has "been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone" (Ephesians 2:20).

Paul used the symbolism of Jesus as the Rock or foundation in First Corinthians:

> *1 For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; 3 and all ate the same spiritual food; 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. (1 Corinthians 10:1-4)*

When Paul said the "they were drinking from the spiritual rock" and "the rock was Christ" (v. 4), both times he used the word "petra." Jesus was the foundation stone, the One Who provided sustenance to the Hebrews as they escaped from the Pharaoh.

Jesus Himself explained the necessity of a sure foundation in Luke Chapter 6:

> *47 Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: 48 he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock;*

> *and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. 49 But the one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house on the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great. (Luke 6:47-49)*

When Jesus said, "he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock" (v. 48) the word in the original was "petra" The giant rock that was rolled to seal Jesus' tomb was a "petra" (Matthew 27:60). Peter **was** one of the foundational stone**s** (the apostles and prophets), but Jesus **is** the Chief Cornerstone, the Foundation of the Church. "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:40).

A second significant point in the text arises from when Jesus said that He "will give you the keys of the kingdom in heaven," and that whatever he bound on earth would be bound in heaven, and whatever was loosed on earth would be loosed in heaven. Scripture is clear that the keys of the kingdom are salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The binding and unbinding of sin is found in the gift of faith (Ephesians 2:8-9) when a person comes to the knowledge of Jesus Christ as their Savior. Peter and the other apostles were sent out with authority to preach the Gospel (Matthew 28:18-20), which would serve as the entry point to faith. In a certain sense, they were being commissioned to open the doors of the Kingdom of God to others by their obedience in proclaiming the Good news and making disciples. We then see Peter is Acts 2:14-40 fulfilling this call by preaching a message of repentance and salvation in Jesus Christ. This is in line with Jesus' teaching when He said, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" (John 3:36). Later, Jesus instructed the group of ten disciples (eleven less Thomas) gathered together in the upper room after His resurrection that anyone who believes in Him through the preaching of the Gospel will be saved. The keys of the Kingdom were being entrusted to this group of men who had been with Jesus personally. They were going to be His hands and feet in the world from now on. And the story of the Gospel continues to penetrate lives because we are all commissioned to be his ambassadors, representing God's love and truth to the world with our lives and our proclamation of the Good News (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Finally, Jesus said, "the gates of Hades will not overpower it" (v. 18c), meaning that all of the evil will not be able to overcome the God-ordained movement of the church. The church is on the offensive, storming the "gates of hell" as was so symbolically portrayed by this incident happening at Caesarea Philippi. This is an important statement that no matter how awful the world may become, the power of Satan will never destroy God's church. We can rest in the fact that Jesus has overcome the world (John 16:33, 1 Corinthians 15:57), and through Him alone we can find the power to continue His commission to make disciples and teach (Matthew 28:16-20).

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Reflection Questions

1. In the Gospel reading, Jesus asked his disciples a very pointed question: "Who do you say that I am?" At some point, each of us has to answer this question. How does Peter's response resonate with you? Is this the foundation you are building your life on? If so, how does your life reflect this? If not, what foundation are you building your life on? Would you like Peter's response to be your response, too? You can pause and ask God to change the direction of your life so that you can build on the Chief Cornerstone, Jesus Christ.

2. In the Gospel lesson, Jesus said, "the gates of Hades will not overpower it" (v. 18c), meaning that all of the evil will not be able to overcome the God-ordained movement of the church. Where do you see this passage intersecting with your life?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 123: 08-24-2025

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, our first reading is from the final chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah. The passage is prophetic in nature; it touches on events in the last days of God's plan for redemption. The second reading from the Epistle to the Hebrews deals with the challenging subject of discipline and how God uses it in the lives of His children. Finally, we read more about Jesus' teaching ministry as He traveled through Israel. In this passage, He includes some tough lessons that are important for us to understand.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The book of Isaiah is like a small Bible. Chapters 1-39 speak of Israel amid the nations (like the Old Testament, consisting of 39 books in many versions). Chapters 40-66 speak of comfort in the revelation of Christ (like the New Testament's 26 books). This last section begins with John the Baptist, climaxes in chapter 53 about the sacrifice of Christ, and ends with the Millennial Kingdom. Today's portion was written to educate Israel about the distant future of the Messianic Kingdom of God and the ultimate restoration of the nation.

First Reading:

> *Isaiah 66:18-21 NAS95 18 "For I know their works and their thoughts; the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and see My glory. 19 I will set a sign among them and will send survivors from them to the nations: Tarshish, Put, Lud, Meshech, Rosh, Tubal and Javan, to the distant coastlands that have neither heard My fame nor seen My glory. And they will declare My glory among the nations. 20 Then they shall bring all your brethren from all the nations as a grain offering to the LORD, on horses, in chariots, in litters, on mules and on camels, to My holy mountain Jerusalem," says the LORD, "just as the sons of Israel bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD. 21 I will also take some of them for priests and for Levites," says the LORD.*

In these verses, Isaiah moves from speaking of God's judgment upon those unfaithful to Him to announcing a future gathering of all nations. Representatives will come into God's presence and be introduced to His great glory. Then, they will be sent out to the countries of the world that have not known God. Someone has called this the Great Commission for Israel (similar to the Great Commission to the Church in Matthew 28). These "missionaries" will declare the glory of God to the nations.

The result will be a great migration, multitudes coming to Jerusalem, described as "My holy mountain." The text tells us they will come in various ways: "on horses, in chariots, in litters, on mules and camels." Notably, God will choose some of these new believers to be priests and to be used in serving capacities for God.

One might ask, "When will these things come to pass?" The answer would require a meticulous study of prophetic Scriptures—Old and New Testament texts—to be definitive. The Bible often speaks of a great tribulation in the end times. Many believe it is the saints (believers) who come out of that tribulation period who will be the messengers to bring to God those who had not yet heard of His love and grace and who, as a result of this witness, come into a relationship of faith in God.

No matter the timing of this prophecy, the recurring theme in this passage is God's glory. What is God's glory? "Glory" is difficult to define because it does not represent a concrete object. It means a quality or essence, much like "beauty." God's glory reflects His beauty and perfect nature, manifesting His unique and sought-after presence. Glory is the positive reference to His attractive reputation, which is manifested in who He is and displayed in what He does. We get a sense of God's glory by the loving dynamic within the three persons of the Godhead, with His generous and gracious interaction with humankind (as recorded in Scripture), and in His display of exotic beauty and intricate design in nature (general revelation). God's glory has been on display for all to see in creation, so that Saint Paul says: "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His

eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse . . . Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man . . . " (Romans 1:20, 22-23).

Responding to God's glory and living in light of this reality is an integral part of a well-lived life with eternal qualities to it. In the passage of Isaiah, it is the distinct privilege of people to declare His fame and reflect His glory to those who do not know. In our lives, we have the privilege to live for God's fame, and not our daily. We can choose to order our lives around giving glory to God, or we can exchange this opportunity to glorify self, honor the finite things of this world, or value what was created over the Creator Himself. Though the results are not always immediate, this passage reminds us that God's glory is worth pursuing.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The central theme of Hebrews is Christ's preeminence. It involves some fundamental and profound theology and includes efficient ideas about Christian living. In fact, the last three chapters provide valuable teaching about walking in faith (ch. 11), walking with hope (ch. 12), and walking in love (ch. 13). Today's reading provides a helpful lesson about the value and necessity of discipline, which often may be painful but always serves God's good purpose.

Second Reading:

Note: Includes verses 8-10 omitted from the reading.

> *Hebrews 12:5-13 NAS95 5 and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; 6 FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES." 7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us*

> *for our good, so that we may share His holiness. 11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. 12 Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.*

The section begins with a reminder that discipline comes from God, and it happens in the lives of all Christians ("every son," v. 6). In fact, the very reality that God disciplines someone proves that person's sonship; he indeed belongs to God, because parents don't discipline someone else's children. It should be noted here that the words in the text express discipline and chastisement, not judgment and punishment. There is a difference.

Most people do not like pain and suffering, and we pray fervently to be rid of them. But, whatever the reason for the pain—whether it's the discipline of God or the consequences of natural infirmities, God can use the suffering for His good purposes. One writer, who has suffered a debilitating disease for many years, wrote:

"If my parents could have stopped me from being afflicted by this disease, they would have. But God didn't, and He's the perfect Father, knowing what will make me a better person. Because of their love, my parents would most likely have insulated me from some of the greatest lessons of life that I could learn only through my suffering. Because of God's love for me, He dare not withhold the pain and suffering."

But why is it necessary for God to discipline His children? What are God's motives? Unfortunately, many of us have been disciplined by an earthly parent out of impatience, sometimes to show us who's boss, or to get us to cooperate with their plan, with no interest in our nurture. Some of the tactics that earthly parents wrongly use are guilt and shame, producing in us a fear of punishment and a surface compliance to the desires of the one with authority. If we view God like our earthly parents, then we have some soul work to do to trust God in the midst of His discipline.

God does not discipline His children to comply begrudgingly or even to get even with the wrongs we have done. God lovingly disciplines His children to help shape a worldview in our hearts that pries our fingers off self-reliance, independence, and autonomous pride; and in exchange, opens our arms to embrace a God-reliant walk with Him. Saint Paul wrote of a time when he was under so much affliction that he even despaired of life itself. As a result of this time of discipline, Paul internalized a deep reliance on God, saying: "We had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not

trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead" (2 Corinthians 1:9).

In our immaturity (just like a child), we do not know how much we need our Father. We often live as if we are in charge and give a quick nod to God when we want to do well on an exam, need a new job, or feel like we are in a bind. But God, in His kindness, knows this is low-level living in Him. Through having the proverbial rug pulled out from underneath us, He helps us to live in light of reality and recognize that we cannot do life on our own. In our disorientation and desolation, we desperately seek God's abiding presence and find our consolation in Him (not in our sense of control or carefully arranged circumstances). We begin to internalize His value system in our soul by living in dependence on Him, which is a "severe mercy" on God's part. God's motive is to bring life that is truly life (John 10:10) to us amid His strategic and loving discipline.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

We hear a lot today about intolerance. We are urged to tolerate almost everyone and everything that someone might believe or do. Moral standards of right and wrong seem to have evaporated in modern society, and common sense has been replaced with personal preference. But, there is a standard; there is a right way, and everything contrary to that must be wrong. Jesus and Christianity are often criticized because of their claim that there is only one way to God. Today's reading emphasizes that truth in the teaching of Jesus Himself, who claimed to be the way (John 14:6).

Gospel Reading:

> *Luke 13:22-30 NAS95 22 And He was passing through from one city and village to another, teaching, and proceeding on His way to Jerusalem. 23 And someone said to Him, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" And He said to them, 24 "Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. 25 Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, 'Lord, open up to us!' then He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know where you are from.' 26 Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets'; 27 and He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you are from; DEPART FROM ME, ALL YOU EVILDOERS.' 28 In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being thrown out. 29 And they will come from east and west and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God. 30 And behold, some are last who will be first and some are first who will be last."*

Luke records essential lessons from Jesus' teaching as the Lord makes His way to Jerusalem, where He is to suffer and die. He had told His disciples about His destiny, although they did not fully understand His plan of salvation until after the promised resurrection. Some had understood His teaching about the necessity to come to God through Him, and one asked Him specifically about it. Are there, he wonders, only a few that will be saved? Jesus answers by describing the entrance to faith as "the narrow door." His further comments can leave no doubt about the exclusiveness of the way to God.

Not all who feel entitled to enter can do so. The "head of the house," no doubt a reference to God the Father, surely has the right to open and close the door to His own house, and knocking on the door will not achieve entrance if you are unknown to the householder. He clarifies that the past physical association with Him (eating and drinking, for example) is insufficient. People also claim they listened to His teaching in their streets, but this is still insufficient. Those entitled to enter are those who enter through the "narrow door." What is this narrow door that Jesus is referring to?

In the Gospel of John, Jesus answers the question by metaphorically referring to himself as the door to the sheepfold. Inside the sheepfold, the sheep are safe and find refuge. He said, "Truly, truly I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:7-10). It is clear from this and other parts of Scripture (John 14:6, Acts 4:12) that Jesus is the only entry point to eternal life.

It is clear, then, that there is no salvation apart from genuine trust in the grace of Jesus and His finished work on the cross, evidenced by His resurrection. He indeed is the only way to God. Those who reject the opportunity to trust Him will weep and gnash their teeth when they see Israel's fathers and prophets in the kingdom, and they are left out. These words should bring them to repentance so they can "recline at the table in the kingdom of God." The last—the down-and-outers, the ones who do not feel entitled—will be first in the kingdom because they have accepted the lordship of Jesus in their lives.

Reflection Questions

1. The pinnacle of God's glory is displayed in His work of salvation accomplished through Christ's

perfect life, His death, and His resurrection. How has God's glory changed you from pursuing the corruptible things of this finite world to orienting your life around the incorruptible beauty of God's nature? Where do you see God's glory displayed in your life's choices, attitudes, and values? Where would you like to see God's continued work in your life and through your life to reflect His glory?

2. How did your parents discipline you as a child? What tactics/motives reflected the heart of God, and what tactics/motives did not reflect the heart of God? What parts of that experience do you need to exchange to embrace God's loving discipline in your life? What seasons of discipline do you need to revisit in your mind and mentally process with this new perspective of God's heart for internalizing His value system in you? How can this perspective on God's discipline being part of our sonship encourage you and those you love to stay faithful to God amid suffering?

3. Since Jesus spoke metaphorically of entering through the narrow door, what does it mean to do this spiritually? How does this metaphor get lived out in your life? It might require a first-time decision to follow Him if you have never articulated your allegiance to Christ or daily moments of trust to show your allegiance to Him as Lord. What would it be worth to you to recline at the table in the kingdom of God and be with the Old Testament saints for eternity? How might you grow in valuing this eternal reward over short-term gratification that gets in the way of reflecting God's glory?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 08-25-2024

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass. This week the readings focus upon the theme of God calling people to walk in a personal relationship with Him. In the first reading from Joshua, we see a challenge issued by God to forsake the false gods the people's ancestors served. In the second reading, Saint Paul teaches about the relationship between man and his wife, and the mystery of how this parallels that between the Father and the Son. In the Gospel lesson, we study a story where Jesus' followers came to a point of decision concerning His identity as God in the flesh, the promised Messiah, the nature of whom they misunderstood.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Joshua who was the successor to Moses after the Exodus and the one who led the Hebrew people across the Jordan after Moses' death. The reading today provides an overview of the monumental charge from Joshua to serve the One true God.

First Reading:

> *Joshua 24:1-18 NAS95 1 Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and called for the elders of Israel and for their heads and their judges and their officers; and they presented themselves before God. 2 Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'From ancient times your fathers lived beyond the River, namely, Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods. 3 'Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River, and led him through all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac. 4 'To Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau, and to Esau I gave Mount Seir to possess it; but Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt. 5 'Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt by what I did in its midst; and afterward I brought you out. 6 'I brought your fathers out of Egypt, and you came to the sea; and Egypt pursued your fathers with chariots and horsemen to the Red Sea. 7 'But when they cried out to the LORD, He put darkness between you and the Egyptians, and brought the sea upon them and covered them; and your own eyes saw what I did in Egypt. And you lived in the wilderness for a long time. 8 'Then I brought you into the land of the Amorites who lived beyond the Jordan, and they fought with you; and I gave them into your hand, and you took possession of their land when I destroyed them before you. 9 'Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose and fought against Israel, and he sent and summoned Balaam the son of Beor to curse you. 10 'But I was not willing to listen to Balaam. So he had to bless you, and I delivered you from his hand. 11 'You crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho; and the citizens of Jericho fought against you, and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Girgashite, the Hivite and the Jebusite. Thus I gave them into your hand. 12 'Then I sent the hornet before you and it drove out the two kings of the Amorites from before you, but not by your sword or your bow. 13 'I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and cities which you had not built, and you have lived in them; you are eating of vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant.' 14 "Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. 15 "If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." 16 The people answered and said, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; 17 for the LORD our God is He who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and who did these great signs in our sight and preserved us through all the way in which we went and among all the peoples through whose midst we passed. 18 "The LORD drove out from before us all the peoples, even the Amorites who lived in the land. We also will serve the LORD, for He is our God."*

After forty years of wandering in the desert under the leadership of Moses, the people who were still alive migrated across the Jordan River into the Promised Land. Upon entering the land, they encountered many obstacles the foremost of which was their immersion into a culture of idolatry which wasn't too different from that which plagued Abraham's father Terah (v. 2). Joshua presented to them the heart of the matter by saying, "choose for yourselves today whom you will serve:

whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living" or the One true God (v. 15). This was God's call to the people for a relationship with Him, with the terms of this relationship being to serve Him alone and not the gods of the surrounding nations. The people answered that they would indeed serve the Lord God and not the gods of the Amorites.

We know from reading the rest of the Scriptures how short-lived the Hebrew's promise was not to serve other gods and in effect creating a division between the true followers of God and the rest of the people. Because of their disobedience, God later sent foreign nations to invade their land including the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and finally the Romans. Joshua was in the first camp, saying "but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (v. 15). As we will see later in the Gospel lesson, Jesus confronts the people with a similar decision. Will they follow Him, or instead follow their religious traditions? Will they follow the Father God, or their father the devil? Will they enter by the narrow road, Jesus, or follow the broad road to destruction (Matthew 7:13)?

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Ephesians 5. The context leading up to this passage is a treatise on how Christians should relate to one another. Saint Paul's teaching then zeros in on the model of submission between a husband and his wife, linking this as a reflection of the relationship between God the Son and God the Father, as well the church and Christ.

Second Reading:

> *Ephesians 5:21-33 NAS95 21 and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. 22 Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. 24 But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, 26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. 28 So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; 29 for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, 30 because we are members of His body. 31 FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS*

> *FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. 32 This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. 33 Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.*

The big idea in the reading is the nature of the relationship that exists between the believer and God. In the same way that the Jews in the first reading had a decision to make regarding their spiritual direction, all believers, not just Christian husbands and wives, have to come to grips with their personal relationship to God and how He calls them to live out this relationship with Him. Paul opens the reading by saying that everyone (married, unmarried, widows, and widowers) must "be subject to one another in the fear of Christ" (v. 21). This is the foundational concept upon which he builds his explanation of biblical submission between and woman and her husband, which parallels the mysterious relationship that exists between Jesus and the Father (v. 32). Because "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28), we too are to serve others in mutual submission to God ("in the fear of Christ," v. 21). This includes not only wives serving their husbands, but husbands serving their wives and everyone serving each other in the church family. For Paul said in 1 Corinthians, "But now there are many members, but one body" (1 Corinthians 12:21).

Continuing upon the relational concept in the reading, Paul described how the husband is the visible leader of the family by using the word translated "head" (v. 23), which in the original Greek connoted "something that can be seen and taken a hold of." The idea is that the wife is to voluntarily place herself under the leadership of her husband. In the same way that Jesus is equal to God the Father but with different in His role, so the wife is equal in status to her husband, but in a different. Jesus' submission to the Father does not make Him inferior (Philippians 2:6-11), only obedient. So, too, the wife's submission to her husband in the Lord does not make her inferior to her husband, but it does allow her to be obedient to God. This model of the harmonious union between one man and one woman goes all the way back to the Book of Genesis: "FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH" (v. 31). The unity between the man and the woman in marriage parallels the mysterious relationship between Christ and the church (v. 32). The Bible is clear that both the man and woman are called to be in mutual submission to God, while the woman is to submit to her husband and the man to God as the final authority. The man is called by God to be the visible ruler of the family by first separating himself from the headship of his own father (v. 31). This is the man's conscious point of decision to leave his earthly father and join with his wife in a new relationship that leads to unity under his Father God. It's as if God tells the man, choose whom you will serve.

As we move onto the Gospel lesson, we will see how Jesus' teaching of the crowds resulted in their

coming to their own point of decision regarding whom they would serve.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Today's reading from John marks an important point in his Gospel concerning a point of decision and division. The reading contains the famous John 6:66 passage, the numbering of which brings with it the idea of the mark of the Antichrist, the great divider who is to come in the future who will separate the true believers from among everyone in the world. The concept comes from the Book of Revelation. *"16 And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, 17 and he provides that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name. 18 Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six"* (Revelation 13:16-18). In the End Times, the people will be given one final choice regarding who they will serve. At this point, God will make a clear division between the followers of God and the only other choice, the followers of the AntiChrist. In the Gospel reading, Jesus' teaching reaches a similar climax in which Jesus calls the people to a personal relationship with Him. Although they are not outright called to decide to which camp they belong, a clear division occurs beginning in John 6:66 which begins the separation of the wheat and the chaff (Matthew 3:12). God uses these moments of decision to reveal His true followers such as the occasion in which Saint Paul stated, "For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you" (1 Corinthians 11:19).

Gospel Reading:

> *John 6:60-69 NAS95 60 Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this said, "This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?" 61 But Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said to them, "Does this cause you to stumble? 62 What then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before? 63 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. 64 But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. 65 And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father." 66 As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore. 67 So Jesus said to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?" 68 Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. 69 We have believed and have*

come to know that You are the Holy One of God."

This story in John marked the beginning of several such points of decision in which the people were challenged to choose between the ways of God by following Jesus or the ways of man by following a false religion and their own traditions. In this reading, the people came to the point of decision when they had heard Jesus' prior statements about Him being the "bread which came down from heaven" (John 6:58). The conflict that the people had with Jesus that caused their grumbling (John 6:43) was that they were familiar with Jesus' father Joseph and also his mother (John 6:42). Jesus was calling Himself God, and since they knew his earthly parents, they reasoned that He could not be God. The people also misunderstood the nature of the Messiah because just a few verses later they said, "However, we know where this man is from; but whenever the Christ may come, no one knows where He is from" (John 7:27). This point of division continued into the group of His twelve disciples, for Jesus knew that one of them (Judas) had already separated himself from Him. The grumbling of the larger group of disciples then resulted in a separation of the true followers of God and everyone else. As this separation occurred, Jesus presented to the twelve a challenge causing Peter to take a stand for Jesus, affirming everything that Jesus had been saying about Himself. "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God" (vv. 68-69).

This passage teaches us that belief in Jesus is the way to eternal life. Some of the Jews were offended that Jesus, a mere man in their eyes, would claim to be God. However, if He was the Messiah, then His demand for their belief and loyalty was justified. In some sense, everyone has to come to terms with Jesus' claim to be the only way to eternal life. Some will be like the offended Jews, who stumbled over what they saw as far-fetched claims and rejected Jesus' lordship over their lives. But others respond like Peter and say: "Lord" (which is a good way to start a sentence when you are talking to God in the flesh). . . "You have the words of eternal life" (vv. 68-69). May we continue to believe in Christ as Lord and let Him work in us the type of life that leads to eternity with the Father.

One day while I was driving, I happened upon a man walking in the afternoon along the road who seemed to be in a hurry to get somewhere. He was wearing black wingtip shoes, which kind of stuck out to me. I had never seen this particular man before. My spirit prompted me to pull beside him and offer him a ride, which he gladly accepted. He told me that his bicycle had broken down and that he was on his way to work at the local supermarket. I encountered this man several times over the course of the next few months and each time he presented himself in such a kind, godly way that I actually began to think that he was an angel. As he found out more about my faith, he began to praise and glorify God for all that He had done in my life. Perhaps it was because I didn't know him very well, but each time we met I sensed his close relationship with God. It also helped that his real

name was Angelo! It wasn't until I met his wife that I finally understood he really was just a man (see Matthew 22:30).

After several encounters with Angelo, it really got me thinking about how **I** come across to the random people that I meet. Does my public persona match how I come across to people personally? How about my persona on Facebook; does it match what I truly believe? Considering Facebook, it seems to me to be okay to post that you are attending a Saturday afternoon wine tasting session; however, it is problematic when all that a person posts is about food and wine.

Like Angelo, when people meet us we should exhibit the markings of a follower of Jesus Christ. Which path are you **continuing** to choose in your daily walk with God? Joshua said in the first reading, "Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD," "choose for yourselves today whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:14, 15b). Paul said in the second reading to "be subject to one another in the fear of Christ" (Ephesians 51), a behavior which can only be done through the empowerment of God's Holy Spirit as a new creation in Christ. Finally, Jesus said, "You do not want to go away also, do you?" (John 6:67b). Each day we have to choose the forsake "Egypt" and choose the pathway to walk with God. Although we make certain bad choices at times that dishonor God, the Scripture says that "if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Reflection Questions

1. What have been some of the turning points in your life, especially as you consider your relationship with God? How have you turned from being offended by Christ's radical call on your life to a place of surrender and submission to His lordship? Are there areas of your life that you are still wrestling for control? How might these passages help you to surrender anew to His lordship?

2. If someone watched your life, choices and attitudes, to whom or what would they attribute your devotion, worship and loyalty? What things would they see to show them that you are choosing this day (and every day) to serve the Lord? What things would give a conflicted and confusing message to them of your heart's true home?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for 08-22-2021



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The first reading is from Joshua who was the successor to Moses after the Exodus and the one who led the Hebrew people across the Jordan after Moses' death. The reading today provides an overview of the monumental charge from Joshua to serve the One true God.

First Reading:

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After forty years of wandering in the desert under the leadership of Moses, the people who were still alive migrated across the Jordan River into the Promised Land. Upon entering the land they encountered many obstacles the foremost of which was their immersion into a culture of idolatry which wasn't too different from that which plagued Abraham's father Terah (v. 2). Joshua presented to them the heart of the matter by saying, "choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living" or the One true God (v. 15). This was God's call to the people for a relationship with Him with the terms of the relationship being to serve Him alone and not the gods of the surrounding nations. The people answered that they would indeed serve the Lord God

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We know from reading the rest of the Scriptures how short-lived the Hebrew's promise was not to serve other gods and in effect creating a division between the true followers of God and the rest of the people. Because of their disobedience, God later sent foreign nations to invade their land including the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and finally the Romans. Joshua was in the first camp, saying "but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (v. 15). As we will see later in the Gospel lesson, Jesus confronts the people with a similar decision. Will they follow Him, or instead follow their religious traditions? Will they follow the Father God, or their father the devil? Will they enter by the narrow road, Jesus, or follow the broad road to destruction (Matthew 7:13)?

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The second reading is from Ephesians 5. The context leading up to this passage is a treatise on how Christians should relate to one another. Saint Paul's teaching then zeros in on the model of submission between a husband and his wife, linking this as a reflection of the relationship between God the Son and God the Father, as well the church to Christ.

Second Reading:

Ephesians 5:21-33 NAS95 21 and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. 22 Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. 24 But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, 26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. 28 So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; 29 for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, 30 because we are members of His body. 31 FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. 32 This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. 33 Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.

The big idea in the reading is the nature of the relationship that exists between the believer and God. In the same way that the Jews in the first reading had a decision to make regarding their spiritual direction, all believers, not just Christian husbands and wives, have to come to grips with their personal relationship to God and how He calls them to live out this relationship with Him. Paul opens the reading by saying that everyone (married, unmarried, widows, and widowers) must "be subject to one another in the fear of Christ" (v. 21). This is the foundational concept upon which he builds his explanation of biblical submission between and woman and her husband, which parallels the mysterious relationship that exists between Jesus and the Father (v. 32). Because "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28) we too are to serve others in mutual submission to God ("in the fear of Christ," v. 21). This includes not only wives serving their husbands, but husbands serving their wives and everyone serving each other in the church family. For Paul said in 1 Corinthians, "But now there are many members, but one body" (1 Corinthians 12:21).

Continuing upon the relational concept in the reading, Paul described how the husband is the visible leader of the family by using the word translated "head" (v.23), which in the original Greek connoted "something that can be seen and taken a hold of." The idea is that the wife is to voluntarily place herself under the leadership of her husband. In the same way that Jesus is equal to God the Father, but different in His role, so the wife is equal in status to her husband, but different in her role. Jesus' submission to the Father does not make Him inferior (Philippians 2:6-11), only obedient. So, too, the wife's submission to her husband in the Lord does not make her inferior to her husband, but it does allow her to be obedient to God. This model of the harmonious union between one man and one woman goes all the way back to the Book of Genesis: "FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH" (v. 31). The unity between the man and the woman in marriage parallels the mysterious relationship between Christ and the church (v. 32). The Bible is clear that both the man and woman are called to be in mutual submission to God, while the woman is to submit to her husband and the man to God as the final authority. The man is called by God to be the visible ruler of the family by first separating himself from the headship of his own father (v. 31). This is the man's conscious point of decision to leave his earthly father and join with his wife in a new relationship that leads to unity under his Father God. It's as if God tells the man, choose whom you will serve.

As we move onto the Gospel lesson, we will see how Jesus' teaching of the crowds resulted in their coming to their own point of decision regarding whom they would serve.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

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Today's reading from John marks an important point in his Gospel concerning a point of decision and division. The reading contains the famous John 6:66 passage, the numbering of which brings with it the idea of the mark of the Antichrist, the great divider who is to come in the future who will separate the true believers from among everyone in the world. The concept comes from the Book of Revelation. *"16 And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, 17 and he provides that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name. 18 Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six"* (Revelation 13:16-18). In the End Times the people will be given one final choice regarding who they will serve. At this point God will make a clear division between the followers of God and the only other choice, the followers of the AntiChrist. In the Gospel reading, Jesus' teaching reaches a similar climax in which Jesus calls the people to a personal relationship with Him. Although they are not outright called to decide to which camp they belong, a clear division occurs beginning in John 6:66 which begins the separation of the wheat and the chaff (Matthew 3:12). God uses these moments of decision to reveal His true followers such as the occasion in which Saint Paul stated, "For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you" (1 Corinthians 11:19).

Gospel Reading:

John 6:60-69 NAS95 60 Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this said, "This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?" 61 But Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said to them, "Does this cause you to stumble? 62 What then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before? 63 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. 64 But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. 65 And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father." 66 As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore. 67 So Jesus said to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?" 68 Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. 69 We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God."

This story in John marked the beginning of several such points of decision in which the people were challenged to choose between the ways of God by following Jesus or the ways of man by following false religion and their own traditions. In this reading, the people came to the point of decision when they had heard Jesus' prior statements about Him being the "bread which came down from heaven" (John 6:58). The conflict that the people had with Jesus that caused their grumbling (John 6:43) was

that they were familiar with Jesus' father Joseph and also his mother (John 6:42). Jesus was calling Himself God and since they knew his earthly parents, they reasoned that He could not be God. The people also misunderstood the nature of the Messiah because just a few verses later they said, "However, we know where this man is from; but whenever the Christ may come, no one knows where He is from" (John 7:27). This point of division continued into the group of His twelve disciples, for Jesus knew that one of them (Judas) had already separated himself from Him. The grumbling of the larger group of disciples then resulted in a separation of the true followers of God and everyone else. As this separation occurred, Jesus presented to the twelve a challenge causing Peter to take a stand for Jesus, affirming everything that Jesus had been saying about Himself. "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God" (vv. 68-69).

This passage teaches us that belief in Jesus is the way to eternal life. Some of the Jews were offended that Jesus, a mere man in their eyes, would claim to be God. However, if He was the Messiah, then His demand for their belief and loyalty was justified. In some sense, everyone has to come to terms with Jesus' claim to be the only way to eternal life. Some will be like the offended Jews, who stumbled over what they saw as far-fetched claims and rejected Jesus' lordship over their lives. But others respond like Peter and say: "Lord" (which is a good way to start a sentence when you are talking to God in the flesh) . . . "You have the words of eternal life" (vv. 68-69). May we continue to believe in Christ as Lord and let Him work in us the type of life that leads to eternity with the Father.

One day while I was driving, I happened upon a man walking in the afternoon along the road who seemed to be in a hurry to get somewhere. He was wearing black wingtip shoes, which kind of stuck out to me. I had never seen this particular man before. My spirit prompted me to pull beside him and offer him a ride, which he gladly accepted. He told me that his bicycle had broken down and that he was on his way to work at the local supermarket. I encountered this man several times over the course of the next few months and each time he presented himself in such a kind, godly way that I actually began to think that he was an angel. As he found out more about my faith he began to praise and glorify God for all that He had done in my life. Perhaps it was because I didn't know him very well, but each time we met I sensed his close relationship with God. It also helped that his real name was Angelo! It wasn't until I met his wife that I finally understood he really was just a man (see Matthew 22:30).

After several encounters with Angelo, it really got me thinking about how **I** come across to the random people that I meet. Does my public persona match how I come across to people personally? How about my persona on Facebook; does it match what I truly believe? Considering Facebook, it seems to me to be okay to post that you are attending a Saturday afternoon wine tasting session;

however, it is problematic when all that a person posts is about food and wine.

Like Angelo, when people meet us we should exhibit the markings of a follower of Jesus Christ. Which path are you **continuing** to choose in your daily walk with God? Joshua said in the first reading, "Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD," "choose for yourselves today whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:14, 15b). Paul said in the second reading to "be subject to one another in the fear of Christ" (Ephesians 51), a behavior which can only be done through the empowerment of God's Holy Spirit as a new creation in Christ. Finally, Jesus said, "You do not want to go away also, do you?" (John 6:67b). Each day we have to choose the forsake "Egypt" and choose the pathway to walk with God. Although we make certain bad choices at times that dishonor God, the Scripture says that "if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Reflection Questions

1. What have been some of the turning points in your life, especially as you consider your relationship with God? How have you turned from being offended by Christ's radical call on your life to a place of surrender and submission to His lordship? Are there areas of your life that you are still wrestling for control? How might these passages help you to surrender anew to His lordship?

2. If someone watched your life, choices and attitudes, to whom or what would they attribute your devotion, worship and loyalty? What things would they see to show them that you are choosing this day (and every day) to serve the Lord? What things would give a conflicted and confusing message to them of your heart's true home?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 08-23-2020

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the first reading from Isaiah where we see and explain meanings of the phrase "the key of the house of David." Then we move to the second reading from Romans 11 where you will read many additional verses beyond what was published in the lectionary in order to understand the meaning of God's Word based on its context. Finally, we conclude with the Gospel message from Matthew 16 and study the meaning of a phrase similar to what we saw in the first reading, "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" in which Jesus emphasized the importance of Peter as the first among equals of the disciples.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Before we begin, I will briefly review the format and method of these weekly study notes. The format can be understood from the acronym A-B-C but starting from the "C" and working backwards: context, big idea, and application. First, we provide the full scriptural context of the text including verses that were omitted in the reading. We also provide the historical context along with the background and setting of the author. Second, we study the text in light of its historical context to determine the theological big idea. We develop this in light of a "Christological" focus, that is upon the redemptive message found throughout the Bible of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, whether in a future context as in the Old Testament or in a present or historical context as in the New Testament. We do not rely upon an allegorical interpretation but instead use the historical

critical method and refer to the original languages and parallel passages whenever necessary. Finally, we provide several applications of the text for the present day Christian. Although there is usually only one main interpretation of the text, there are many possible applications. With these guiding principles in mind, let's move onto the first reading.

The first reading is from the Prophet Isaiah. The reading is a parenthesis in Chapter 22, meaning that it was a pause or temporary transition from the main theme. The theme that Isaiah was describing in the chapter before this parenthesis was the future destruction of Jerusalem that we know came over 125 years later in 586 B.C. Isaiah wrote just prior to the destruction of the Northern Kingdom by Assyria in 722 B.C. The context of the reading is that an evil man named Shebna, who was the secretary of the treasury under King Hezekiah, built for himself a royal tomb so that his name would be remembered after he was dead. Evidently, this Shebna was misappropriating funds (see 2 Kings 18:18, 19:2, and Isaiah 36:3, 37:2). This reading includes verses 15-18 and verses 24-25, in order for you to read the whole section of Scripture.

First Reading:

15 Thus says the Lord GOD of hosts, "Come, go to this steward, To Shebna, who is in charge of the royal household, 16 'What right do you have here, And whom do you have here, That you have hewn a tomb for yourself here, You who hew a tomb on the height, You who carve a resting place for yourself in the rock? 17 Behold, the LORD is about to hurl you headlong, O man. And He is about to grasp you firmly 18 And roll you tightly like a ball, To be cast into a vast country; There you will die And there your splendid chariots will be, You shame of your master's house.'

19 I will depose you from your office, And I will pull you down from your station. 20 Then it will come about in that day, That I will summon My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, 21 And I will clothe him with your tunic And tie your sash securely about him. I will entrust him with your authority, And he will become a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. 22 Then I will set the key of the house of David on his shoulder, When he opens no one will shut, When he shuts no one will open. 23 "I will drive him like a peg in a firm place, And he will become a throne of glory to his father's house.

24 So they will hang on him all the glory of his father's house, offspring and issue, all the least of vessels, from bowls to all the jars. 25 "In that day," declares the LORD of hosts, "the peg driven in a firm place will give way; it will even break off and fall, and the load hanging on it will be cut off, for

the LORD has spoken." (Isaiah 22:15-25)

God was angry with ungodly Shebna and Isaiah said that he would be deposed (v. 19) and replaced by godly Eliakim the son of Hilkiah (v. 20). Shebna squandered resources to build a tomb to enthrone his name in history (v. 16). The focus of the reading is upon the great contrast between Eliakim, a type of Christ, and Shebna, a type of Antichrist, and by application (and prophesy) between Christ and the Antichrist. Remember that a type is when persons (or statements) in the Old Testament prefigure the person of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. For example, the Prophet Jonah, who spent three days and nights in the belly of the great fish (Jonah 1:17) was a type of Christ, in the same way that Jesus spent three days and three nights in the belly of the earth (Matthew 12:40). Eliakim typified the Person of Jesus Christ (as we see in verses 21-24). Jesus, Isaiah prophesied, would "be entrusted with authority (v. 21), become a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah" (v. 21), and possess the "key of the house of David on his shoulder" (v. 24).

Jesus quoted from this passage, as we will see later in the Gospel lesson when He addressed Peter after this important disciple had confessed Jesus as the Messiah. There is a parallel between the trusted servant Eliakim and Peter the disciple of Jesus who came along much later. Both Eliakim and Peter were trusted servants, the latter so much so that Jesus said he would build His church upon him along with the other ten trusted disciples. There are other parallels that exist to the New Testament. The phrase in verse 22 "the key of the house of David" is very similar to a phrase used in the Book of Revelation. Saint John, the author of the Book said, "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this" (Revelation 3:7). John said that Jesus was the One Who "is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens" (v. 7). Jesus alone holds the keys to the kingdom.

The closing of this section of text is marked by a view of the end time tribulation period in which the false Christ, the Antichrist typified by Isaiah as Shebna, will be taken down (v. 25, Revelation 19:19-20). Isaiah said that the Antichrist, "the peg driven in a firm place will give way; it will even break off and fall, and the load hanging on it will be cut off" (v. 25). We can trust that the true Jesus will overcome the false Christ but not until God has tolerated the hardness of almost the entire world's heart against believing in the Gospel message. Though God will speak the Good News to the world all at the same time through the voice of an angel (Revelation 14:6), precious few will believe. During the end time period God will call and redeem all of Israel (Romans 11:26).

Something that we can take away from the first reading includes God's eventual judgment of sin. Shebna, though he was rich and powerful, was not immune to God's judgment and the consequences of trusting in himself to make it through life. This is the essence of what it means to be "anti-Christ"—having a posture of self-reliance. In contrast, the Christ-follower is one who recognizes his or her own need for a Savior and invites Jesus into the daily stuff of life in order to let Christ rule and reign in our hearts.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

As we move onto the second reading from Romans Chapter 11, we need to discuss a portion of text before the reading in order to bring out the meaning. The context is Paul's discussion about the future of Israel. Romans 9 dealt with Israel's past, Romans 10 with the present (in Paul's time), and Romans 11 with the future. As you read this first omitted section (Chapter 11 vv. 25-32), keep in mind the study last week regarding the unfolding of the revelation of the mystery of God's plan of salvation for the Gentiles.

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 11:25-32)

Paul said that the reason God allowed the Jews to harden their hearts against the Messiah Jesus was to allow for the salvation of the Gentiles in the church. God loved the world so much that He allowed this mystery to accomplish His saving work for the Gentiles as prophesied in the Old Testament (Isaiah 49:6). Paul wrote as moved by the Holy Spirit about the unveiling of this phenomenal mystery.

Now let's read the actual second reading.

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Second Reading:

33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! 34 For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? 35 Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? 36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:33-36)

Paul marveled at the wisdom and knowledge of God (v. 33). How could God tolerate the hard-hearted Jews in order to provide for the salvation of the Gentiles? The ways of God are unfathomable (v. 33). The implication of this for our own lives is multi-dimensional. As we go through life, there are so many things that are out of our control that we do not understand. We know that God has the power to change things—yet, sometimes he doesn't do things according to what we think is best. This is the crisis of faith. Will we trust that God is wiser and more knowledgeable than we ourselves are? Or will we rail at God for being unloving and incompetent in our lives? While God doesn't cause evil, He does permit it (as in allowing the hearts of the Jews to be hardened). There is a choice that each believer in God has to make at some point in their relationship with God: Am I going to trust God's ways or am I going to trust in my ways above His ways? Throughout the Bible God uses His divine agents to accomplish His work, be they angels, prophets, animals, or even people like us. As we transition to the Gospel lesson, meditate upon the depth of the wisdom of God in the past biblical record in order to trust Him in the midst of any present-day confusing circumstances for your own life.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading this week is from Matthew 16. Jesus had just been showing the disciples His supernatural power through the feeding of the 5,000 and a separate incident of feeding of the 4,000. After He did this Jesus warned them to beware of "the leaven of the Pharisees" (Matthew 16:11) and then He traveled with them to the region known as Caesarea Philippi. It is in this region that many pagans believed was the seat of the underworld, a place where immoral practices were done on a regular basis to appease the gods out from the "gates of hell." There were even niches carved out of the rock cliff in order to display the idols that were worshipped in this area. It is in this ominous and evil place that Jesus had a valuable lesson to teach His disciples.

Gospel Reading:

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" 14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." 15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." 20 Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ. (Matthew 16:13-20)

In the reading, Jesus clearly emphasized Peter as the foremost among the disciples and this along with other New Testament readings indicate that this disciple was something like "first among equals." Jesus told Peter that He would build His church upon both Peter and his confession of Jesus as the Christ. As we delve further into the analysis of the reading, we ask our readers to contemplate how Jesus could lay any authority for giving the Gospel message to the world on anyone, even Peter. Peter, like many of us, was impulsive and impatient, always wanting to take actions but maybe never thinking things through as thoroughly as he would later in his life.

Several significant points jump out of the text. First, Peter, the uncontested leader or the disciples, made the marvelous statement through the help of God the Father that Jesus was indeed the Messiah (v. 16). Jesus affirmed his confession and went on to elaborate upon Peter's statement. What did Jesus mean when He told Peter, "upon this rock I will build my church" (v.18b)? Jesus' meaning is clear when we look one level deeper into the plain meaning found in the original language. Peter, whose name in Greek is "Petros", literally means "rock." However, the foundation on which Jesus spoke about building the church is a different Greek word "petra" which means a mass or rock. In context, what Jesus said was close to this paraphrase: "Simon, I am changing your name to Petros, and upon this petra (foundational mass of rock) I will build my church." Jesus said that He would build His church upon the foundation (petra, meaning mass of rock or many large rocks), which, in context, is Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ. However, Jesus clearly indicated that Peter was the foremost of these building blocks, the "first among equals." Peter, with his heart changed by the Holy Spirit of God so as to confess Jesus as the Christ was the foundation of the church. Jesus entrusted this authority to him like what we saw with Eliakim in the first reading. Peter, as first among equals, shared this authority with the other disciples. Peter, the Rock, was the leader of the church among the Jews, the people to whom God first granted the understanding of the mystery of the church, before Paul spread the message to the Gentiles.

Peter clarified this meaning in the Book of First Peter. Peter said, "you also, as living stones, are

being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). Although Peter used the word "lithos" for stone, he stated how the individual stones are built up into a holy priesthood of believers "through Jesus Christ." The church is the collection of spiritual rocks that are built on the "petra" or foundation that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16) through whom is the only way to eternal life (John 14:6).

Saint Paul used a similar analogy in explaining how God empowered him as the leader and builder of the church among the Gentiles (Ephesians 3:1), in the same way that Peter was the builder of the church among the Jews (Galatians 2:8). Paul said, "According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:10-11). In Ephesians Paul clarified how Jesus intended the church to interpret this passage by pointing out that our faith has "been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone" (Ephesians 2:20).

Paul used the symbolism of Jesus as the Rock or foundation in First Corinthians:

1 For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; 3 and all ate the same spiritual food; 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. (1 Corinthians 10:1-4)

When Paul said the "they were drinking from the spiritual rock" and "the rock was Christ" (v. 4) both times he used the word "petra." Jesus was the foundation stone, the One Who provided sustenance to the Hebrews escaping from the Pharaoh.

Jesus Himself explained the necessity of a sure foundation in Luke Chapter 6:

47 Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: 48 he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. 49 But the one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a

house on the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great. (Luke 6:47-49)

When Jesus said, "he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock" (v. 48) the word in the original was "petra" The giant rock that was rolled to seal Jesus' tomb was a "petra" (Matthew 27:60). Peter **was** one of the foundational stone**s** (the apostles and prophets), but Jesus **is** the Chief Cornerstone, the Foundation of the Church. "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:40).

A second significant point in the text arises from when Jesus said that He "will give you the keys of the kingdom in heaven," and that whatever he bound on earth would be bound in heaven and whatever was loosed on earth would be loosed in heaven. Scripture is clear that the keys of the kingdom are salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The binding and unbinding of sin is found in the gift of faith (Ephesians 2:8-9) when a person comes to the knowledge of Jesus Christ as their Savior. Peter and the other apostles were being sent out with authority to preach the Gospel (Matthew 28:18-20), which would be the entry point of faith. In a certain sense, they were being commissioned to open the doors of the Kingdom of God to others by their obedience in proclaiming the Good news and making disciples. We then see Peter is Acts 2:14-40 fulfilling this call by preaching a message of repentance and salvation in Jesus Christ. This is in line with Jesus' teaching when He said, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" (John 3:36). Later, Jesus instructed the group of ten disciples (eleven less Thomas) gathered together in the upper room after His resurrection that anyone who believes in Him through the preaching of the Gospel will be saved. The keys of the Kingdom were being entrusted to this group of men who had been with Jesus in a personal way. They were going to be His hands and feet in the world from now on. And the story of the Gospel continues to penetrate lives because we are all commissioned to be his ambassadors, representing God's love and truth to the world with our lives and our proclamation of the Good news (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Finally, Jesus said, "the gates of Hades will not overpower it" (v. 18c), meaning that all of the evil will not be able to overcome the God-ordained movement of the church. The church is on the offensive, storming the "gates of hell" as was so symbolically portrayed by this incident happening at Caesarea Philippi. This is an important statement that no matter how awful the world may become, the power of Satan will never destroy God's church. We can rest in the fact that Jesus has overcome the world (John 16:33, 1 Corinthians 15:57) and through Him alone we can find the power to continue His commission of making disciples and teaching (Matthew 28:16-20).

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Reflection Questions

1. In the Gospel reading, Jesus asked his disciples a very pointed question: "Who do you say that I am?" At some point, each of us has to answer this question. How does Peter's response resonate with you? Is this the foundation you are building your life on? If so, how does your life reflect this? If not, what foundation are you building your life on? Would you like Peter's response to be your response, too? You can pause and ask God to change the direction of your life so that you can build on the Chief Cornerstone, Jesus Christ.

2. In the Gospel lesson Jesus said, "the gates of Hades will not overpower it" (v. 18c), meaning that all of the evil will not be able to overcome the God-ordained movement of the church. Where do you see this passage intersecting with your life?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 08-25-2019

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week our first reading is from the final chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah. The passage is prophetic in nature, that is, it touches on events in the last days of God's plan for redemption. The second reading from the Epistle to the Hebrews deals with the very difficult subject of discipline and how God uses it in the lives of His children. Finally, we read more about Jesus' teaching ministry as He traveled through Israel. In this passage He includes some very hard lessons that are important for us to understand.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The book of Isaiah is like a small Bible. Chapters 1-39 speak of Israel in the midst of the nations (like the Old Testament, consisting of 39 books in many versions). Chapters 40-66 speak of comfort in the revelation of Christ (like the New Testament's 26 books). This last section begins with John the Baptist, climaxes in chapter 53 about the sacrifice of Christ, and ends with the Millennial Kingdom. Today's portion was written, perhaps, to educate Israel concerning the distant future with respect to the Messianic Kingdom of God and ultimate restoration of the nation.

First Reading:

> *Isaiah 66:18-21 NAS95 18 "For I know their works and their thoughts; the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and see My glory. 19 I will set a sign among them and will send survivors from them to the nations: Tarshish, Put, Lud, Meshech, Rosh, Tubal and Javan, to the distant coastlands that have neither heard My fame nor seen My glory. And they will declare My glory among the nations. 20 Then they shall bring all your brethren from all the nations as a grain offering to the LORD, on horses, in chariots, in litters, on mules and on camels, to My holy mountain Jerusalem," says the LORD, "just as the sons of Israel bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD. 21 I will also take some of them*

for priests and for Levites," says the LORD.

In these verses Isaiah moves from speaking of God's judgment upon those who are unfaithful to Him to announce a future gathering of all nations. Representatives will come into God's presence and be introduced to His great glory. Then, they will be sent out to the nations of the world who have not known God. Someone has called this the Great Commission for Israel (similar to the Great Commission to the Church in Matthew 28). These "missionaries" will declare the glory of God to the nations.

The result will be a great migration, multitudes coming to Jerusalem, described as "My holy mountain." The text tells us that they will come in a variety of ways: "on horses, in chariots, in litters, on mules and on camels." Notably, God will choose some of these new believers to be priests and to be used in serving capacities for God.

One might well ask, "When will these things come to pass?" The answer would require a very careful study of prophetic Scriptures—both Old and New Testament texts—to be definitive. The Bible often speaks of a great tribulation in the end times, and many believe it is the saints (believers) who come out of that tribulation period who will be the messengers to bring to God those who had not yet heard of His love and grace and who, as a result of this witness, come into a relationship of faith in God.

No matter the timing of this prophecy, the recurring theme in this passage is God's glory. What is God's glory? "Glory" is a very difficult word to define because it does not represent a concrete object. It represents a quality or essence, much like the word "beauty." God's glory is the reflection of His beautiful and perfect essence, the manifestation of His unique and sought after presence. Glory is the positive reference to His attractive reputation, which is manifested in who He is and displayed in what He does. We get a sense of God's glory by the loving dynamic within the three persons of the Godhead, with His generous and gracious interaction with humankind (as recorded in Scripture), and in His display of exotic beauty and intricate design in nature (general revelation). God's glory has been on display for all to see in creation, so that Saint Paul says: "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse . . . Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man . . . " (Romans 1:20,22-23).

Responding to God's glory and living in light of this reality is an important part of a life well-lived, a life that has eternal qualities to it. In the passage of Isaiah, it is the distinct privilege of people to declare His fame and reflect His glory to those who do not know. In our lives, we have the privilege to live for God's fame, and not our own on a daily basis. We can choose to order our lives around

giving glory to God, or we can choose to exchange this opportunity in order to glorify self, honor the finite things of this world, or value what was created over the Creator Himself. Though the results are not always immediate, this passage reminds us that God's glory is worth pursuing.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The major theme of Hebrews is the pre-eminence of Christ. It involves some very important and deep theology, but it also includes very practical ideas about Christian living. In fact, the last three chapters give valuable teaching about walking in faith (ch. 11), walking with hope (ch. 12), and walking in love (ch. 13). Today's reading gives a helpful lesson about the value and necessity of discipline, which often may be painful but always serves God's good purpose.

Second Reading:

Note: Includes verses 8-10 omitted from the reading.

> *Hebrews 12:5-13 NAS95 5 and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; 6 FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES." 7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. 11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. 12 Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.*

The section begins with a reminder that discipline comes from God, and it happens in the lives of all Christians ("every son," v. 6). In fact, the very reality that God disciplines someone proves that person's sonship; he indeed belongs to God, because parents don't discipline someone else's children. It should be noted here that the words in the text express discipline and chastisement, not judgment and punishment. There is a difference.

Most people do not like pain and suffering, and we pray fervently to be rid of them. But, whatever the reason for the pain—whether it's the discipline of God or the consequences of natural infirmities, God can use the suffering for His good purposes. One writer, who has suffered a debilitating disease

for many years, wrote: "If my parents could have stopped me from being afflicted by this disease, they would have. But God didn't, and He's the perfect Father, knowing what will make me a better person. Because of their love, my parents would more likely have insulated me from some of the greatest lessons of life that I could learn only through my suffering. Because of God's love for me, He dare not withhold the pain and suffering."

But why is it necessary for God to discipline His children? What are God's motives? Unfortunately, many of us have been disciplined by an earthly parent out of impatience, sometimes to show us who's boss, or to get us to cooperate with their plan with no interest in our nurture. Some of the tactics that earthly parents wrongly use are guilt and shame, producing in us a fear of punishment and a surface compliance to the desires of the one with authority. If we view God like we view our earthly parents, then we have some soul work to do in order to trust God in the midst of His discipline.

God does not discipline His children in order to get begrudging compliance or in order to get even with wrongs we have done. God lovingly disciplines His children to help shape a worldview in our hearts that pries our fingers off of self-reliance, independence, and autonomous pride; and in exchange, opens our arms to embrace a God-reliant walk with Him. Saint Paul wrote of a time in his life where he was under so much affliction that he even despaired of life itself. As a result of this time of discipline, Paul internalized a deep reliance on God, saying: "we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead" (2 Corinthians 1:9).

In our immaturity (just like a child), we do not know how much we need our Father. We often live as if we are in charge and give a quick nod to God when we want to do well on an exam, need a new job, or feel like we are in a bind. But God, in His kindness, knows that this is low-level living in Him. Through having the proverbial rug pulled out from underneath us, He helps us to live in light of reality and recognize that we cannot do life on our own. In our disorientation and desolation, we desperately reach out for God's abiding presence and find our consolation in Him (not in our sense of control or carefully arranged circumstances). We begin to internalize His value system in our soul by living in dependence on Him, which is a "severe mercy" on God's part. God's motive is to bring life that is truly life (John 10:10) to us in the midst of His strategic and loving discipline.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

We hear a lot today about intolerance. We are urged to be tolerant of almost everyone and everything that someone might believe or do. Moral standards of right and wrong seem to have evaporated in modern society, and common sense has been replaced with personal preference. But, there is a standard; there is a right way, and everything contrary to that must be wrong. Jesus and Christianity are often criticized because of their claim that there is only one way to God. Today's reading emphasizes that truth in the teaching of Jesus Himself, who claimed to be that one way (John 14:6).

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Gospel Reading:

> *Luke 13:22-30 NAS95 22 And He was passing through from one city and village to another, teaching, and proceeding on His way to Jerusalem. 23 And someone said to Him, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" And He said to them, 24 "Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. 25 Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, 'Lord, open up to us!' then He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know where you are from.' 26 Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets'; 27 and He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you are from; DEPART FROM ME, ALL YOU EVILDOERS.' 28 In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being thrown out. 29 And they will come from east and west and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God. 30 And behold, some are last who will be first and some are first who will be last."*

Luke records important lessons from Jesus' teaching as the Lord makes His way to Jerusalem, where He is to suffer and die. He had told His disciples about His destiny, although they did not fully understand His plan of salvation until after the promised resurrection. Apparently, some had understood His teaching about the necessity to come to God through Him, and one asks Him specifically about it. Are there, he wonders, only a few that will be saved? Jesus answers by describing the entrance to faith as being "the narrow door." His further comments can leave no doubt about the exclusiveness of the way to God.

Not all who feel entitled to enter can do so. The "head of the house," no doubt a reference to God the Father, surely has the right to open and close the door to His own house, and knocking on the door will not achieve entrance if you are unknown to the householder. He makes it clear that past physical association with Him (eating and drinking, for example) is not sufficient. People also claim that they listened to Him teaching in their streets, but this is still not sufficient. Those who are actually entitled to enter are those who enter through the "narrow door." What is this narrow door that Jesus is referring to?

In the Gospel of John, Jesus answers the question by metaphorically referring to himself as the door to the sheepfold. Inside the sheepfold, the sheep are safe and find refuge. He said, "Truly, truly I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:7-10). It is clear from this and other parts of Scripture (John 14:6, Acts 4:12) that Jesus is the only entry point to eternal life.

It is clear, then, that apart from genuine trust in the grace of Jesus and His finished work at the cross, evidenced by His resurrection, there is no salvation. He indeed is the only way to God. Those who reject the opportunity to trust Him will weep and gnash their teeth when they see Israel's fathers and prophets in the kingdom and they themselves are left out. These words should bring them to repentance so they will be able to "recline at the table in the kingdom of God." The last—the down-and-outers, the ones who do not feel entitled—will be first in the kingdom because they have accepted the lordship of Jesus in their lives.

Reflection Questions

1. The pinnacle of God's glory is displayed in His work of salvation accomplished through Christ's perfect life, His death and His resurrection. How has God's glory changed you from pursuing the corruptible things of this finite world to orienting your life around the incorruptible beauty of God's nature? Where do you see God's glory being displayed in your life's choices, attitudes, and values? Where would you like to see God's continued work in your life and through your life to reflect His glory?
2. How did your parents discipline you as a child? What tactics/motives reflected the heart of God and what tactics/motives did not reflect the heart of God? What parts of that experience do you need to exchange in order to embrace the loving discipline of God in your life? What seasons of discipline do you need to revisit in your mind and mentally process with this new perspective of God's heart for internalizing His value system in you? How can this perspective on God's discipline being part of our sonship be an encouragement for you and those you love to stay faithful to God in the midst of suffering?
3. Since Jesus was speaking metaphorically of entering through the narrow door, what does it mean to do this spiritually? How does this metaphor get lived out in your life? It might require a first-time decision to follow Him if you have never articulated your allegiance to Christ or it might require daily moments of trust to show your allegiance to Him as Lord. What would it be worth to you to recline at the table in the kingdom of God and be with the Old Testament saints for eternity? How might you grow in valuing this eternal reward over short-term gratification that gets in the way of reflecting God's glory.

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 08-26-2018



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass. This week the readings focus upon the theme of God calling people to walk in a personal relationship with Him. In the first reading from Joshua, we see a challenge issued by God to forsake the false gods the people's ancestors served. In the second reading, Saint Paul teaches about the relationship between man and his wife and the mystery of how this parallels that between the Father and the Son. In the Gospel lesson, we study a story where Jesus' followers came to a point of decision concerning His identity as God in the flesh, the promised Messiah, the nature of whom they misunderstood.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Joshua who was the successor to Moses after the Exodus and the one who led the Hebrew people across the Jordan after Moses' death. The reading today provides an overview of the monumental charge from Joshua to serve the One true God.

First Reading:

> *Joshua 24:1-18 NAS95 1 Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and called for the elders of Israel and for their heads and their judges and their officers; and they presented themselves before God. 2 Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'From ancient times your fathers lived beyond the River, namely, Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods. 3 'Then I took your father Abraham from*

> *beyond the River, and led him through all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac. 4 'To Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau, and to Esau I gave Mount Seir to possess it; but Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt. 5 'Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt by what I did in its midst; and afterward I brought you out. 6 'I brought your fathers out of Egypt, and you came to the sea; and Egypt pursued your fathers with chariots and horsemen to the Red Sea. 7 'But when they cried out to the LORD, He put darkness between you and the Egyptians, and brought the sea upon them and covered them; and your own eyes saw what I did in Egypt. And you lived in the wilderness for a long time. 8 'Then I brought you into the land of the Amorites who lived beyond the Jordan, and they fought with you; and I gave them into your hand, and you took possession of their land when I destroyed them before you. 9 'Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose and fought against Israel, and he sent and summoned Balaam the son of Beor to curse you. 10 'But I was not willing to listen to Balaam. So he had to bless you, and I delivered you from his hand. 11 'You crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho; and the citizens of Jericho fought against you, and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Girgashite, the Hivite and the Jebusite. Thus I gave them into your hand. 12 'Then I sent the hornet before you and it drove out the two kings of the Amorites from before you, but not by your sword or your bow. 13 'I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and cities which you had not built, and you have lived in them; you are eating of vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant.' 14 "Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. 15 "If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." 16 The people answered and said, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; 17 for the LORD our God is He who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and who did these great signs in our sight and preserved us through all the way in which we went and among all the peoples through whose midst we passed. 18 "The LORD drove out from before us all the peoples, even the Amorites who lived in the land. We also will serve the LORD, for He is our God."*

After forty years of wandering in the desert under the leadership of Moses, the people who were still alive migrated across the Jordan River into the Promised Land. Upon entering the land they encountered many obstacles the foremost of which was their immersion into a culture of idolatry which wasn't too different from that which plagued Abraham's father Terah (v. 2). Joshua presented to them the heart of the matter by saying, "choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living" or the One true God (v. 15). This was God's call to the people for a relationship with Him with the terms of the relationship being to serve Him alone and not the gods of the surrounding nations. The people answered that they would indeed serve the Lord God and not the gods of the Amorites.

We know from reading the rest of the Scriptures how short-lived the Hebrew's promise was not to

serve other gods and in effect creating a division between the true followers of God and the rest of the people. Because of their disobedience, God later sent foreign nations to invade their land including the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and finally the Romans. Joshua was in the first camp, saying "but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (v. 15). As we will see later in the Gospel lesson, Jesus confronts the people with a similar decision. Will they follow Him, or instead follow their religious traditions? Will they follow the Father God, or their father the devil? Will they enter by the narrow road, Jesus, or follow the broad road to destruction (Matthew 7:13)?

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Ephesians 5. The context leading up to this passage is a treatise on how Christians should relate to one another. Saint Paul's teaching then zeros in on the model of submission between a husband and his wife, linking this as a reflection of the relationship between God the Son and God the Father, as well the church to Christ.

Second Reading:

> *Ephesians 5:21-33 NAS95 21 and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. 22 Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. 24 But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, 26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. 28 So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; 29 for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, 30 because we are members of His body. 31 FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. 32 This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. 33 Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.*

The big idea in the reading is the nature of the relationship that exists between the believer and God. In the same way that the Jews in the first reading had a decision to make regarding their spiritual direction, all believers, not just Christian husbands and wives, have to come to grips with their personal relationship to God and how He calls them to live out this relationship with Him. Paul opens the reading by saying that everyone (married, unmarried, widows, and widowers) must "be subject to one another in the fear of Christ" (v. 21). This is the foundational concept upon which he builds his explanation of biblical submission between and woman and her husband, which parallels the mysterious relationship that exists between Jesus and the Father (v. 32). Because "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28) we too are to serve others in mutual submission to God ("in the fear of Christ," v. 21). This

includes not only wives serving their husbands, but husbands serving their wives and everyone serving each other in the church family. For Paul said in 1 Corinthians, "But now there are many members, but one body" (1 Corinthians 12:21).

Continuing upon the relational concept in the reading, Paul described how the husband is the visible leader of the family by using the word translated "head" (v.23), which in the original Greek connoted "something that can be seen and taken a hold of." The idea is that the wife is to voluntarily place herself under the leadership of her husband. In the same way that Jesus is equal to God the Father, but different in His role, so the wife is equal in status to her husband, but different in her role. Jesus' submission to the Father does not make Him inferior (Philippians 2:6-11), only obedient. So, too, the wife's submission to her husband in the Lord does not make her inferior to her husband, but it does allow her to be obedient to God. This model of the harmonious union between one man and one woman goes all the way back to the Book of Genesis: "FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH" (v. 31). The unity between the man and the woman in marriage parallels the mysterious relationship between Christ and the church (v. 32). The Bible is clear that both the man and woman are called to be in mutual submission to God, while the woman is to submit to her husband and the man to God as the final authority. The man is called by God to be the visible ruler of the family by first separating himself from the headship of his own father (v. 31). This is the man's conscious point of decision to leave his earthly father and join with his wife in a new relationship that leads to unity under his Father God. It's as if God tells the man, choose whom you will serve.

As we move onto the Gospel lesson, we will see how Jesus' teaching of the crowds resulted in their coming to their own point of decision regarding whom they would serve.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Today's reading from John marks an important point in his Gospel concerning a point of decision and division. The reading contains the famous John 6:66 passage, the numbering of which brings with it the idea of the mark of the Antichrist, the great divider who is to come in the future who will separate the true believers from among everyone in the world. The concept comes from the Book of Revelation. *"16 And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, 17 and he provides that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name. 18 Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six"* (Revelation 13:16-18). In the End Times the people will be given one final choice regarding who they will serve. At this point God will make a clear division between the followers of God and the only other choice, the followers of the AntiChrist. In the Gospel reading, Jesus' teaching reaches a similar climax in which Jesus calls the people to a personal relationship with Him. Although they are not outright called to decide to which camp they belong, a clear division occurs beginning in John 6:66 which begins the separation of the wheat and the chaff (Matthew 3:12). God uses these moments of decision to reveal His true followers such as the occasion in which Saint Paul stated, "For there must

also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you" (1 Corinthians 11:19).

Gospel Reading:

> *John 6:60-69 NAS95 60 Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this said, "This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?" 61 But Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said to them, "Does this cause you to stumble? 62 What then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before? 63 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. 64 But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. 65 And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father." 66 As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore. 67 So Jesus said to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?" 68 Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. 69 We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God."*

This story in John marked the beginning of several such points of decision in which the people were challenged to choose between the ways of God by following Jesus or the ways of man by following false religion and their own traditions. In this reading, the people came to the point of decision when they had heard Jesus' prior statements about Him being the "bread which came down from heaven" (John 6:58). The conflict that the people had with Jesus that caused their grumbling (John 6:43) was that they were familiar with Jesus' father Joseph and also his mother (John 6:42). Jesus was calling Himself God and since they knew his earthly parents, they reasoned that He could not be God. The people also misunderstood the nature of the Messiah because just a few verses later they said, "However, we know where this man is from; but whenever the Christ may come, no one knows where He is from" (John 7:27). This point of division continued into the group of His twelve disciples, for Jesus knew that one of them (Judas) had already separated himself from Him. The grumbling of the larger group of disciples then resulted in a separation of the true followers of God and everyone else. As this separation occurred, Jesus presented to the twelve a challenge causing Peter to take a stand for Jesus, affirming everything that Jesus had been saying about Himself. "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God" (vv. 68-69).

This passage teaches us that belief in Jesus is the way to eternal life. Some of the Jews were offended that Jesus, a mere man in their eyes, would claim to be God. However, if He was the Messiah, then His demand for their belief and loyalty was justified. In some sense, everyone has to come to terms with Jesus' claim to be the only way to eternal life. Some will be like the offended Jews, who stumbled over what they saw as far-fetched claims and rejected Jesus' lordship over their lives. But others respond like Peter and say: "Lord" (which is a good way to start a sentence when you are talking to God in the flesh) . . . "You have the words of eternal life" (vv. 68-69). May we continue to believe in Christ as Lord and let Him work in us the type of life that leads to eternity

with the Father.

One day while I was driving, I happened upon a man walking in the afternoon along the road who seemed to be in a hurry to get somewhere. He was wearing black wingtip shoes, which kind of stuck out to me. I had never seen this particular man before. My spirit prompted me to pull beside him and offer him a ride, which he gladly accepted. He told me that his bicycle had broken down and that he was on his way to work at the local supermarket. I encountered this man several times over the course of the next few months and each time he presented himself in such a kind, godly way that I actually began to think that he was an angel. As he found out more about my faith he began to praise and glorify God for all that He had done in my life. Perhaps it was because I didn't know him very well, but each time we met I sensed his close relationship with God. It also helped that his real name was Angelo! It wasn't until I met his wife that I finally understood he really was just a man (see Matthew 22:30).

After several encounters with Angelo, it really got me thinking about how **I** come across to the random people that I meet. Does my public persona match how I come across to people personally? How about my persona on Facebook; does it match what I truly believe? Considering Facebook, it seems to me to be okay to post that you are attending a Saturday afternoon wine tasting session; however, it is problematic when all that a person posts is about food and wine.

Like Angelo, when people meet us we should exhibit the markings of a follower of Jesus Christ. Which path are you **continuing** to choose in your daily walk with God? Joshua said in the first reading, "Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD," "choose for yourselves today whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:14, 15b). Paul said in the second reading to "be subject to one another in the fear of Christ" (Ephesians 51), a behavior which can only be done through the empowerment of God's Holy Spirit as a new creation in Christ. Finally, Jesus said, "You do not want to go away also, do you?" (John 6:67b). Each day we have to choose the forsake "Egypt" and choose the pathway to walk with God. Although we make certain bad choices at times that dishonor God, the Scripture says that "if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Reflection Questions

1. What have been some of the turning points in your life, especially as you consider your relationship with God? How have you turned from being offended by Christ's radical call on your life to a place of surrender and submission to His lordship? Are there areas of your life that you are still wrestling for control? How might these passages help you to surrender anew to His lordship?
2. If someone watched your life, choices and attitudes, to whom or what would they attribute your devotion, worship and loyalty? What things would they see to show them that you are

> choosing this day (and every day) to serve the Lord? What things would give a conflicted and confusing message to them of your heart's true home?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 8-27-2017



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the first reading from Isaiah where we see and explain meanings of the phrase "the key of the house of David." Then we move to the second reading from Romans 11 where you will read many additional verses beyond what was published in the lectionary in order to understand the meaning of God's Word based on its context. Finally, we conclude with the Gospel message from Matthew 16 and study the meaning of a phrase similar to what we saw in the first reading, "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" in which Jesus emphasized the importance of Peter as the first among equals of the disciples.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Before we begin, I will briefly review the format and method of these weekly study notes. The format

can be understood from the acronym A-B-C but starting from the "C" and working backwards: context, big idea, and application. First, we provide the full scriptural context of the text including verses that were omitted in the reading. We also provide the historical context along with the background and setting of the author. Second, we study the text in light of its historical context to determine the theological big idea. We develop this in light of a "Christological" focus, that is upon the redemptive message found throughout the Bible of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, whether in a future context as in the Old Testament or in a present or historical context as in the New Testament. We do not rely upon an allegorical interpretation but instead use the historical critical method and refer to the original languages and parallel passages whenever necessary. Finally, we provide several applications of the text for the present day Christian. Although there is usually only one main interpretation of the text, there are many possible applications. With these guiding principles in mind, let's move onto the first reading.

The first reading is from the Prophet Isaiah. The reading is a parenthesis in Chapter 22, meaning that it was a pause or temporary transition from the main theme. The theme that Isaiah was describing in the chapter before this parenthesis was the future destruction of Jerusalem that we know came over 125 years later in 586 B.C. Isaiah wrote just prior to the destruction of the Northern Kingdom by Assyria in 722 B.C. The context of the reading is that an evil man named Shebna, who was the secretary of the treasury under King Hezekiah, built for himself a royal tomb so that his name would be remembered after he was dead. Evidently, this Shebna was misappropriating funds (see 2 Kings 18:18, 19:2, and Isaiah 36:3, 37:2). This reading includes verses 15-18 and verses 24-25, in order for you to read the whole section of Scripture.

First Reading:

15 Thus says the Lord GOD of hosts, "Come, go to this steward, To Shebna, who is in charge of the royal household, 16 'What right do you have here, And whom do you have here, That you have hewn a tomb for yourself here, You who hew a tomb on the height, You who carve a resting place for yourself in the rock? 17 Behold, the LORD is about to hurl you headlong, O man. And He is about to grasp you firmly 18 And roll you tightly like a ball, To be cast into a vast country; There you will die And there your splendid chariots will be, You shame of your master's house.'

19 I will depose you from your office, And I will pull you down from your station. 20 Then it will come about in that day, That I will summon My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, 21 And I will clothe him with your tunic And tie your sash securely about him. I will entrust him with your authority, And he will become a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. 22 Then I will set the key of the house of David on his shoulder, When he opens no one will shut, When he shuts no one will open. 23 "I will drive him like a peg in a firm place, And he will become a throne of glory to his father's house.

24 So they will hang on him all the glory of his father's house, offspring and issue, all the least of vessels, from bowls to all the jars. 25 "In that day," declares the LORD of hosts, "the peg driven in a firm place will give way; it will even break off and fall, and the load hanging on it will be cut off, for

the LORD has spoken." (Isaiah 22:15-25)

God was angry with ungodly Shebna and Isaiah said that he would be deposed (v. 19) and replaced by godly Eliakim the son of Hilkiah (v. 20). Shebna squandered resources in order to build a tomb to enthrone his name in history (v. 16). The focus of the reading is upon the great contrast between Eliakim, a type of Christ, and Shebna, a type of Antichrist, and by application (and prophesy) between Christ and the Antichrist. Remember that a type is when persons (or statements) in the Old Testament prefigure the person of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. For example, the Prophet Jonah, who spent three days and nights in the belly of the great fish (Jonah 1:17) was a type of Christ, in the same way that Jesus spent three days and three nights in the belly of the earth (Matthew 12:40). Eliakim typified the Person of Jesus Christ (as we see in verses 21-24). Jesus, Isaiah prophesied, would "be entrusted with authority (v. 21), become a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah" (v. 21), and possess the "key of the house of David on his shoulder" (v. 24).

Jesus quoted from this passage, as we will see later in the Gospel lesson when He addressed Peter after this important disciple had confessed Jesus as the Messiah. There is a parallel between the trusted servant Eliakim and Peter the disciple of Jesus who came along much later. Both Eliakim and Peter were trusted servants, the latter so much so that Jesus said he would build His church upon him along with the other ten trusted disciples. There are other parallels that exist to the New Testament. The phrase in verse 22 "the key of the house of David" is very similar to a phrase used in the Book of Revelation. Saint John, the author of the Book said, "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this" (Revelation 3:7). John said that Jesus was the One Who "is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens" (v. 7). Jesus alone holds the keys to the kingdom.

The closing of this section of text is marked by a view of the end time tribulation period in which the false Christ, the Antichrist typified by Isaiah as Shebna, will be taken down (v. 25, Revelation 19:19-20). Isaiah said that the Antichrist, "the peg driven in a firm place will give way; it will even break off and fall, and the load hanging on it will be cut off" (v. 25). We can trust that the true Jesus will overcome the false Christ but not until God has tolerated the hardness of almost the entire world's heart against believing in the Gospel message. Though God will speak the Good News to the world all at the same time through the voice of an angel (Revelation 14:6), precious few will believe. During the end time period God will call and redeem all of Israel (Romans 11:26).

Something that we can take away from the first reading includes God's eventual judgment of sin. Shebna, though he was rich and powerful, was not immune to God's judgment and the consequences of trusting in himself to make it through life. This is the essence of what it means to be "anti-Christ"—having a posture of self-reliance. In contrast, the Christ-follower is one who recognizes his or her own need for a Savior and invites Jesus into the daily stuff of life in order to let Christ rule and reign in our hearts.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

As we move onto the second reading from Romans Chapter 11, we need to discuss a portion of text before the reading in order to bring out the meaning. The context is Paul's discussion about the future of Israel. Romans 9 dealt with Israel's past, Romans 10 with the present (in Paul's time), and Romans 11 with the future. As you read this first omitted section (Chapter 11 vv. 25-32), keep in mind the study last week regarding the unfolding of the revelation of the mystery of God's plan of salvation for the Gentiles.

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 11:25-32)

Paul said that the reason God allowed the Jews to harden their hearts against the Messiah Jesus was to allow for the salvation of the Gentiles in the church. God loved the world so much that He allowed this mystery to accomplish His saving work for the Gentiles as prophesied in the Old Testament (Isaiah 49:6). Paul wrote as moved by the Holy Spirit about the unveiling of this phenomenal mystery.

Now let's read the actual second reading.

Second Reading:

33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! 34 For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? 35 Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? 36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:33-36)

Paul marveled at the wisdom and knowledge of God (v. 33). How could God tolerate the hard-hearted Jews in order to provide for the salvation of the Gentiles? The ways of God are unfathomable (v. 33). The implication of this for our own lives is multi-dimensional. As we go through life, there are so many things that are out of our control that we do not understand. We know that God has the power to change things—yet, sometimes he doesn't do things according to what we think is best. This is the crisis of faith. Will we trust that God is wiser and more knowledgeable than we ourselves are? Or will we rail at God for being unloving and incompetent in our lives? While God doesn't cause

evil, He does permit it (as in allowing the hearts of the Jews to be hardened). There is a choice that each believer in God has to make at some point in their relationship with God: Am I going to trust God's ways or am I going to trust in my ways above His ways? Throughout the Bible God uses His divine agents to accomplish His work, be they angels, prophets, animals, or even people like us. As we transition to the Gospel lesson, meditate upon the depth of the wisdom of God in the past biblical record in order to trust Him in the midst of any present-day confusing circumstances for your own life.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading this week is from Matthew 16. Jesus had just been showing the disciples His supernatural power through the feeding of the 5,000 and a separate incident of feeding of the 4,000. After He did this Jesus warned them to beware of "the leaven of the Pharisees" (Matthew 16:11) and then He traveled with them to the region known as Caesarea Philippi. It is in this region that many pagans believed was the seat of the underworld, a place where immoral practices were done on a regular basis to appease the gods out from the "gates of hell." There were even niches carved out of the rock cliff in order to display the idols that were worshipped in this area. It is in this ominous and evil place that Jesus had a valuable lesson to teach His disciples.

Gospel Reading:

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" 14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." 15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." 20 Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ. (Matthew 16:13-20)

In the reading, Jesus clearly emphasized Peter as the foremost among the disciples and this along with other New Testament readings indicate that this disciple was something like "first among equals." Jesus told Peter that He would build His church upon both Peter and his confession of Jesus as the Christ. As we delve further into the analysis of the reading, we ask our readers to contemplate how Jesus could lay any authority for giving the Gospel message to the world on anyone, even Peter. Peter, like many of us, was impulsive and impatient, always wanting to take actions but maybe never thinking things through as thoroughly as he would later in his life.

Several significant points jump out of the text. First, Peter, the uncontested leader or the disciples, made the marvelous statement through the help of God the Father that Jesus was indeed the Messiah (v. 16). Jesus affirmed his confession and went on to elaborate upon Peter's statement.

What did Jesus mean when He told Peter, "upon this rock I will build my church" (v.18b)? Jesus' meaning is clear when we look one level deeper into the plain meaning found in the original language. Peter, whose name in Greek is "Petros", literally means "rock." However, the foundation on which Jesus spoke about building the church is a different Greek word "petra" which means a mass or rock. In context, what Jesus said was close to this paraphrase: "Simon, I am changing your name to Petros, and upon this petra (foundational mass of rock) I will build my church." Jesus said that He would build His church upon the foundation (petra, meaning mass of rock or many large rocks), which, in context, is Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ. However, Jesus clearly indicated that Peter was the foremost of these building blocks, the "first among equals." Peter, with his heart changed by the Holy Spirit of God so as to confess Jesus as the Christ was the foundation of the church. Jesus entrusted this authority to him like what we saw with Eliakim in the first reading. Peter, as first among equals, shared this authority with the other disciples.

Peter clarified this meaning in the Book of First Peter. Peter said, "you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). Although Peter used the word "lithos" for stone, he stated how the individual stones are built up into a holy priesthood of believers "through Jesus Christ." The church is the collection of spiritual rocks that are built on the "petra" or foundation that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16) through whom is the only way to eternal life (John 14:6).

Saint Paul used a similar analogy in explaining how God empowered him as the leader and builder of the church among the Gentiles (Ephesians 3:1), in the same way that Peter was the builder of the church among the Jews (Galatians 2:8). Paul said, "According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:10-11). In Ephesians Paul clarified how Jesus intended the church to interpret this passage by pointing out that our faith has "been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone" (Ephesians 2:20).

Paul used the symbolism of Jesus as the Rock or foundation in First Corinthians:

1 For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; 3 and all ate the same spiritual food; 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. (1 Corinthians 10:1-4)

When Paul said the "they were drinking from the spiritual rock" and "the rock was Christ" (v. 4) both times he used the word "petra." Jesus was the foundation stone, the One Who provided sustenance to the Hebrews escaping from the Pharaoh.

Jesus Himself explained the necessity of a sure foundation in Luke Chapter 6:

47 Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is

like: 48 he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. 49 But the one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house on the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great. (Luke 6:47-49)

When Jesus said, "he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock" (v. 48) the word in the original was "petra" The giant rock that was rolled to seal Jesus' tomb was a "petra" (Matthew 27:60). Peter **was** one of the foundational stone**s** (the apostles and prophets), but Jesus **is** the Chief Cornerstone, the Foundation of the Church. "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:40).

A second significant point in the text arises from when Jesus said that He "will give you the keys of the kingdom in heaven," and that whatever he bound on earth would be bound in heaven and whatever was loosed on earth would be loosed in heaven. We previously discussed this in the June 29, 2014 edition of Mass Notes. In summary, we said that the keys of the kingdom are salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The binding and unbinding of sin is found in the gift of faith (Ephesians 2:8-9) when a person comes to the knowledge of Jesus Christ as their Savior. Peter and the other apostles were being sent out with authority to preach the Gospel (Matthew 28:18-20), which would be the entry point of faith. In a certain sense, they were being commissioned to open the doors of the Kingdom of God to others by their obedience in proclaiming the Good news and making disciples. We then see Peter is Acts 2:14-40 fulfilling this call by preaching a message of repentance and salvation in Jesus Christ. This is in line with Jesus' teaching when He said, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" (John 3:36). Later, Jesus instructed the group of ten disciples (eleven less Thomas) gathered together in the upper room after His resurrection that anyone who believes in Him through the preaching of the Gospel will be saved. The keys of the Kingdom were being entrusted to this group of men who had been with Jesus in a personal way. They were going to be His hands and feet in the world from now on. And the story of the Gospel continues to penetrate lives because we are all commissioned to be his ambassadors, representing God's love and truth to the world with our lives and our proclamation of the Good news (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Finally, Jesus said, "the gates of Hades will not overpower it" (v. 18c), meaning that all of the evil will not be able to overcome the God-ordained movement of the church. The church is on the offensive, storming the "gates of hell" as was so symbolically portrayed by this incident happening at Caesarea Philippi. This is an important statement that no matter how awful the world may become, the power of Satan will never destroy God's church. We can rest in the fact that Jesus has overcome the world (John 16:33, 1 Corinthians 15:57) and through Him alone we can find the power to continue His commission of making disciples and teaching (Matthew 28:16-20).

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Reflection Questions

1. In the Gospel reading, Jesus asked his disciples a very pointed question: "Who do you say that I am?" At some point, each of us has to answer this question. How does Peter's response resonate with you? Is this the foundation you are building your life on? If so, how does your life reflect this? If not, what foundation are you building your life on? Would you like Peter's response to be your response, too? You can pause and ask God to change the direction of your life so that you can build on the Chief Cornerstone, Jesus Christ.

2. In the Gospel lesson Jesus said, "the gates of Hades will not overpower it" (v. 18c), meaning that all of the evil will not be able to overcome the God-ordained movement of the church. Where do you see this passage intersecting with your life?

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