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 141: 10/05/2025



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we learn from Habakkuk how the people of God can persevere through suffering. In the second reading, we learn about the importance of using our spiritual gifts and spreading the true doctrine of God. In the Gospel lesson, we study three short lessons from Jesus on discipleship.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Habakkuk, like Amos, who we looked at last week, was a minor prophet, meaning his writings were shorter than those called the major prophets. The book's overall theme is how the people of God are to persist during their suffering by focusing on Him. He wrote a bit later than Amos, in the late seventh century BC (610 – 605 BC). This was after the Assyrians had taken the Northern Kingdom of Israel into captivity in 722 BC and just before the Southern Kingdom fell to the Babylonians in three waves beginning in 605 BC. The context is critical to understand because the Babylonian army was soon to begin its conquest of Jerusalem, the holy city of the southern kingdom of Judah. The

prophet cried out to God, "How long, O LORD, will I call for help, and You will not hear? I cry out to You, "Violence!" Yet You do not save" (Habakkuk 1:2). The Book records God's answer to his plea.

First Reading:

> *Habakkuk 1:2-3 NAS95 2 How long, O LORD, will I call for help, And You will not hear? I cry out to You, "Violence!" Yet You do not save. 3 Why do You make me see iniquity, And cause me to look on wickedness? Yes, destruction and violence are before me; Strife exists and contention arises.*
> *2:2-4 2 Then the LORD answered me and said, "Record the vision And inscribe it on tablets, That the one who reads it may run. 3 For the vision is yet for the appointed time; It hastens toward the goal and it will not fail. Though it tarries, wait for it; For it will certainly come, it will not delay. 4 Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; But the righteous will live by his faith."*

In chapter 2, verse 4 of Habakkuk, a very important principle for believers is stated. "Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; But the righteous will live by his faith." Other versions state this more clearly, such as the NIV, which reads, "See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright– but the righteous will live by his faith." Here we see that one key characteristic of a disciple of God is having faith in Him. Righteous living depends upon faith, but faith must have an object. If our faith is placed in our perceived goodness, the good works we do for the church, or anything other than God, we are "puffed up and our desires are not upright."

Here is an illustration of the importance of placing our faith in the correct object, God. If our mother asked us to go to the store and buy a gallon, she may be amazed if we returned with a gallon of cod liver oil when she desired skim milk! It is essential to have the correct object of faith.

Later in Habakkuk, we found the object of Habakkuk's faith. "The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights (Hab 3:19a, b NIV). Habakkuk's call was to the people of Israel to repent of their sin and return to God, the only true source of possible deliverance from their impending tragedy of the invasion by Babylon. That calling is just as appropriate today as it was to Israel. The righteous shall live by faith in God and not by faith in anything else, including money, success, or good works. For we are saved by grace through faith and not of ourselves, it is a gift of God, not of works, lest any person should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

We are often unable to understand what God is up to when He allows trouble in our lives. Habakkuk's call to God regarding why He allowed such terrible hardships to happen to the people of God is as essential to his readers as it is to those in our day. When we suffer without seeing any obvious purpose or reason, we too ask God, Why? God's answer to us is, "*But the righteous will live by his faith*" (Habakkuk 2:4c). We are called to live by faith in God's plan, faith that God will work out all things for the good of those who love him (Romans 8:28).

When I wrote this, I was preparing to travel to the Detroit area to the funeral of a friend who died at a middle age. Over and over, I have asked what I could have done to have prevented his death. I pray that somehow God will use this experience to draw me and others closer to Him, and that I will have the boldness to share the love of Jesus Christ with others through this tragedy. The person who died has been on my BLL (big long list) for many years. I carry a huge burden with the passing of each on this list. What helps me get through it is the half dozen or so people formerly on the list who are now walking with God in faith. Through it all, the message of Habakkuk rings true: "the righteous will live by his faith."

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from the Book of Second Timothy. The theme of this section is Paul's calling to young Timothy to continue his bold service of the Lord despite tribulation. This is similar to what we learned from the first reading in Habakkuk.

Second Reading:

> *6 For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. 7 For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. 8 So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, 9 who has saved us and called us to a holy life– not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, 10 but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. 11 And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. 12 That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day. 13 What you*

> *heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 1:6-13 NIV)*

Paul reminded Timothy to use the spiritual gifts God gave him during his ordination service (v. 6, "laying on of my hands"). He said in verse 13, "What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus." The caution to adhere to a pattern of sound teaching is a frequent admonition in the New Testament. Doctrine is essential, especially as we will see in today's Gospel lesson, because teaching false doctrine leads others away from the true faith in Jesus. Such a practice, knowingly or not, will lead to much greater condemnation for non-believers engaged in it. This leads us to the Gospel lesson for today from Saint Matthew.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Though today's Gospel lesson covered only chapter 17, verses 5 – 10, we will cover the entire section from verses 1 – 10 to take the context into account.

Gospel Reading:

> *1 JESUS SAID TO his disciples: "Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. 2 It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. 3 So watch yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. 4 If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him." 5 The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" 6 He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you. 7Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? 8 Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? 9 Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? 10 So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.' " (Luke 17:1-10 NIV)*

This section of Luke contains teaching on discipleship. It consists of three short lessons and concludes with a parable. In the first lesson, we see Jesus' admonition about the seriousness of sin, especially for the person who leads others into sin. Jesus is saying that sin is severe enough that we should be willing to take drastic actions to overcome temptation. Any teenage boy can attest that girly magazines are a compelling attraction when hormones are raging. However, what Jesus is saying here is that the person who causes others to sin, in this case, the publisher of the pornographic magazine, will receive greater condemnation. The parallel section in Matthew adds this verse, "Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!" (Mt 18:7 NIV). Next, Jesus continues with a second lesson. Here we find that being willing to forgive is a second key characteristic of discipleship to Jesus. He said, "If your brother sins, rebuke him; if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him." That was a hard saying to His disciples because their answer was to ask Him to increase their faith. Forgiveness can be a hard thing to do. The call to forgiveness is evident in our Lord's Prayer, recited weekly in Mass, in Matthew Chapter 6.

Jesus' third lesson is about faith, which we found in Habakkuk's first reading. After Jesus spoke about the need to forgive, the disciples asked Jesus to increase their faith. Jesus said, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you." His use of a mustard seed is significant because it was one of the smallest seeds his disciples would have been familiar with. Jesus' statement meant that even the smallest faith was of great value. If we plant and water a seed, this tiny object may sprout regardless of how much faith we place in it. The seed comes from God, and His concern is how we use it. God doesn't call everyone a spiritual giant; He asks us to use our small faith for His purposes. As we saw in Habakkuk, the just shall live even by their tiny amount of faith, the size of a mustard seed. Even such a small faith may move mountains.

Next, Jesus moved on to a parable, as He had done throughout this section of Luke. This parable was about a master who posed a hypothetical question about his servant. "Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready, and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that, you may eat and drink'? Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told?" The message was clear. As disciples of Jesus, we must serve without strings attached. Our obedience is not a matter of merit, but of responsive duty, though God does honor our Christian service. Although we will be rewarded in heaven for our obedience to God, He calls us to obey Him now, as a servant is called to obey his master. The servant will be rewarded, "after that you may eat and drink" (v. 8), but a servant's work is a duty that does not earn them exceptional merit with their master. God is a faithful Master who will honor us for our service. When we make "sacrifices" to obey God, we should not pat ourselves on the back or look for special paybacks from God. We merely live in light

of the new life He has given us in Christ.

Something exciting happened at a church dinner some years back that helped me gain insights into these passages. Since our name fell in a particular range for this event, we were supposed to bring a large dessert. My wife baked up one of her most amazing treats, peach berry cobbler with freshly made whipped cream. I dropped her off at the church door, and she carried the still-hot cobbler downstairs and the whipped cream dish. When we got inside, the organizers told her to find a table with a dessert and place it there. Frankly, I was concerned that we would not get any of this lovely treat, but I began resigning myself to the fact that we would not be able to enjoy any delicious delicacy. My wife set out to find a table without dessert, but could not find one that already had one. Next, I told her to place the dessert on our table and get on with the dinner as I turned away to speak to someone behind me. As we were about to decide what to do, I suddenly heard a loud crash. As I turned around, I saw the delicious cobbler splattered all over the floor! I was shocked and stood there in disbelief for a minute as our hosts rushed around trying to figure out how to clean up the mess on the floor. I didn't have any cobbler that night!

As we went through the dinner and the following service, I reflected on my heart's intentions during this event. My wife's motives were pure; she wanted to bring the best dessert for whoever received it. Mine were not so pure; I intended to save some for myself all along. God evidently had other intentions by showing me a lesson in allowing the eventual disaster. Serve God with a pure heart, without strings attached, *and He will honor you*.

Reflection Questions

1. The mustard seed, though one of the smallest seeds, can, with proper soil and watering, sprout and grow into a large bush, whether or not we have faith that it will succeed. It's specially designed by God to do just that. Read Hebrews 12:2 and Ephesians 2:8-9 below.

> *Eph 2:8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith– and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God–not by works, so that no one can boast.*

> *Heb 12:2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne*

of God.

Who provides the seed of faith for which you are called to sow to produce God's fruit in the Kingdom?

2. Refer to your answer above. How can your faith be improved, enlarged, or expanded, with the source of your faith determined? Considering its source, is it productive to feel guilty if we don't have "enough faith"? What would be a more appropriate response?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 10-06-2024



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open this week with a reading from Genesis, the first and foundation Book of the Bible. This is one of the Books that I read once a year, along with the two other Books that I consider the foundation for any student of the Bible. The other two that I read (and sometimes the entire Book in one sitting) are the Gospels of John and the Book of Acts. When I speak with new believers, I frequently tell them to proceed in the following order. Begin with Genesis, then with John, and finally conclude with Acts. In this way, the reader picks up

many very important names and biblical constructs in a very short time. In addition, when reading in this order a person will quickly recognize the connections between the Old and New Testaments. This week as we begin with a reading from Genesis, we will see how Jesus connected this first Book of the Bible to His contemporary teaching on divorce as well as the Mosaic Law which His nemesis the Pharisees were trying to twist for their own advantage. We will also study in the second reading how the Old Testament proves that Jesus is the Christ as we look at the Book of Hebrews. The author of Hebrews was a star student of the Old Testament and understood extremely well the themes and theology of the Old Testament and how it connected with the New as revealed through the Person of Jesus Christ.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Moses Chapter 2. This reading is from Moses' retelling of the creation story that added additional details to the summary account he provided in Chapter 1. Beginning in verse 4 of this chapter, Moses adds additional details to his account. Although God had already created man (Genesis 1:26, 2:7) he was placed in the garden to work it alone (2:18). God knew that Adam needed a mate who was like himself, and to provide a means to fulfil the commandment to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28). In today's reading, we will find out the remedy for Adam's loneliness.

First Reading:

> *Genesis 2:18-24 NAS95 18 Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." 19 Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. 21 So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. 22 The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. 23 The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." 24 For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.*

After God created the animals, He brought them to Adam, who completed the task of giving names to each one (2:20). Adam's naming process may have taken a long time, and the absence of any helper in the process reinforced his need for a spouse. Early in the reading we see the phrase it was "not good" in reference to Adam being alone. This contrasted with the closing of chapter one at the conclusion of the creation account in which God said it was "very good" after everything, and everybody including Adam and Eve, had been created (Genesis 1:31). During Adam's naming process, the text says that "there was not found a suitable helper for him" (v. 20d) among the animal kingdom. Although Adam had close fellowship with the animals, as any pet owner can attest, these very special bonds still didn't satisfy his need for **human** companionship. Remember that during this time before the Fall the Lord God walked with Adam in fellowship with him (Genesis 3:8), however, even this relationship left Adam desiring a mate because God had designed him for it. God, then remedied Adam's need by creating the woman we know as Eve (Genesis 3:20) from out of Adam. In the Hebrew, the word transliterated "woman" is "ish-shah" which sounds much like the word for man which is "aw-saw." In the original the word for rib also means side, so the woman was literally from Adam's side and named a word with the same root sound. In the English the idea of her name is similar, with "man" being the root and "wo-man" being the person taken from the man's side. In verse 18, the text says that a suitable "helper" was not found for Adam. The word in the original is "ezer" pronounced "ay zer" which means aid. This word brings with it an association with another word found later in the Bible, "Ebenezer," which by interpretation is the "stone of help" and is used of God in the Old Testament. Ebenezer reminded the Jewish people of God's presence, and Eve created by God as a helper should do the same for us. Adam was created as a relational being, and God is a relational being consisting of three Persons in the Godhead. After the Fall, we know that Adam and Eve's relationships were shattered, in contrast to that which exists among the Persons of the Godhead (Who are eternally in perfect relationship). Although Eve is literally the helper person drawn from Adam's side, the inevitable conflicts would begin between Adam and Eve after her creation, not matter how lonely he was before. These two had a mission, as the woman joined Adam in the work that God had given to him as the leader of the effort to maintain the garden that had been entrusted to him (Genesis 2:8, 15). Second, they were to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:28).

Later in the Gospel reading, we see how Jesus used the last verse of this reading to show how it was God's original plan that man and woman be united in the relationship of marriage during their lifetimes. Verse 24 explains that "for this reason" the man and woman shall leave their parents and become one in marriage, both in the spiritual sense and through the sexual union. The phrase "for this reason" points back to the previous verse where God explained that woman was formed from the man, and since this is so, the two are now one in marriage. Jesus will explain this essential truth to the Pharisees who were trying to twist the Law to hold their followers in the same bondage that they placed upon themselves.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from the Book of Hebrews, a Book about the superiority of Jesus Christ over angels and everyone else. This Book teaches us how Jesus was in the line of the Melchizedekian priesthood, which is eternal, rather than the Levitical priesthood which is tied to the human lifespan of the high priests. We know that one of the heresies that plagued the early church was the worship of angels, and the author of Hebrews attacked this headlong in showing Jesus' superiority over them. Saint Paul talked about this in the Book of Colossians when he said, "Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the **worship of the angels**, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind" (Colossians 2:18). In the first chapter of the Book, the author explained how angels are "ministering spirits sent to those who will inherit salvation" (Hebrews 1:14). Angels are God's agents who do His business for Him. They are never to be worshiped in any manner, since there is only one mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5). The author's teaching on Jesus' position relative to the angels continues into chapter 2, which is the reading for today.

Second Reading:

> *Hebrews 2:9-11 NAS95 9 But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. 10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. 11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,*

In today's reading, the author explains how Jesus submitted to God the Father's plan for Him by allowing Himself to be born as a man in order to serve the world. The theological term for the process by which Jesus emptied Himself of His independent use of His divine attributes during the ministry of His first advent is "kenosis." This concept is explained more clearly by Saint Paul in the Book of Philippians in the reading below. We are including this because of the great importance of this subject and for the fact that the author of Hebrews assumes the reader's familiarity with this concept. Saint Paul explains this in the verses below.

5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every

name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (Philippians 2:5-10).

With Paul's teaching in mind, the meaning of the reading from Hebrews becomes clear. Jesus voluntarily became human during His earthly lifetime, making Himself "for a little while lower than the angels" (v. 2a). Jesus died for everyone according to God's rich grace by humbling Himself on the cross not as a victim, but as a victor. Nowhere in Scripture is Jesus ever called a victim, rather Jesus gave His life willingly for us in order to suffer the penalty for the sins of the entire world. The purpose of Jesus' work is explained in verses 10–11. Jesus is "bringing many sons to glory," and sanctifies (meaning makes perfect" those whom He calls brethren. At the first moment we believe we are given a new Spirit, the old one is gone and replaced with something new who knows God (Ezekiel 36:26, 2 Peter 1:3). In this new relationship, we are united in fellowship with the Holy Spirit, Jesus, and the Father. The author stated in the reading, "For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father" (v. 11a). This relationship is never something from which we can become divorced, as it was given to us by God. "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" (Romans 8:35). As we transition to the Gospel lesson, we will see how Jesus taught about the relationship of marriage as created by God for the purpose of a lifetime of fellowship between two followers of Him.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is a continuation of the study from Saint Mark. Before we continue, let's take a step back and look at the big picture of this Gospel. Mark's writing was one of the earliest of the four Gospels. In this important Book of the Bible, the author emphasizes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. John Mark is held by tradition to be the author and there is strong evidence regarding this. He was very likely influenced by the ministry of Saint Peter, whom the Lord Jesus called the Rock of the church. Remember that this Rock of the church wrote about how as believers, we become the heirs of God's great gifts through an eternal relationship with Him, something which the Pharisees did not understand. Peter said that as believers we are born again to a living hope "to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:3). Throughout Mark, there are three primary groups of people, and in the reading this week each them appear. The first is Jesus' primary nemesis, the religious leaders, including the Pharisees. The second is the crowds who follow Jesus and continually misunderstand Him. The third group is Jesus' disciples who also suffer from no small amount of misunderstanding even up until Jesus had risen from the dead when He had to explain everything to them regarding Himself from the Old Testament (Luke 24:13-32).

In today's reading, Jesus responds to a question from the religious leaders who came to Him not to learn, but rather to test Him (Mark 10:2). Jesus responded with a question, something that He often did when questioned. Do we know anyone who, when we ask them a question responds with a question, and afterwards we learn something from them? Jesus used this inductive approach when He was addressing the crowds, as contrasted with a deductive method in which He would have plainly given them the answer to their question. He uses those two different approaches consistently when He was addressing those two different groups of people. With the inductive method, He spoke mostly with questions and parables, but then later explained His public address privately to His disciples. In this case, the religious leaders didn't really desire to learn from Jesus by understanding the true answer to their question, instead they were trying to test or trap Jesus by asking Him a question about some obscure or difficult subject dealing with Jewish Law. In the reading, we see Jesus following a familiar pattern. Someone from one of the first two groups asks Him a question, and Jesus responds with a question, which if answered properly could have led them to the answer themselves. Then, once He is away from them, He plainly explains to His disciples the answer to both questions. As you read, ask yourself how you would answer the question from the Pharisees, and then the question posed by Jesus.

Gospel Reading:

> *Mark 10:2-16 NAS95 2 Some Pharisees came up to Jesus, testing Him, and began to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife. 3 And He answered and said to them, "What did Moses command you?" 4 They said, "Moses permitted a man TO WRITE A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY." 5 But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. 6 But from the beginning of creation, God MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE. 7 FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, 8 AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH; so they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9 What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." 10 In the house the disciples began questioning Him about this again. 11 And He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; 12 and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery." 13 And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them. 14 But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 15 Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all." 16 And He took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands on them.*

The context of the reading follows Jesus' teaching on the seriousness and spiritually harmful nature of sin. Jesus had taught them, "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it

would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea" (Mark 9:42). Afterwards, He left Capernaum and came to the region of "Judea beyond the Jordan," meaning the largely Gentile land to the east of this important watery landmark (Mark 10:1). Here, the crowds met up with Him again and were joined by the Pharisees who led with a question in order to test Him (v. 2).

The Pharisees asked Jesus whether it was lawful (according to Jewish Law) for a man to divorce his wife (v. 2). They didn't of course mean whether it was lawful according to Roman Law, but rather according to their strict, literal and often wrong interpretation of the Mosaic Law. Jesus responded with a question, asking them to locate the answer from what Moses had written in the Law (v. 3). Jesus explained to them following a method that would have been very familiar to the Pharisees from the Old Testament. In the Book of Nehemiah, the people after they had been held in captivity in Babylon for seventy years had lost track of the Scriptures. Once Ezra had located a copy, he gathered the people around him to teach them, and Ezra and the priests read the lost biblical text. We see that it said, "They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading" (Nehemiah 8:8). This is what Jesus did by reading from the text and at the same time providing the interpretation of it. Moses didn't write in Deuteronomy Chapter 24 saying that God in any way favored divorce, but rather that God **authorized** divorce. Jesus explained this very crucial difference. Moses said that it was an abomination before the LORD for a man to remarry a woman whom he had previously divorced and had remarried, and taught the people through the Law not to do this because it would bring "sin upon the land" by doing so (Deuteronomy 24:4). Jesus continued the biblical teaching on the matter of divorce by drawing the people back to the Scriptures, a behavior which all of us would do well to follow. In responding to the question from the Pharisees, who didn't really care to hear the true answer, Jesus simply pointed them back to God's original teaching on the matter.

The closing of the reading was the second instance where the crowds were bringing children to Jesus (v. 13). Once again, Jesus rebuked His disciples for not allowing or even encouraging this. "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these," He said (v. 14). As true followers of Jesus, all of us must approach him humbly, and He was teaching His disciples this very important lesson.

This week we saw how Jesus turned to the Scriptures to answer a question by the Pharisees. Even though this group of religious legalists didn't desire to listen to His answer, Jesus still explained to them the sanctity of marriage and how this flowed from the relationship of the first man and woman God created during Creation about which we read in the first reading. In the closing verses of the Gospel, reading Jesus had to remind His disciples to be humble and receive Him just like the children. In the second reading, we learned how Jesus humbled Himself in order to accomplish the

will of His Father. As followers of Jesus, He calls us to humble ourselves and receive Him as little children.

Reflection Questions

1. In the first reading we read how God created the first woman out of Adam as a helper and companion for him to accomplish the purposes that He had previously assigned to him. Later in the Gospel reading, we saw how Jesus used these same verses to explain the lifetime relationship of marriage as arising from God through this same creation account. Read the following verses and then discuss in what ways a husband and wife model the more perfect relationship that exists between the Persons of the Godhead.

> *John 14:16-20 NAS95 16 "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; 17 that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. 18 "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19 "After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also. 20 "In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.*

2. How does knowing that God exists eternally in a perfect relationship help you in your own relationship regardless if you are single or married?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 139: 10/04/2026

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we reverse the usual order and begin with the second reading, examining Paul's Letter to the Philippians. Then we look at the first reading from Isaiah and close with the Gospel lesson from Matthew.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

In the New Testament reading, we find how obedient believers can have a clear conscience and live without worry. This reading continues our study of the Book of Philippians from past weeks. As a reminder, Paul was in prison for his faithfulness to God in preaching the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. In the previous verses, Paul admonishes two specific women in the church to resolve a certain unmentioned conflict. You can imagine that hearing of this conflict while he was in prison would have been discouraging to Paul. In the verse leading up to today's reading, Paul said, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4). Before you read the text, ask yourself: what does it mean to rejoice in the Lord, especially given Paul's unpleasant conditions and his admonition to resolve interpersonal conflict?

Second Reading:

> *6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. 9 The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:6-9)*

In the reading, Paul made a commanding call to prayer, correct thinking, and right actions, which he said would bring peace to a believer's heart. As we saw in the context leading up to the reading, Paul said first to rejoice in the Lord. This means that, as believers, we can rest in the finished work of the Lord Jesus in securing our salvation and rejoice that, regardless of our circumstances, we can never be taken away from our relationship with the Lord (John 10:28-29). Paul said in the reading that we do not have to suffer anxiety if we turn our anxiety into a prayer request (v. 6). The word "supplication" is even stronger, as it connotes urgency, desperation, and humility. This is the attitude with which we can approach the throne of grace.

This is the same message that the Lord Jesus gave to his disciples in His great Sermon on the Mount. Jesus told them,
"And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name'" (Matthew 6:7-9).
In Jesus' model prayer, He instructed His disciples to first begin with adoration of God and thanksgiving. Jesus continued, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." (Matthew 6:10-12). After adoring God and thanking Him for His provisions, we should remember to confess our sins before we ask Him for the help we need. One of the things we can confess (which literally means "to say the same thing," which implies we agree with God) is our limited perspective, which is causing our anxiety in the first place. We can approach God with confidence (Hebrews 4:16), which should produce thankfulness in our hearts, no matter the circumstances we face. "And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (v. 7).

Finally, Paul called the believers in Philippi not only to pray when tempted to worry, but to think

about the right things as a second way to combat worry. Paul told the believers to think about those things that were pure, lovely, of good repute, things of excellence and worthy of praise (v. 8) as well as the Scriptures that they had received from Paul (v. 9). Not only were they to concentrate their thoughts on the correct things, but they were also to practice the things which they had learned from Paul (v. 9). Many people have discovered that one way of forgetting their own troubles is to help others with their troubles. After they did all these things, the peace of God would be with them (v. 9c).

To summarize, Paul said that instead of worrying, we should pray, being thankful that God hears us and that we are not alone in our trials. He also directed believers to focus their thoughts on the right things, including a list of good things worthy of praise. In addition, we should practice what Paul taught: walking by faith in the truth of Scripture rather than by sight (or our feelings). Finally, we can only expect and look forward to experiencing God's peace after we do these things connected to living in the truth.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The Old Testament reading is from the Prophet Isaiah. He prophesied to Judah during the reigns of King Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (Isaiah 1:1). His prophetic view often extended far beyond Judah's immediate circumstances, even as it faced a threat from Babylon. Isaiah prophesied about a distant day when the Lord's temple and holy city of Jerusalem would be exalted, and the world would be at peace. The following biblical text provides a hopeful backdrop amid Judah's impending exile.

The events Isaiah spoke of were often "telescoped" together, so distant events were seen as happening alongside near-term ones. This is sometimes called the "mountain peaks of prophecy" or "prophetic foreshortening." The "last days" Isaiah spoke of in verse two above is the time of Jacob's trouble (Jeremiah 30:7) that John chronicles in Revelation. At this time, the Lord Jesus will return to the earth to usher in His kingdom, reign over the world, and finally bring an era of peace (Revelation 19:11-16).

But before peace could come, Judah must face the consequences of her disregard for the relational covenant God made with her. Judah repeatedly rejected God's overtures of loving provision, and His desire for relational loyalty was continually met with spiritual adultery. As you read, listen to God's heart as He faced the disappointment of unmet relational expectations with His chosen people.

First Reading:

> *1 Let me sing now for my well-beloved a song of my beloved concerning His vineyard. My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill. 2 He dug it all around, removed its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. And He built a tower in the middle of it and also hewed out a wine vat in it; Then He expected it to produce good grapes, but it produced only worthless ones. 3 "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge between Me and My vineyard. 4 What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones? 5 So now let Me tell you what I am going to do to My vineyard: I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed; I will break down its wall and it will become trampled ground. 6 I will lay it waste; It will not be pruned or hoed, But briars and thorns will come up. I will also charge the clouds to rain no rain on it." 7 For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel And the men of Judah His delightful plant. Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; For righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress. (Isaiah 5:1-7)*

In today's reading, Isaiah sings a song about God, Isaiah's beloved. God planted a vineyard with a choice vine. Isaiah explained the vineyard metaphor as the house of Israel (v. 7). This metaphor of Israel as the vine appears throughout the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments. After tending it and building a tower to protect it, the vineyard produced "worthless" grapes (connoting wild or sour grapes). God had no other choice but to remove the hedge of protection that He placed around Jerusalem and Judah and allow it to become a wasteland because of their rejection of the covenant relationship with God (v. 5). This prophecy of physical destruction was fulfilled through the invasion of the Babylonian forces in successive waves, with the last one in 586 BC resulting in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (2 Kings 25:1-10). The final destruction of Jerusalem will occur in the future, when God allows a person called the Antichrist to establish his kingdom rule in Jerusalem (Revelation 13). Later in the Gospel lesson, we will see that a second part of the destruction of Jerusalem was the spiritual element that came when the Messiah, Jesus, whom God sent, was rejected by the Jews.

This passage teaches about God's heart and the fallen human condition. God provided everything for his chosen people to thrive and be fruitful. The passage shows God's great care in establishing and tending His vineyard, the house of Israel (v. 7). "He dug it, removed its stones, and planted it with

the choicest vine" (v. 2). This parallels the creation account of what He did for Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. It was part of the original design for humans to be God's image-bearers and to be fruitful on Earth (Genesis 1:27-28).

The consistent nature of human beings, as seen in Adam and Eve and in His people Israel, has been to break God's heart and to not live up to their noble identity as image-bearers. "Then I expected it to produce good grapes, but it produced only worthless ones" (v. 4). Isaiah repeats God's unmet expectation: "Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold a cry of distress" (v. 7). These verses reveal the systemic human condition of "fallenness" (or depravity). Even under the best conditions, humans show their tendency to reject God and choose self-reliance.

Therefore, God's response to these choices of autonomy and independence is not justified or necessary. It's almost as if God is saying, "What else can I do? They have rejected Me, so I will honor their choice." But their choice to live in autonomy from God has dire consequences. "I will remove its hedge, and it will be consumed . . ." (v. 5). Israel was free to live outside the covenant relationship God established, but she would also forfeit the benefits of this loving, protective relationship. They would reap the natural consequences of life apart from God. Rejecting God had dire consequences for the nation of Judah, as it continues to have for us today.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson continues the theme of God's vineyard as Jesus teaches using a parable. Context is extremely important this week to understand Jesus' intended meaning. Jesus' message was clearly addressed directly to the Jewish religious authorities. This group had just witnessed Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey (Matthew 21:7), something a king would do in that culture. As Jesus rode past the crowds, they cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David; BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Hosanna in the highest!" (v. 9b). Immediately afterwards, Jesus escalated the tense situation even more as Matthew recorded that Jesus "entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of those who were selling doves" (v. 12). Next, while still in the temple He healed the blind and lame (v. 14). All of this inflamed the Jewish leaders and further exposed their hatred of Jesus. Matthew recorded what happened next. "But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were shouting in the temple, 'Hosanna to the Son of David,' they became indignant and said to Him, 'Do You hear what these children are saying?'" (vv. 15-16a). Jesus responded, "Yes; have you never read, 'OUT OF THE MOUTH OF INFANTS AND NURSING BABIES YOU HAVE PREPARED PRAISE FOR

YOURSELF'" (v. 16b). The next day, Jesus returned to the temple (v. 23) after staying overnight in Bethany (v. 17). After cursing the fig tree in front of His disciples (v. 20), He was confronted by the chief priests and elders in the temple who questioned His authority (v. 23). Finally, in the verses leading up to today's reading He told the authorities in the temple the parable of the Sons in the Vineyard that we studied previously. That particular lesson, directed squarely at the hearts of the Jewish leaders, revealed that even though a person may outwardly act in a religious manner, they could be spiritually dead on the inside (Matthew 7:13). Jesus had taught the crowds earlier about this as recorded in Matthew:

> *21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. 22 Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.' (Matthew 7:21-23)*

The religious leaders were not pleased with what Jesus told them. Later in the chapter, Matthew recorded, "When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them. When they sought to seize Him, they feared the people, because they considered Him to be a prophet" (Matthew 21:45-46). How insightful of them; they were afraid to seize Him, at least then, because the people considered Him a prophet!

Now that we understand the context of the Gospel lesson, as you read the Gospel text, take special note of the identity of each character in the story. *Note: Verse 44 was included for context.*

Gospel Reading:

> *33 Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who PLANTED A VINEYARD AND PUT A WALL AROUND IT AND DUG A WINE PRESS IN IT, AND BUILT A TOWER, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey. 34 When the harvest time*

> *approached, he sent his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his produce. 35 "The vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third. 36 Again he sent another group of slaves larger than the first; and they did the same thing to them. 37 But afterward he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' 38 But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' 39 They took him, and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. 40 Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers? 41 They said to Him, "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons." 42 Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone; THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES'? 43 Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it. 44 And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust." (Matthew 21:33-46)*

This parable shows God's goodness and the reasonable expectation that His people would respond to that goodness by being obedient workers on God's behalf and producing fruit in His vineyard.

The story starts with a landowner who planted a vineyard. The all-caps text in verse 33 references Isaiah 5:1, which we read in the first reading. It is also very similar to the wording that God said about Israel being a "choice vine" in Jeremiah 2:21. The vine growers rejected their role as laborers on behalf of the landowner by abusing and killing the landowner's servants who came to collect the produce (v. 35). The escalation continued to the point that the vine growers killed the landowner's son (vv. 37-39). In this context, Jesus is clearly referring to Himself. Jesus then let the Jewish leaders dig their own graves, so to speak, by asking them what they would do in such a situation. They said, "He [would] bring those wretches to a wretched end, and [would] rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who [would] pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons" (v. 42). In other words, the landowner would entrust the vineyard to other people who **would** be trustworthy. Jesus then seized the opportunity to teach them from their own Holy Scriptures by quoting a verse from Psalm 118, which they would have known. Jesus was telling the Jewish leaders that He was the stone they (the builders) were about to reject. But their rejection of Him as Messiah did not deter God's plan, for Jesus would become the cornerstone of real faith for past and future generations.

Below is a summary of the characters and subjects along with their meaning in the story:

1. The landowner represents God the Father. The landowner made a huge investment in the vineyard and then entrusted it to the vine growers. In the same way, God invests in people and entrusts His ministry to them to bear fruit.

2. The vineyard represents Israel. It had a tower and walls, protective measures the landowner took to preserve his valuable investment in the vineyard.

3. The vine growers represent the Jewish religious leaders.

4. The slaves are the prophets that God sent to the Old Testament Jews to remind them of their covenantal relationship with God.

5. The landowner's son represents God's Son, Jesus Christ.

6. The "other tenants" are the future church, which would consist primarily of Gentiles, fulfilling Isaiah's prophecies.

Some insights about the parable are as follows. First, this parable provided a key insight into the hearts of the religious leaders. The priests and elders claimed to belong to God's kingdom but did not obey God the Father. Instead, they obeyed a different father: the devil (John 8:44).

Second, the implication of this parable is that the disobedience of the Jewish people throughout history up until that time was actually a **conspiracy** against God. In verse 38, Jesus said, "they said among themselves," meaning they conspired to kill the landowner's son. Conspiracy has always been regarded as a greater crime than manslaughter in the legal system. In modern times, each of the vine growers would have been charged with both murder **and** conspiracy to commit murder. Jesus knew that the Jewish leaders had murder in their hearts. We see later on in Matthew's Gospel that Jesus lamented over Jerusalem, who killed the prophets (Matthew 23:23), the greatest of whom was John the Baptist (Matthew 11:11), who had just been killed by King Herod (Matthew 14:10). This meant that a rejection of God's prophet John was a rejection of God Himself. In general, the prophets

were frequently persecuted by their own people. Some were stoned (2 Chronicles 24:21), and some, like Jeremiah, were persecuted and killed in other ways (Jeremiah 26:7-11, 38:1-28).

Finally, the parable prophesies that the leaders of the Jewish community would reject Jesus. Jesus is the stone the builders rejected, but after His exaltation, He became the Chief Cornerstone of the church (v. 42). Jesus told them clearly about the penalty for their rejection: the loss of their kingdom. "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it." In the end, God gave the kingdom to the universal church, made up primarily of Gentiles. This mystery of God's grace wasn't revealed or understood until after it happened, though in hindsight God provided clues like this.

In His grace, God gave one final warning to the Jewish leaders in verse 44. "And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust," Jesus says that rejecting Him is fatal. Falling or stumbling upon the Rock will break those who reject the Messiah, for the 2nd advent of the Messiah will be that of a Judge who will pronounce everlasting judgment. Anyone who has ever dropped a dish onto a ceramic floor knows the peril of a hard surface. Jesus is the Rock over which the Jewish leaders stumbled. By application, we can see that anyone's rejection of Jesus is a fatal mistake that cannot be forgiven. Rejecting God's provision for the forgiveness of sin through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the only unforgivable sin (Matthew 12:22-32).

Reflection Questions

1. What is your response to God's claim of ownership of your life? Would you describe yourself like the vine growers who rejected the Son who came to seek payment or would you describe yourself as one who has surrendered to God's rightful ownership of your life? How would others describe you, based on your words, your attitudes, your values, and your lifestyle?

2. In the last two readings, we saw God's reasonable expectation that His people bear fruit for Him. We also saw Paul modeling this fulfillment: though he was in very unpleasant circumstances, he pointed the way to peace with God by connecting with Him in prayer. In what ways is God calling you to be His image-bearer in the world, despite your less-than-ideal circumstances? How can depending on God through prayer be a lifeline that helps you fulfill your God-given purpose?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for 10-03-2021



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open this week with a reading from Genesis, the first and foundation Book of the Bible. This is one of the Books that I read once a year, along with the two other Books that I consider foundational for any student of the Bible. The other two that I read (and sometimes the entire Book in one sitting) are the Gospel of John and the Book of Acts. When I speak with new believers, I frequently tell them to proceed in the following order. Begin with Genesis, then with John, and finally conclude with Acts. In this way, the reader picks up many very important names and biblical constructs in a very short time. In addition, when reading in this order a person will quickly recognize the connections between the Old and New Testaments. This week as we begin with a reading from Genesis, we will see how Jesus connected this first Book of the Bible to His contemporary teaching on divorce as well as the Mosaic Law which His nemesis the Pharisees were trying to twist for their own advantage. We will also study in the second reading how the Old Testament proves that Jesus is the Christ as we look at the Book of Hebrews. The author of Hebrews was a star student of the Old Testament and understood extremely well the themes and theology of the Old Testament and how it connected with the New as revealed through the Person of Jesus Christ

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Moses Chapter 2. This reading is from Moses' retelling of the creation story that added additional details to the summary account he provided in Chapter 1. Beginning in verse 4 of this chapter, Moses adds additional details to his account. Although God had already created man (Genesis 1:26, 2:7) he was placed in the garden to work it alone (2:18). God knew that Adam needed a mate who was like himself, and to provide a means to fulfil the commandment to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28). In today's reading, we will find out the remedy for Adam's loneliness.

First Reading:

Genesis 2:18-24 NAS95 18 Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." 19 Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. 21 So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. 22 The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. 23 The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." 24 For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

After God created the animals, He brought them to Adam, who completed the task of giving names to each one (2:20). Adam's naming process may have taken a long time, and the absence of any helper in the process reinforced his need for a spouse. Early in the reading we see the phrase it was "not good" in reference to Adam being alone. This contrasted with the closing of chapter one at the conclusion of the creation account in which God said it was "very good" after everything, and everybody including Adam and Eve, had been created (Genesis 1:31). During Adam's naming process the text says that "there was not found a suitable helper for him" (v. 20d) among the animal kingdom. Although Adam had close fellowship with the animals, as any pet owner can attest, these very special bonds still didn't satisfy his need for **human** companionship. Remember that during this time before the Fall the Lord God walked with Adam in fellowship with him (Genesis 3:8), however, even this relationship left Adam desiring a mate because God had designed him for it. God, then remedied Adam's need by creating the woman we know as Eve (Genesis 3:20) from out of Adam. In the Hebrew the word transliterated "woman" is "ish-shah" which sounds much like the word for man which is "aw-saw." In the original the word for rib also means side, so the woman was literally from Adam's side and named a word with the same root sound. In the English the idea of her name is similar, with "man" being the root and "wo-man" being the person taken from the man's side. In verse 18, the text says that a suitable "helper" was not found for Adam. The word in the original is

"ezer" pronounced "ay zer" which means aid. This word brings with it an association with another word found later in the Bible, "Ebenezer," which by interpretation is the "stone of help" and is used of God in the Old Testament. Ebenezer reminded the Jewish people of God's presence, and Eve created by God as a helper should do the same for us. Adam was created as a relational being, and God is a relational being consisting of three Persons in the Godhead. After the Fall we know that Adam and Eve's relationship was shattered, in contrast that which exists among the Persons of the Godhead is eternally in perfect relationship. Although Eve is literally the helper person drawn from Adam's side, the inevitable conflicts would begin between Adam and Eve after her creation, not matter how lonely he was before. These two had a mission, as the woman joined Adam in the work that God had given to him as the leader of the effort to maintain the garden that had been entrusted to him (Genesis 2:8, 15). Second, they were to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:28).

Later in the Gospel reading, we see how Jesus used the last verse of this reading to show how it was God's original plan that man and woman be united in the relationship of marriage during their lifetimes. Verse 24 explains that "for this reason" the man and woman shall leave their parents and become one in marriage, both in the spiritual sense and through the sexual union. The phrase "for this reason" points back to the previous verse where God explained that woman was formed from the man, and since this is so, the two are now one in marriage. Jesus will explain this essential truth to the Pharisees who were trying to twist the Law to hold their followers in the same bondage that they placed upon themselves.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from the Book of Hebrews, a Book about the superiority of Jesus Christ over angels and everyone else. This Book teaches us how Jesus was in the line of the Melchizedekian priesthood, which is eternal, rather than the Levitical priesthood which is tied to the human lifespan of the high priests. We know that one of the heresies that plagued the early church was the worship of angels, and the author of Hebrews attacked this headlong in showing Jesus' superiority over them. Saint Paul talked about this in the Book of Colossians when he said, "Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the **worship of the angels**, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind" (Colossians 2:18). In the first chapter of the Book the author explained how angels are "ministering spirits sent to those who will inherit salvation" (Hebrews 1:14). Angels are God's agents who do His business for Him. They are never to be worshiped in any manner, since there is only one mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5). The author's teaching on Jesus' position relative to the angels continues into chapter 2, which is the reading for today.

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Second Reading:

Hebrews 2:9-11 NAS95 9 But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. 10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. 11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,

In today's reading, the author explains how Jesus submitted to God the Father's plan for Him by allowing Himself to be born as a man in order to serve the world. The theological term for the process by which Jesus emptied Himself of His independent use of His divine attributes during the ministry of His First Advent is "kenosis." This concept is explained more clearly by Saint Paul in the Book of Philippians in the reading below. We are including this because of the great importance of this subject and for the fact that the author of Hebrews assumes the reader's familiarity with this concept. Saint Paul explains this in the verses below.

5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (Philippians 2:5-10).

With Paul's teaching in mind, the meaning of the reading from Hebrews becomes clear. Jesus voluntarily became human during His earthly lifetime, making Himself "for a little while lower than the angels" (v. 2a). Jesus died for everyone according to God's rich grace by humbling Himself on the cross not as a victim, but as a victor. Nowhere in Scripture is Jesus ever called a victim, rather Jesus gave His life willingly for us in order to suffer the penalty for the sins of the entire world. The purpose of Jesus' work is explained in verses 10–11. Jesus is "bringing many sons to glory," and sanctifies (meaning makes perfect" those whom He calls brethren. At the first moment we believe we are given a new Spirit, the old one is gone and replaced with something new who knows God (Ezekiel 36:26, 2 Peter 1:3). In this new relationship, we are united in fellowship with the Holy Spirit, Jesus, and the Father. The author stated in the reading, "For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father" (v. 11a). This relationship is never something from

which we can become divorced, as it was given to us by God. "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" (Romans 8:35). As we transition to the Gospel lesson, we will see how Jesus taught about the relationship of marriage as created by God for the purpose of a lifetime of fellowship between two followers of Him.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is a continuation of the study from Saint Mark. Before we continue, let's take a step back and look at the big picture of this Gospel. Mark's writing was one of the earliest of the four Gospels. In this important Book of the Bible, the author emphasizes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. John Mark is held by tradition to be the author and there is strong evidence regarding this. He was very likely influenced by ministry of Saint Peter, whom the Lord Jesus called the Rock of the church. Remember that this Rock of the church wrote about how as believers, we become the heirs of God's great gifts through an eternal relationship with Him, something which the Pharisees did not understand. Peter said that as believers we are born again to a living hope "to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:3). Throughout Mark there are three primary groups of people, and in the reading this week each them appear. The first is Jesus' primary nemesis, the religious leaders, including the Pharisees. The second is the crowds who follow Jesus and continually misunderstand Him. The third group is Jesus' disciples who also suffer from no small amount of misunderstanding even up until Jesus had risen from the dead when He had to explain everything to them regarding Himself from the Old Testament (Luke 24:13-32).

In today's reading, Jesus responds to a question from the religious leaders who came to Him not to learn, but rather to test Him (Mark 10:2). Jesus responded with a question, something that He often did when questioned. Do we know anyone who, when we ask them a question responds with a question, and afterwards we learn something from them? Jesus used this inductive approach when He was addressing the crowds, as contrasted with a deductive method in which He would have plainly given them the answer to their question. He uses those two different approaches consistently when He was addressing those two different groups of people. With the inductive method, He spoke mostly with questions and parables, but then later explained His public address privately to His disciples. In this case, the religious leaders didn't really desire to learn from Jesus by understanding the true answer to their question, instead they were trying to test or trap Jesus by asking Him a question about some obscure or difficult subject dealing with Jewish Law. In the reading, we see Jesus following a familiar pattern. Someone from one of the first two groups asks Him a question, and Jesus responds with a question, which if answered properly could have led them to the answer themselves. Then, once He is away from them, He plainly explains to His disciples the answer to

both questions. As you read, ask yourself how you would answer the question from the Pharisees, and then the question posed by Jesus.

Gospel Reading:

Mark 10:2-16 NAS95 2 Some Pharisees came up to Jesus, testing Him, and began to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife. 3 And He answered and said to them, "What did Moses command you?" 4 They said, "Moses permitted a man TO WRITE A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY." 5 But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. 6 But from the beginning of creation, God MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE. 7 FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, 8 AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH; so they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9 What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." 10 In the house the disciples began questioning Him about this again. 11 And He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; 12 and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery." 13 And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them. 14 But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 15 Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all." 16 And He took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands on them.

The context of the reading is following Jesus' teaching on the seriousness and spiritually harmful nature of sin. Jesus had taught them, "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea" (Mark 9:42). Afterwards, He left Capernaum and came to the region of "Judea beyond the Jordan," meaning the largely Gentile land to the east of this important watery landmark (Mark 10:1). Here the crowds met up with Him again and were joined by the Pharisees who led with a question to test Him (v. 2).

The Pharisees asked Jesus whether it was lawful (according to Jewish Law) for a man to divorce his wife (v. 2). They didn't of course mean whether it was lawful according to Roman Law, but rather according to their strict, literal and often wrong interpretation of the Mosaic Law. Jesus responded with a question, asking them to locate the answer from what Moses had written in the Law (v. 3). Jesus explained to them following a method that would have been very familiar to the Pharisees from the Old Testament. In the Book of Nehemiah, the people after they had been held in captivity in

Babylon for seventy years had lost track of the Scriptures. Once Ezra had located a copy, he gathered the people around him to teach them, and Ezra and the priests read the lost biblical text. We see that it said, "They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading" (Nehemiah 8:8). This is what Jesus did by reading from the text and at the same time providing the interpretation of it. Moses didn't write in Deuteronomy Chapter 24 saying that God in any way favored divorce, but rather that God **authorized** divorce. Jesus explained this very crucial difference. Moses said that it was an abomination before the LORD for a man to remarry a woman whom he had previously divorced and had remarried, and taught the people through the Law not to do this because it would bring "sin upon the land" by doing so (Deuteronomy 24:4). Jesus continued the biblical teaching on the matter of divorce by drawing the people back to the Scriptures, a behavior which all of us would do well to follow. In responding to the question from the Pharisees, who didn't really care to hear the true answer, Jesus simply pointed them back to God's original teaching on the matter.

The closing of the reading was the second instance where the crowds were bringing children to Jesus (v. 13). Once again, Jesus rebuked His disciples for not allowing or even encouraging this. "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these," He said (v. 14). As true followers of Jesus, all of us must approach him humbly, and He was teaching His disciples this very important lesson.

This week we saw how Jesus turned to the Scriptures to answer a question by the Pharisees. Even though this group of religious legalists didn't desire to listen to His answer, Jesus still explained to them the sanctity of marriage and how this flowed from the relationship of the first man and woman God created during Creation about which we read in the first reading. In the closing verses of the Gospel reading, Jesus had to remind His disciples to be humble and receive Him just like the children. In the second reading, we learned how Jesus humbled Himself in order to accomplish the will of His Father. As followers of Jesus, He calls us to humble ourselves and receive Him as little children.

Reflection Questions

1. In the first reading we read how God created the first woman out of Adam as a helper and companion for him to accomplish the purposes that He had previously assigned to him. Later in the Gospel reading, we saw how Jesus used these same verses to explain the lifetime relationship of marriage as arising from God through this same creation account. Read the following verses and then discuss in what ways a husband and wife model the more perfect relationship that exists

between the Persons of the Godhead.

John 14:16-20 NAS95 16 "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; 17 that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. 18 "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19 "After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also. 20 "In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.

2. How does knowing that God exists eternally in a perfect relationship help you in your own relationship, regardless if you are single or married?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 10-04-2020

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we reverse the normal order begin with the second reading where we examine Paul's Letter to the Philippians. Then we look at the first reading from Isaiah and close with the Gospel lesson from Matthew.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

In the New Testament reading we find how obedient believers can have a clear conscience and live without worry. This reading is a continuation of the study from the Book of Philippians that we have been reading for the last several weeks. As a reminder, Paul was in prison for his faithfulness to God in preaching the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. In the previous verses, Paul admonishes two specific women in the church to resolve some certain unmentioned conflict. You can imagine that hearing of this conflict while he was in prison would have been discouraging to Paul. In the verse leading up to today's reading Paul said, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4). Before you read the text ask yourself, what does it mean to rejoice in the Lord especially given Paul's unpleasant conditions and his admonition to resolve interpersonal conflict?

Second Reading:

6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. 9 The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:6-9)

In the reading, Paul made a commanding call to prayer, correct thinking, and right actions; which he said would result in peace in the heart of a believer. As we saw in the context leading up to the reading, Paul said first to rejoice in the Lord. This means that as believers we can rest in the finished work of the Lord Jesus in securing our salvation and rejoice that regardless of our circumstances we can never be taken away from our relationship with the Lord (John 10:28-29). Paul said in the reading that we do not have to suffer anxiety if we turn our anxiety into a prayer request (v. 6). The word "supplication" is an even stronger word, for it connotes a sense of urgency, desperation and humility. This is the attitude with which we can approach the throne of grace.

This is the same message that the Lord Jesus gave to his disciples in His great Sermon on the Mount. Jesus told them," And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name'" (Matthew 6:7-9). In Jesus' model prayer He instructed His disciples to first begin with adoration of God and thanksgiving. Jesus continued, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." (Matthew 6:10-12). After adoring God and thanking Him for His provisions we should remember to confess our sins to Him before we move onto asking Him for the matter about which we need help. One of the things we can confess (which literally means "to say the same thing" which implies we agree with God) is our limited perspective, which is causing our anxiety in the first place. We can approach God with confidence (Hebrews 4:16), which should produce thankfulness in our hearts, no matter the circumstances we face. "And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (v. 7).

Finally, Paul made a call to the believers in Philippi not only to prayer when tempted with worry but to think about the right things as a second means of combatting worry. Paul told the believers to think about those things that were pure, lovely, of good repute, things of excellence and worthy of praise (v. 8) as well as the Scriptures that they had received from Paul (v. 9). Not only were they to concentrate their thoughts on the correct things but they were also to practice the things which they

had learned from Paul (v. 9). Many people have discovered that one way of forgetting their own troubles is to help others with their troubles. After they had done all of these things **then** the peace of God would be with them (v. 9c).

To summarize, Paul said that instead of worrying, we should pray, being thankful that God hears us and that we are not alone in our trials. He also directed believers to focus our thoughts upon the correct things including a list of good things that are worthy of praise. In addition, we should practice the things that Paul taught which would entail walking by faith in the truth of Scripture and not by sight (or our feelings). Finally, we can only expect and look forward to experiencing the peace of God after we have done these things that are connected to living in the truth.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The Old Testament reading is from the Prophet Isaiah. He was a prophet to Judah during the reigns of King Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah (Isaiah 1:1). His prophetic view frequently extended far beyond the immediate circumstances of Judah who was facing a threat from Babylon. Isaiah prophesied about a distant day when the Lord's temple and holy city of Jerusalem would be exalted and the world would be at peace. The following biblical text provides a backdrop of hopefulness in the midst of Judah's impending exile.

The events about which Isaiah spoke were often "telescoped" together in such a way that distant events were seen as happening with near-term events. This is sometimes called the "mountain peaks of prophecy" or "prophetic foreshortening." The "last days" about which Isaiah spoke in verse two above is the time of Jacob's trouble (Jeremiah 30:7) that is chronicled by John in Revelation. It is at this time that the Lord Jesus will return to the earth to usher in His kingdom reign over the world and finally bring an era of peace (Revelation 19:11-16).

But before peace could come, Judah must face the consequences for her disregard for the relational covenant that God had made with her. Judah repeatedly rejected God's overtures of loving provision, and His desire for relational loyalty was continually met with spiritual adultery. As you read, listen to God's heart as He faced the disappointment of unmet relational expectations with His chosen people.

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First Reading:

1 Let me sing now for my well-beloved a song of my beloved concerning His vineyard. My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill. 2 He dug it all around, removed its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. And He built a tower in the middle of it and also hewed out a wine vat in it; Then He expected it to produce good grapes, but it produced only worthless ones. 3 "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge between Me and My vineyard. 4 What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones? 5 So now let Me tell you what I am going to do to My vineyard: I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed; I will break down its wall and it will become trampled ground. 6 I will lay it waste; It will not be pruned or hoed, But briars and thorns will come up. I will also charge the clouds to rain no rain on it." 7 For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel And the men of Judah His delightful plant. Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; For righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress. (Isaiah 5:1-7)

In today's reading, Isaiah is singing a song about God, who is Isaiah's beloved. God had a vineyard that was planted with a choice vine. Isaiah explained the metaphor of the vineyard being the house of Israel (v. 7). This metaphor of Israel as the vine occurs throughout the Bible, both in the Old and New Testaments. After tending it and building a tower to protect it, the vineyard produced "worthless" grapes (connoting wild or sour grapes). God had no other choice but to remove the hedge of protection that He placed around Jerusalem and Judah and allow it to become a wasteland because of their rejection of the covenant relationship with God (v. 5). This prophecy of physical destruction was fulfilled through the invasion of the Babylonian forces in successive waves with the last one in 586 BC resulting in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (2 Kings 25:1-10). The final destruction of Jerusalem will occur in the future, when God allows a person called the AntiChrist to establish his kingdom rule in Jerusalem (Revelation 13). Later in the Gospel lesson, we will see that a second part of the destruction of Jerusalem was the spiritual element that came when the Messiah, Jesus, whom God sent, was rejected by the Jews.

This passage teaches about God's heart and the fallen human condition. God provided everything for his chosen people to thrive and be fruitful. The passage shows God's great amount of care in establishing and tending His vineyard, the house of Israel (v. 7). "He dug it, removed its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine" (v. 2). This parallels the creation account of what He did for Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. It was part of the original design for humans to be image bearers of God and to be fruitful here on Earth (Genesis 1:27-28).

The consistent nature of human beings, as seen in Adam and Eve and in His people Israel, has been to break God's heart and to not live up to their noble identity as image-bearers. "Then I expected it to produce good grapes, but it produced only worthless ones" (v. 4). Isaiah repeats God's unmet expectation: "Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold a cry of distress" (v. 7). These verses reveal the systemic human condition of fallenness (or depravity). Even with the best of conditions, humans show their propensity toward rejecting God and choosing a life of self-reliance.

Therefore, God's response toward these choices of autonomy and independence are not justified and necessary. It's almost as if God is saying, "What else can I do? They have rejected Me, so I will honor their choice." But their choice to live in autonomy from God has dire consequences. "I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed . . ." (v. 5). Israel was free to live outside the covenant relationship set up by God, but she would also forfeit the benefits of this loving and protective relationship. They would reap the natural consequences of life apart from God. Rejecting God had dire consequences for the nation of Judah, as it continues to have for us today.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson continues the theme of God's vineyard as Jesus teaches using a parable. The context is extremely important this week in order to understand Jesus' intended meaning. It is clear that Jesus' message was addressed directly to the Jewish religious authorities. This group had just witnessed Jesus riding into Jerusalem riding on a donkey (Matthew 21:7), something that would be done by a king in that culture. As Jesus rode past the crowds they cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David; BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Hosanna in the highest!" (v. 9b). Immediately afterwards Jesus escalated the tense situation even more as Matthew recorded that Jesus "entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who were selling doves" (v. 12). Next, while still in the temple He healed the blind and lame (v. 14). All of this inflamed the Jewish leaders and further exposed their hatred of Jesus. Matthew recorded what happened next. "But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were shouting in the temple, 'Hosanna to the Son of David,' they became indignant and said to Him, 'Do You hear what these children are saying?'" (vv. 15-16a). Jesus responded, "Yes; have you never read, 'OUT OF THE MOUTH OF INFANTS AND NURSING BABIES YOU HAVE PREPARED PRAISE FOR YOURSELF'" (v. 16b). The next day, Jesus returned to the temple (v. 23) after staying overnight in Bethany (v. 17). After cursing the fig tree in front of His disciples (v. 20), He was confronted by the chief priests and elders in the temple who questioned His authority (v. 23). Finally, in the verses leading up to today's reading He told the authorities in the temple the parable of the Sons in the Vineyard that we studied previously. That particular lesson, directed squarely at

the hearts of the Jewish leaders, revealed that even though a person may outwardly act in a religious manner they could be spiritually dead on the inside (Matthew 7:13). Jesus had taught the crowds earlier about this as recorded in Matthew:

21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. 22 Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.' (Matthew 7:21-23)

The religious leaders were not pleased with what Jesus told them. Later in the chapter Matthew recorded, "When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them. When they sought to seize Him, they feared the people, because they considered Him to be a prophet" (Matthew 21:45-46). How insightful of them, they were afraid to seize him, at least at that point, because the people considered Him to be a prophet!

Now that we understand the context of the Gospel lesson, as you read the Gospel text take particular note of the identity of each of the characters in the story. *Note: Verse 44 was included for context.*

Gospel Reading:

33 Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who PLANTED A VINEYARD AND PUT A WALL AROUND IT AND DUG A WINE PRESS IN IT, AND BUILT A TOWER, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey. 34 When the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his produce. 35 "The vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third. 36 Again he sent another group of slaves larger than the first; and they did the same thing to them. 37 But afterward he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' 38 But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' 39 They took him, and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. 40 Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers? 41 They said to Him, "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons." 42 Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone; THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES'? 43 Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken

away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it.

44 And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust." (Matthew 21:33-46)

This parable shows the goodness of God and the reasonable expectation that His peoples would respond to His goodness by being obedient workers on God's behalf and producing fruit in His vineyard.

The story starts with a landowner who planted a vineyard. The text in all capitals in verse 33 is a reference to Isaiah 5:1 that we read in the first reading. It is also very similar to the wording that God said about Israel being a "choice vine" in Jeremiah 2:21. The vinegrowers rejected their role as laborers on behalf of the landowner by abusing and killing the landowner's servants who came to collect the produce (v. 35). The escalation continued to the point that the vinegrowers killed the landowner's son (vv. 37-39). In light of the context, it is clear at this point that Jesus is referring to Himself. Jesus then let the Jewish leaders dig their own graves, so to speak, by asking them what they would do in such a situation. They said, "He [would] bring those wretches to a wretched end, and [would] rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who [would] pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons" (v. 42). In other words, the landowner would entrust the vineyard to other people who **would** be trustworthy. Jesus then seized the opportunity to teach them from their own Holy Scriptures by quoting a verse from Psalm 118 with which they would have been familiar. What Jesus was telling the Jewish leaders was that **He** was the stone who they (the builders) were about to reject. But their rejection of Him as Messiah did not deter God's plan, for Jesus would become the cornerstone of real faith for past and future generations.

Below is a summary of the characters and subjects along with their meaning in the story:

1. The landowner represents God the Father. The landowner made a huge investment in the vineyard and then entrusted it to the vinegrowers. In the same way, God invests in people and then entrusts His ministry to them for the purposes of bearing fruit.

2. The vineyard represents Israel. It contained a tower and walls which were protective measures taken by the landowner to preserve his valuable investment in the vineyard.

3. The vinegrowers represent the Jewish religious leaders.

4. The slaves are the prophets that God sent to the Old Testament Jews to remind them of their covenantal relationship with God.

4. The landowner's son represents God's Son, Jesus Christ.

5. The "other tenants" are the future church that would consist primarily of the Gentiles in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecies.

Some insights about the parable are as follows. First, this parable provided a key insight into the hearts of the religious leaders. The priests and elders claimed to belong to God's kingdom but were not obedient to God the Father. Instead they were obedient to a different father, their father the devil (John 8:44).

Second, the implication of this parable is that the disobedience of the Jewish people throughout history up until that time was actually a **conspiracy** against God. In verse 38 Jesus said, "they said among themselves," meaning they conspired to kill the landowner's son. Conspiracy has always been regarded as a greater crime than manslaughter in the legal system. In modern times each of the vinegrowers would have been charged with both murder **and** conspiracy to commit murder. Jesus knew that the Jewish leaders had murder in their hearts. We see later on in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus lamented over Jerusalem who killed the prophets (Matthew 23:23), the greatest of whom was John the Baptist (Matthew 11:11) who had just been killed by King Herod (Matthew 14:10). This meant that a rejection of God's prophet John was a rejection of God Himself. In general the prophets were frequently persecuted by their own people. Some were stoned (2 Chronicles 24:21), and some like Jeremiah were persecuted and killed in other ways (Jeremiah 26:7-11, 38:1-28).

Finally, the parable is a prophecy that Jesus would be rejected by the leaders of the Jewish community. Jesus is the stone that the builders rejected, but after His exaltation, He became the Chief Cornerstone of the church (v. 42). Jesus told them very clearly about the penalty for their rejection, which was the loss of their kingdom. "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it." In the end, the kingdom of God was given to the universal church made up primarily of Gentiles. This mystery of God's grace wasn't

revealed or understood until after it had happened, though in hindsight clues such as this were provided by God.

God, in His grace provided one final warning to the Jewish leaders in verse 44. "And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust." Jesus is saying that rejection of Him is fatal. Falling or stumbling upon the Rock will break those who reject the Messiah, for the 2nd advent of the Messiah will be that of Judge who will pronounce everlasting judgment. Anyone that has ever dropped a dish onto a ceramic floor knows the peril of a hard surface. Jesus is the Rock over which the Jewish leaders stumbled. By application, we can see that anyone's rejection of Jesus is a fatal mistake that cannot be forgiven. Rejection of God's provision for the forgiveness of sin through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the only unforgivable sin (Matthew 12:22-32).

Reflection Questions

1. What is your response to God's claim of ownership on your life? Would you describe yourself like the vinegrowers who rejected the Son who came to seek payment or would you describe yourself as one who has surrendered to God's rightful ownership of your life? How would others describe you, based on your words, your attitudes, your values and your lifestyle?

2. In the last two readings, we saw God's reasonable expectation that His people bear fruit for Him. We also saw Paul modeling the fulfillment of this, for though he was in very unpleasant circumstances, he pointed the way to have peace in God through connecting to God in prayer. In what ways is God calling you to be His image-bearer in the world, despite your less than ideal circumstances? How can depending on God through prayer be a life-line for you to fulfill your God-given purpose?

Mass-Study-Notes-for-Sunday_10-04-2020Download

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 10-06-2019



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we learn from Habakkuk how the people can God can persevere through suffering. We learn about the importance of using our spiritual gifts and the spreading the true doctrine of God in the second reading. In the Gospel lesson we study three short lessons from Jesus on discipleship.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Habakkuk, like Amos that we looked at last week, was a minor prophet, meaning his writings were shorter than the ones who are called the major prophets. The overall theme of the book is how the people of God are to persist during their suffering by focusing upon Him. He wrote a bit later than Amos, in the late seventh century BC (610 – 605 BC). This was after the Assyrians had already taken the Northern Kingdom of Israel into captivity in 722 BC and just before the Southern Kingdom first fell to the Babylonians in three waves beginning in 605 BC. The context is very important to understand because the Babylonian army was soon to begin their conquest of Jerusalem, the holy city of the southern kingdom of Judah. The prophet cried out to God, "How long, O LORD, will I call for help, And You will not hear? I cry out to You, "Violence!" Yet You do not save" (Habakkuk 1:2). The Book records God's answer to his plea.

First Reading:

> *Habakkuk 1:2-3 NAS95 2 How long, O LORD, will I call for help, And You will not hear? I cry out*

> *to You, "Violence!" Yet You do not save. 3 Why do You make me see iniquity, And cause me to look on wickedness? Yes, destruction and violence are before me; Strife exists and contention arises.*
>
> *2:2-4 2 Then the LORD answered me and said, "Record the vision And inscribe it on tablets, That the one who reads it may run. 3 For the vision is yet for the appointed time; It hastens toward the goal and it will not fail. Though it tarries, wait for it; For it will certainly come, it will not delay. 4 Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; But the righteous will live by his faith."*

In chapter 2 verse 4 of Habakkuk stated a very important principle for believers. "Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; But the righteous will live by his faith." Other versions state this more clearly, such as the NIV which reads, "See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright– but the righteous will live by his faith." Here we see that one key characteristic of a disciple of God is having faith in Him. Righteous living depends upon faith, but faith must have an object. If our faith is placed in our perceived goodness, good works we do for the church, or anything other than God we are "puffed up and our desires are not upright."

Here is an illustration about the importance of placing our faith in the correct object, God. If our mother asked us to go to the store and buy a gallon, she may be very surprised if we returned with a gallon of cod liver oil when she actually desired skim milk! It is very important to have the correct object of faith.

Later in Habakkuk, we found the object of Habakkuk's faith. "The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights (Hab 3:19a,b NIV). Habakkuk's call was to the people of Israel to repent of their sin and return to God, the only true source of possible deliverance from their impending tragedy of invasion by Babylon. That calling is just as appropriate today as it was to Israel. The righteous shall live by faith in God and not by faith in anything else including money, success, or good works. For we are saved by grace through faith and not of ourselves, it is a gift of God, not of works, less any person should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

We are often not able to understand what God is up to during the times that He allows trouble in our lives. Habakkuk's call to God regarding why He allowed such terrible hardships to happen to the people of God is as important to his readers as it is to those in our day. When we suffer without seeing any obvious purpose or reason we too ask God, why? God answer to us is, "*But the righteous will live by his faith*" (Habakkuk 2:4c). We are called to live by faith in God's plan, faith that God will work out all things for the good of those who love him (Romans 8:28).

As I write this I am preparing to travel to the Detroit area to the funeral of friend who died at middle age. Over and over I have asked what I could have done to have prevented his death. I pray that somehow God will use this experience to draw me and others closer to Him, and that I would have the boldness to share the love of Jesus Christ with others through this tragedy. The person who died is on that has been on my BLL (big long list) for many years. I carry an especially large burden with the passing of each on this list What helps me get through it is the half dozen or so people *formerly* on the list who are now walking with God in faith. Through it all the message of Habakkuk rings true, "the righteous will live by his faith."

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from the Book of Second Timothy. The theme of this section is Paul's calling to young Timothy to continue his bold service of the Lord in spite of tribulation. This is similar to what we learned from the first reading in Habakkuk.

Second Reading:

> *6 For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. 7 For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. 8 So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, 9 who has saved us and called us to a holy life– not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, 10 but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. 11 And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. 12 That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day. 13 What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 1:6-13 NIV)*

Paul reminded Timothy to use the spiritual gifts given to him by God during his ordination service (v. 6, "laying on of my hands"). He said in verse 13, "What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus." The caution to adhere to a pattern of sound teaching is a frequent admonition made by Paul and other New Testament writers. Doctrine is important especially as we will see in the Gospel lesson today because teaching false doctrine leads others away from the true faith in Jesus. Such a practice, knowingly or not, will lead to a much greater condemnation for non-believers engaged in such practices. This leads us to the Gospel lesson for today from Saint Matthew.

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Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Though the Gospel lesson today only covered chapter 17 verses 5 – 10 we will cover the entire section from verses 1 -10 in order to take into account the context.

Gospel Reading:

> *1 JESUS SAID TO his disciples: "Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. 2 It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. 3 So watch yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. 4 If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him." 5 The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" 6 He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you. 7Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? 8 Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? 9 Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? 10 So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.' " (Luke 17:1-10 NIV)*

This section of Luke contains teaching related to the topic of discipleship. It consists of three short lessons and concludes with a parable. In the first lesson, we see an admonition by Jesus about the seriousness of sin, especially for the person that *causes* people to sin. Jesus is saying that sin is serious enough that we should be willing to take drastic actions to overcome temptation. Any teenage boy can attest to the fact that girly magazines are an especially powerful attraction when hormones and raging. However, what Jesus is saying here is that the person that causes others to sin, in this case the publisher of the pornographic magazine, will receive greater condemnation. The parallel section in in Matthew adds this verse, "Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!" (Mt 18:7 NIV). Next, Jesus continues with a second lesson. Here we find that having a willingness to forgive is a second key characteristic of being a disciple of Jesus. Jesus said, "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him." That was a hard saying for His disciples because their answer is to ask Him to increase their faith. Forgiveness can be a hard thing to do. The call to forgiveness is evident in our Lord's Prayer recited every week in Mass found in Matthew Chapter 6. "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6:14-15). Paul said in Ephesians 4:32, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in

Christ God forgave you." Jesus commands us to forgive others because he forgave us. The call to forgive others is a key characteristic of a believer and is a frequent topic throughout the New Testament.

Jesus third lesson is about faith, something that we found in the first reading from Habakkuk. After Jesus spoke about the need to forgive, the disciples asked Jesus to increase their faith. Jesus then said, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you." His use of a mustard seed is significant since it was one of the smallest seeds with which his disciples would have been familiar. Jesus' statement meant that even having the smallest faith was of extremely high value. If we plant a seed and water it this tiny object may sprout regardless of how much faith we put in this happening. The seed comes from God and His concern is about *how* we use it. God doesn't call everyone to be spiritual giants, He just asks us to use our small faith for His purposes. As we saw in Habakkuk, the just shall live even by their tiny amount of faith the size of a mustard seed. Even such a small faith may move mountains.

Next, Jesus moved onto a parable, as He has done throughout this section of Luke. This parable was about a master to whom he posed a hypothetical question about his servant. "Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do?" The message was clear. *As disciples of Jesus, we must serve without strings attached*. Our obedience is not a matter of merit but of responsive duty, though God does honor our Christian service. Although we will be rewarded in heaven for our obedience to God, He calls us to obey Him now, as a servant is called to obey his master. The servant will be rewarded, "after that you may eat and drink (v. 8)," but a servant's work is a duty that does not earn them special merit with their master. God is a faithful Master Who will honor us for our service. When we make "sacrifices" in order to obey God, we should not pat ourselves on the back or look for special paybacks from God. We are merely living in light of the new life He has given us in Christ.

Some years back something very interesting happened at a church dinner that helped me to gain some insights into these passages. For this event since our name fell in a certain range, we were supposed to bring a large dessert. My wife baked up one of her most amazing treats, peach berry cobbler with a dish of freshly made whipped cream. I dropped Christy off at the door of the church and she carried the still hot cobbler downstairs along with the dish of whipped cream. When we got inside the organizers told her to find a table that did already have a dessert and just place it there. Frankly, I was concerned that we would not get any of this lovely treat but began resigning myself to the fact that we would not be able to enjoy any of the delicious delicacy. My wife set out to find a table without a dessert but was unable to find a table that did not already have a dessert. Next, I told her to just place the dessert on *our* table and get on with the dinner as I turned away to speak to someone behind me. As we were milling about trying to decide what to do, I suddenly heard a loud crash. As I turned around, I saw that the delicious cobbler had splattered all over the floor! I was shocked and just stood there in disbelief for a minute as our hosts began rushing around trying to figure out how to clean up the mess on the floor. I didn't have any cobbler that night!

As we went through the dinner and the service that followed, I reflected on the intentions of my heart during this event. My wife's motives were pure; she wanted to bring the very best dessert possible for *whoever* received it. Mine were not so pure; I intended all along to save some for myself. God evidently had other intentions by showing me a lesson in allowing the eventual disaster. *Serve God with a pure heart without strings attached and He will honor you*.

Reflection Questions

1. The mustard seed, though it is one of the smallest seeds, can with proper soil and watering, sprout and grow into a large bush whether or not we have faith that it will grow or not. It's specially designed by God to do just that. Read Hebrews 12:2 and Ephesians 2:8-9 below.

   Eph 2:8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith– and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God–not by works, so that no one can boast.

   Heb 12:2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Who provides the seed of faith for which you are called to sow to produce God's fruit in the Kingdom?

2. Refer to your answer above. With the source or your faith determined, how can your faith be improved, enlarged or expanded? Considering its source, is it productive for us to feel guilty if we don't have "enough faith"? What would be a more appropriate response?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 10-07-2018

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open this week with a reading from Genesis, the first and foundation Book of the Bible. This is one of the Books that I read once a year, along with the two other Books that I consider foundational for any student of the Bible. The other two that I read (and sometimes the entire Book in one sitting) are the Gospel of John and the Book of Acts. When I speak with new believers, I frequently tell them to proceed in the following order. Begin with Genesis, then with John, and finally conclude with Acts. In this way, the reader picks up many very important names and biblical constructs in a very short time. In addition, when reading in this order a person will quickly recognize the connections between the Old and New Testaments. This week as we begin with a reading from Genesis, we will see how Jesus connected this first Book of the Bible to His contemporary teaching on divorce as well as the Mosaic Law which His nemesis the Pharisees were trying to twist for their own advantage. We will also study in the second reading how the Old Testament proves that Jesus is the Christ as we look at the Book of Hebrews. The author of Hebrews was a star student of the Old Testament and understood extremely well the themes and theology of the Old Testament and how it connected with the New as revealed through the Person of Jesus Christ.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Moses Chapter 2. This reading is from Moses' retelling of the creation story that added additional details to the summary account he provided in Chapter 1. Beginning in verse 4 of this chapter, Moses adds additional details to his account. Although God had already created man (Genesis 1:26, 2:7) he was placed in the garden to work it alone (2:18). God knew that Adam needed a mate who was like himself, and provide a means to fulfil the commandment to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28). In today's reading, we will find out the remedy to Adam's loneliness.

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First Reading:

> *Genesis 2:18-24 NAS95 18 Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." 19 Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. 21 So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. 22 The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. 23 The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." 24 For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.*

After God created the animals, He brought them to Adam who completed the task of giving names to each one (2:20). Adam's naming process may have taken a long time, and the absence of any helper in the process reinforced his need for a spouse. Early in the reading we see the phrase it was "not good" in reference to Adam being alone. This contrasted with the closing of chapter one at the conclusion of the creation account in which God said it was "very good" after everything, and everybody including Adam and Eve, had been created (Genesis 1:31). During Adam's naming process the text says that "there was not found a suitable helper for him" (v. 20d) among the animal kingdom. Although Adam had close fellowship with the animals, as any pet owner can attest, these very special bonds still didn't satisfy his need for **human** companionship. Remember that during this time before the Fall the Lord God walked with Adam in fellowship with him (Genesis 3:8), however even this relationship left Adam desiring a mate because God had designed him for it. God then remedied Adam's need by creating the woman we know as Eve (Genesis 3:20) from out of Adam. In the Hebrew the word transliterated "woman" is "ish-shah" which sounds much like the word for man which is "aw-saw." In the original the word for rib also means side, so the woman was literally from Adam's side and named a word with the same root sound. In the English the idea of her name is similar, with "man" being the root and "wo-man" being the person taken from the man's side. In verse 18, the text says that a suitable "helper" was not found for Adam. The word there in the original is "ezer" pronounced "ay zer" which means aid. This word brings with it an association with another word found later in the Bible, "Ebenezer," which by interpretation is the "stone of help" and is used of God in the Old Testament. Ebenezer reminded the Jewish people of God's presence, and Eve created by God as a helper should do the same for us. Adam was created as a relational being, and God is a relational being consisting of three Persons in the Godhead. After the Fall we know that Adam and Eve's relationship was shattered, in contrast that which exists among the Persons of the Godhead is eternally in perfect relationship. Although Eve is literally the helper person drawn from Adam's side, the inevitable conflicts would begin between Adam and Eve after her creation, not matter how lonely he was before. These two had a mission, as the woman joined Adam in the work that God had given to him as the leader of the effort to maintain the garden that had been entrusted to him (Genesis 2:8, 15). Second, they were to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:28).

Later in the Gospel reading, we see how Jesus used the last verse of this reading to show how it was God's original plan that man and woman be united in the relationship of marriage during their lifetimes. Verse 24 explains that "for this reason" the man and woman shall leave their parents and become one in marriage, both in the spiritual sense and through the sexual union. The phrase "for this reason" points back to the previous verse where God explained that woman was formed from the man, and since this is so, the two are now one in marriage. Jesus will explain this essential truth to the Pharisees who were trying to twist the Law to hold their followers in the same bondage that they placed upon themselves.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from the Book of Hebrews, a Book about the superiority of Jesus Christ over angels and everyone else. This Book teaches us how Jesus was in the line of the Melchizedekian priesthood, which is eternal, rather than the Levitical priesthood which is tied to the human lifespan of the high priests. We know that one of the heresies that plagued the early church was the worship of angels, and the author of Hebrews attacked this headlong in showing Jesus' superiority over them. Saint Paul talked about this in the Book of Colossians when he said, "Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the **worship of the angels**, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind" (Colossians 2:18). In the first chapter of the Book the author explained how angels are "ministering spirits sent to those who will inherit salvation" (Hebrews 1:14). Angels are God's agents who do His business for Him. They are never to be worshiped in any manner, since there is only one mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5). The author's teaching on Jesus' position relative to the angels continues into chapter 2, which is the reading for today.

Second Reading:

> *Hebrews 2:9-11 NAS95 9 But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. 10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. 11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,*

In today's reading, the author explains how Jesus submitted to God the Father's plan for Him by allowing Himself to be born as a man in order to serve the world. The theological term for the process by which Jesus emptied Himself of His independent use of His divine attributes during the ministry of His First Advent is "kenosis." This concept is explained most clearly by Saint Paul in the Book of Philippians in the reading below. We are including this because of the great importance of this subject and for the fact that the author of Hebrews assumes the reader's familiarity with this concept. Saint Paul explains this in the verses below.

> *5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in*

> *the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (Philippians 2:5-10).*

With Paul's teaching in mind, the meaning of the reading from Hebrews becomes clear. Jesus voluntarily became human during His earthly lifetime, making Himself "for a little while lower than the angels" (v. 2a). Jesus died for everyone according to God's rich grace by humbling Himself on the cross not as a victim, but as a victor. Nowhere in Scripture is Jesus ever called a victim, rather Jesus gave His life willingly for us in order to suffer the penalty for the sins of the entire world. The purpose of Jesus' work is explained in verses 10 – 11. Jesus is "bringing many sons to glory," and sanctifies (meaning makes perfect" those whom He calls brethren. At the first moment we believe we are given a new Spirit, the old one is gone and replaced with something new who knows God (Ezekiel 36:26, 2 Peter 1:3). In this new relationship, we are united in fellowship with the Holy Spirit, Jesus, and the Father. The author stated in the reading, "For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father" (v. 11a). This relationship is never something from which we can become divorced, as it was given to us by God. "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" (Romans 8:35). As we transition to the Gospel lesson, we will see how Jesus taught about the relationship of marriage as created by God for the purpose of a lifetime of fellowship between two followers of Him.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is a continuation of the study from Saint Mark. Before we continue let's take a step back and look at the big picture of this Gospel. Mark's writing was one of the earliest of the four Gospels. In this important Book of the Bible, the author emphasizes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. John Mark is held by tradition to be the author and there is strong evidence to regarding this. He was very likely influenced by ministry of Saint Peter, whom the Lord Jesus called the Rock of the church. Remember that this Rock of the church wrote about how as believers we become the heirs of God's great gifts through an eternal relationship with Him, something which the Pharisees did not understand. Peter said that as believers we are born again to a living hope "to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:3). Throughout Mark there are three primary groups of people, and in the reading this week each them appear. The first is Jesus' primary nemesis, the religious leaders including the Pharisees. The second is the crowds who follow Jesus and continually misunderstand Him. The third group is Jesus' disciples who also suffer from no small amount of misunderstanding even up until Jesus had risen from the dead when He had to explain everything to them regarding Himself from the Old Testament (Luke 24:13-32).

In today's reading, Jesus responds to a question from the religious leaders who came at Him not to

learn but rather to test Him (Mark 10:2). Jesus responded with a question, something that He often did when questioned. Do we know anyone who when we ask them a question responds with a question, and afterwards we learn something from them? Jesus used this inductive approach when He was addressing the crowds, as contrasted with a deductive method in which He would have plainly given them the answer to their question. He uses those two different approaches consistently when He was addressing those two different groups of people. With the inductive method, He spoke mostly with questions and parables, but then later explained His public address privately to His disciples. In this case, the religious leaders didn't really desire to learn from Jesus by understanding the true answer to their question, instead they were trying to test or trap Jesus by asking Him a question about some obscure or difficult subject dealing with Jewish Law. In the reading, we see Jesus following a familiar pattern. Someone from one of the first two groups asks Him a question, and Jesus responds with a question, which if answered properly could have led them to the answer themselves. Then once He is away from them, He plainly explains to His disciples the answer to both questions. As you read, ask yourself how you would answer the question from the Pharisees, and then the question posed by Jesus.

Gospel Reading:

> *Mark 10:2-16 NAS95 2 Some Pharisees came up to Jesus, testing Him, and began to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife. 3 And He answered and said to them, "What did Moses command you?" 4 They said, "Moses permitted a man TO WRITE A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY." 5 But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. 6 But from the beginning of creation, God MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE. 7 FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, 8 AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH; so they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9 What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." 10 In the house the disciples began questioning Him about this again. 11 And He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; 12 and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery." 13 And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them. 14 But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 15 Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all." 16 And He took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands on them.*

The context of the reading is following Jesus' teaching on the seriousness and spiritually harmful nature of sin. Jesus had taught them, "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea" (Mark 9:42). Afterwards, He left Capernaum and came to the region of "Judea beyond the Jordan," meaning the largely Gentile land to the east of this important watery landmark (Mark 10:1). Here the crowds met up with Him again and were joined by the Pharisees who led with a question to test Him (v. 2).

The Pharisees asked Jesus whether it was lawful (according to Jewish Law) for a man to divorce his wife (v. 2). They didn't of course mean whether it was lawful according to Roman Law, but rather according to their strict, literal and often wrong interpretation of the Mosaic Law. Jesus responded with a question, asking them to locate the answer from what Moses had written in the Law (v. 3). Jesus explained to them following a method that would have been very familiar to the Pharisees from the Old Testament. In the Book of Nehemiah, the people after they had been held in captivity in Babylon for seventy years had lost track of the Scriptures. Once Ezra had located a copy, he gathered the people around him to teach them, and Ezra and the priests read the lost biblical text. We see there that is said that "They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading" (Nehemiah 8:8). This is what Jesus did by reading from the text and at the same time providing the interpretation of it. Moses didn't write in Deuteronomy Chapter 24 saying that God in any way favored divorce, but rather that God **authorized** divorce. Jesus explained this very crucial difference. Moses said that it was an abomination before the LORD for a man to remarry a woman whom he had previously divorced and had remarried, and taught the people through the Law not to do this because it would bring "sin upon the land" by doing so (Deuteronomy 24:4). Jesus continued the biblical teaching on the matter of divorce by drawing the people back to the Scriptures, a behavior which all of us would do well to follow. In responding to the question from the Pharisees, who didn't really care to hear the true answer, Jesus simply pointed them back to God's original teaching on the matter.

The closing of the reading was the second instance where the crowds were bringing children to Jesus (v. 13). Once again, Jesus rebuked His disciples for not allowing or even encouraging this. "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these," He said (v. 14). As true followers of Jesus, all of us must approach him humbly, and He was teaching His disciples this very important lesson.

This week we saw how Jesus turned to the Scriptures to answer a question by the Pharisees. Even though this group of religious legalists didn't desire to listen to His answer, Jesus still explained to them the sanctity of marriage and how this flowed from the relationship of the first man and woman God created during Creation about which we read in the first reading. In the closing of verses of the Gospel, reading Jesus had to remind His disciples to be humble and receive Him just like the children. In the second reading, we learned how Jesus humbled Himself in order to accomplish the will of His Father. As followers of Jesus He calls us to humble ourselves and receive Him as little children.

Reflection Questions

1. In the first reading we read how God created the first woman out of Adam as a helper and companion for him to accomplish the purposes that He had previously assigned to him. Later in the Gospel reading, we saw how Jesus used these same verses to explain the lifetime relationship of marriage as arising from God through this same creation account. Read the following verses and then discuss in what ways a husband and wife model the more perfect relationship that exists

between the Persons of the Godhead.

> *John 14:16-20 NAS95 16 "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; 17 that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. 18 "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19 "After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also. 20 "In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.*

2. How does knowing that God exists eternally in a perfect relationship help you in your own relationship, regardless if you are single or married?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 10-08-2017



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we reverse the normal order begin with the second reading where we examine Paul's Letter to the Philippians. Then we look at the first reading

from Isaiah and close with the Gospel lesson from Matthew.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

In the New Testament reading we find how obedient believers can have a clear conscience and live without worry. This reading is a continuation of the study from the Book of Philippians that we have been reading for the last several weeks. As a reminder, Paul was in prison for his faithfulness to God in preaching the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. In the previous verses, Paul admonishes two specific women in the church to resolve some certain unmentioned conflict. You can imagine that hearing of this conflict while he was in prison would have been discouraging to Paul. In the verse leading up to today's reading Paul said, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4). Before you read the text ask yourself, what does it mean to rejoice in the Lord especially given Paul's unpleasant conditions and his admonition to resolve interpersonal conflict?

Second Reading:

6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. 9 The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:6-9)

In the reading, Paul made a commanding call to prayer, correct thinking, and right actions; which he said would result in peace in the heart of a believer. As we saw in the context leading up to the reading, Paul said first to rejoice in the Lord. This means that as believers we can rest in the finished work of the Lord Jesus in securing our salvation and rejoice that regardless of our circumstances we can never be taken away from our relationship with the Lord (John 10:28-29). Paul said in the reading that we do not have to suffer anxiety if we turn our anxiety into a prayer request (v. 6). The word "supplication" is an even stronger word, for it connotes a sense of urgency, desperation and humility. This is the attitude with which we can approach the throne of grace.

This is the same message that the Lord Jesus gave to his disciples in His great Sermon on the Mount. Jesus told them," And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name'" (Matthew 6:7-9). In Jesus' model prayer He instructed His disciples to first begin with adoration of God and thanksgiving. Jesus continued, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." (Matthew 6:10-12). After adoring God and thanking Him for His provisions we should remember to confess our sins to Him before we move

onto asking Him for the matter about which we need help. One of the things we can confess (which literally means "to say the same thing" which implies we agree with God) is our limited perspective, which is causing our anxiety in the first place. We can approach God with confidence (Hebrews 4:16), which should produce thankfulness in our hearts, no matter the circumstances we face. "And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (v. 7).

Finally, Paul made a call to the believers in Philippi not only to prayer when tempted with worry but to think about the right things as a second means of combatting worry. Paul told the believers to think about those things that were pure, lovely, of good repute, things of excellence and worthy of praise (v. 8) as well as the Scriptures that they had received from Paul (v. 9). Not only were they to concentrate their thoughts on the correct things but they were also to practice the things which they had learned from Paul (v. 9). Many people have discovered that one way of forgetting their own troubles is to help others with their troubles. After they had done all of these things **then** the peace of God would be with them (v. 9c).

To summarize, Paul said that instead of worrying, we should pray, being thankful that God hears us and that we are not alone in our trials. He also directed believers to focus our thoughts upon the correct things including a list of good things that are worthy of praise. In addition, we should practice the things that Paul taught which would entail walking by faith in the truth of Scripture and not by sight (or our feelings). Finally, we can only expect and look forward to experiencing the peace of God after we have done these things that are connected to living in the truth.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The Old Testament reading is from the Prophet Isaiah. He was a prophet to Judah during the reigns of King Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah (Isaiah 1:1). His prophetic view frequently extended far beyond the immediate circumstances of Judah who was facing a threat from Babylon. Isaiah prophesied about a distant day when the Lord's temple and holy city of Jerusalem would be exalted and the world would be at peace. The following biblical text provides a backdrop of hopefulness in the midst of Judah's impending exile.

First Reading:

2 Now it will come about that in the last days the mountain of the house of the LORD Will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it. 3 And many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways And that we may walk in His paths." For the law will go forth from Zion And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. 4 And He will judge between the nations, And will render decisions for many peoples; And they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they learn war. (Isaiah 2:2-4)

The events about which Isaiah spoke were often "telescoped" together in such a way that distant

events were seen as happening with near-term events. This is sometimes called the "mountain peaks of prophecy" or "prophetic foreshortening." The "last days" about which Isaiah spoke in verse two above is the time of Jacob's trouble (Jeremiah 30:7) that is chronicled by John in Revelation. It is at this time that the Lord Jesus will return to the earth to usher in His kingdom reign over the world and finally bring an era of peace (Revelation 19:11-16).

But before peace could come, Judah must face the consequences for her disregard for the relational covenant that God had made with her. Judah repeatedly rejected God's overtures of loving provision, and His desire for relational loyalty was continually met with spiritual adultery. As you read, listen to God's heart as He faced the disappointment of unmet relational expectations with His chosen people.

1 Let me sing now for my well-beloved a song of my beloved concerning His vineyard. My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill. 2 He dug it all around, removed its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. And He built a tower in the middle of it and also hewed out a wine vat in it; Then He expected it to produce good grapes, but it produced only worthless ones. 3 "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge between Me and My vineyard. 4 What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones? 5 So now let Me tell you what I am going to do to My vineyard: I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed; I will break down its wall and it will become trampled ground. 6 I will lay it waste; It will not be pruned or hoed, But briars and thorns will come up. I will also charge the clouds to rain no rain on it." 7 For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel And the men of Judah His delightful plant. Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; For righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress. (Isaiah 5:1-7)

In today's reading, Isaiah is singing a song about God, who is Isaiah's beloved. God had a vineyard that was planted with a choice vine. Isaiah explained the metaphor of the vineyard being the house of Israel (v. 7). This metaphor of Israel as the vine occurs throughout the Bible, both in the Old and New Testaments. After tending it and building a tower to protect it, the vineyard produced "worthless" grapes (connoting wild or sour grapes). God had no other choice but to remove the hedge of protection that He placed around Jerusalem and Judah and allow it to become a wasteland because of their rejection of the covenant relationship with God (v. 5). This prophecy of physical destruction was fulfilled through the invasion of the Babylonian forces in successive waves with the last one in 586 BC resulting in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (2 Kings 25:1-10). The final destruction of Jerusalem will occur in the future, when God allows a person called the AntiChrist to establish his kingdom rule in Jerusalem (Revelation 13). Later in the Gospel lesson, we will see that a second part of the destruction of Jerusalem was the spiritual element that came when the Messiah, Jesus, whom God sent, was rejected by the Jews.

This passage teaches about God's heart and the fallen human condition. God provided everything for his chosen people to thrive and be fruitful. The passage shows God's great amount of care in establishing and tending His vineyard, the house of Israel (v. 7). "He dug it, removed its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine" (v. 2). This parallels the creation account of what He did for Adam

and Eve in the Garden of Eden. It was part of the original design for humans to be image bearers of God and to be fruitful here on Earth (Genesis 1:27-28).

The consistent nature of human beings, as seen in Adam and Eve and in His people Israel, has been to break God's heart and to not live up to their noble identity as image-bearers. "Then I expected it to produce good grapes, but it produced only worthless ones" (v. 4). Isaiah repeats God's unmet expectation: "Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold a cry of distress" (v. 7). These verses reveal the systemic human condition of fallenness (or depravity). Even with the best of conditions, humans show their propensity toward rejecting God and choosing a life of self-reliance.

Therefore, God's response toward these choices of autonomy and independence are not justified and necessary. It's almost as if God is saying, "What else can I do? They have rejected Me, so I will honor their choice." But their choice to live in autonomy from God has dire consequences. "I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed . . ." (v. 5). Israel was free to live outside the covenant relationship set up by God, but she would also forfeit the benefits of this loving and protective relationship. They would reap the natural consequences of life apart from God. Rejecting God had dire consequences for the nation of Judah, as it continues to have for us today.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson continues the theme of God's vineyard as Jesus teaches using a parable. The context is extremely important this week in order to understand Jesus' intended meaning. It is clear that Jesus' message was addressed directly to the Jewish religious authorities. This group had just witnessed Jesus riding into Jerusalem riding on a donkey (Matthew 21:7), something that would be done by a king in that culture. As Jesus rode past the crowds they cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David; BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Hosanna in the highest!" (v. 9b). Immediately afterwards Jesus escalated the tense situation even more as Matthew recorded that Jesus "entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who were selling doves" (v. 12). Next, while still in the temple He healed the blind and lame (v. 14). All of this inflamed the Jewish leaders and further exposed their hatred of Jesus. Matthew recorded what happened next. "But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were shouting in the temple, 'Hosanna to the Son of David,' they became indignant and said to Him, 'Do You hear what these children are saying?'" (vv. 15-16a). Jesus responded, "Yes; have you never read, 'OUT OF THE MOUTH OF INFANTS AND NURSING BABIES YOU HAVE PREPARED PRAISE FOR YOURSELF'" (v. 16b). The next day, Jesus returned to the temple (v. 23) after staying overnight in Bethany (v. 17). After cursing the fig tree in front of His disciples (v. 20), He was confronted by the chief priests and elders in the temple who questioned His authority (v. 23). Finally, in the verses leading up to today's reading He told the authorities in the temple the parable of the Sons in the Vineyard that we studied previously. That particular lesson, directed squarely at the hearts of the Jewish leaders, revealed that even though a person may outwardly act in a religious manner they could be spiritually dead on the inside (Matthew 7:13). Jesus had taught the crowds

earlier about this as recorded in Matthew:

21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. 22 Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.' (Matthew 7:21-23)

The religious leaders were not pleased with what Jesus told them. Later in the chapter Matthew recorded, "When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them. When they sought to seize Him, they feared the people, because they considered Him to be a prophet" (Matthew 21:45-46). How insightful of them, they were afraid to seize him, at least at that point, because the people considered Him to be a prophet!

Now that we understand the context of the Gospel lesson, as you read the Gospel text take particular note of the identity of each of the characters in the story. *Note: Verse 44 was included for context.*

Gospel Reading:

33 Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who PLANTED A VINEYARD AND PUT A WALL AROUND IT AND DUG A WINE PRESS IN IT, AND BUILT A TOWER, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey. 34 When the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his produce. 35 "The vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third. 36 Again he sent another group of slaves larger than the first; and they did the same thing to them. 37 But afterward he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' 38 But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' 39 They took him, and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. 40 Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers? 41 They said to Him, "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons." 42 Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone; THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES'? 43 Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it.

44 And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust." (Matthew 21:33-46)

This parable shows the goodness of God and the reasonable expectation that His peoples would respond to His goodness by being obedient workers on God's behalf and producing fruit in His vineyard.

The story starts with a landowner who planted a vineyard. The text in all capitals in verse 33 is a reference to Isaiah 5:1 that we read in the first reading. It is also very similar to the wording that God said about Israel being a "choice vine" in Jeremiah 2:21. The vinegrowers rejected their role as laborers on behalf of the landowner by abusing and killing the landowner's servants who came to collect the produce (v. 35). The escalation continued to the point that the vinegrowers killed the landowner's son (vv. 37-39). In light of the context, it is clear at this point that Jesus is referring to Himself. Jesus then let the Jewish leaders dig their own graves, so to speak, by asking them what they would do in such a situation. They said, "He [would] bring those wretches to a wretched end, and [would] rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who [would] pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons" (v. 42). In other words, the landowner would entrust the vineyard to other people who **would** be trustworthy. Jesus then seized the opportunity to teach them from their own Holy Scriptures by quoting a verse from Psalm 118 with which they would have been familiar. What Jesus was telling the Jewish leaders was that **He** was the stone who they (the builders) were about to reject. But their rejection of Him as Messiah did not deter God's plan, for Jesus would become the cornerstone of real faith for past and future generations.

Below is a summary of the characters and subjects along with their meaning in the story:

1. The landowner represents God the Father. The landowner made a huge investment in the vineyard and then entrusted it to the vinegrowers. In the same way, God invests in people and then entrusts His ministry to them for the purposes of bearing fruit.

2. The vineyard represents Israel. It contained a tower and walls which were protective measures taken by the landowner to preserve his valuable investment in the vineyard.

3. The vinegrowers represent the Jewish religious leaders.

4. The slaves are the prophets that God sent to the Old Testament Jews to remind them of their covenantal relationship with God.

4. The landowner's son represents God's Son, Jesus Christ.

5. The "other tenants" are the future church that would consist primarily of the Gentiles in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecies.

Some insights about the parable are as follows. First, this parable provided a key insight into the hearts of the religious leaders. The priests and elders claimed to belong to God's kingdom but were not obedient to God the Father. Instead they were obedient to a different father, their father the devil (John 8:44).

Second, the implication of this parable is that the disobedience of the Jewish people throughout history up until that time was actually a **conspiracy** against God. In verse 38 Jesus said, "they said among themselves," meaning they conspired to kill the landowner's son. Conspiracy has always been regarded as a greater crime than manslaughter in the legal system. In modern times each of the

vinegrowers would have been charged with both murder **and** conspiracy to commit murder. Jesus knew that the Jewish leaders had murder in their hearts. We see later on in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus lamented over Jerusalem who killed the prophets (Matthew 23:23), the greatest of whom was John the Baptist (Matthew 11:11) who had just been killed by King Herod (Matthew 14:10). This meant that a rejection of God's prophet John was a rejection of God Himself. In general the prophets were frequently persecuted by their own people. Some were stoned (2 Chronicles 24:21), and some like Jeremiah were persecuted and killed in other ways (Jeremiah 26:7-11, 38:1-28).

Finally, the parable is a prophecy that Jesus would be rejected by the leaders of the Jewish community. Jesus is the stone that the builders rejected, but after His exaltation, He became the Chief Cornerstone of the church (v. 42). Jesus told them very clearly about the penalty for their rejection, which was the loss of their kingdom. "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it." In the end, the kingdom of God was given to the universal church made up primarily of Gentiles. This mystery of God's grace wasn't revealed or understood until after it had happened, though in hindsight clues such as this were provided by God.

God, in His grace provided one final warning to the Jewish leaders in verse 44. "And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust." Jesus is saying that rejection of Him is fatal. Falling or stumbling upon the Rock will break those who reject the Messiah, for the 2nd advent of the Messiah will be that of Judge who will pronounce everlasting judgment. Anyone that has ever dropped a dish onto a ceramic floor knows the peril of a hard surface. Jesus is the Rock over which the Jewish leaders stumbled. By application, we can see that anyone's rejection of Jesus is a fatal mistake that cannot be forgiven. Rejection of God's provision for the forgiveness of sin through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the only unforgivable sin (Matthew 12:22-32).

Reflection Questions

1. What is your response to God's claim of ownership on your life? Would you describe yourself like the vinegrowers who rejected the Son who came to seek payment or would you describe yourself as one who has surrendered to God's rightful ownership of your life? How would others describe you, based on your words, your attitudes, your values and your lifestyle?

2. In the last two readings, we saw God's reasonable expectation that His people bear fruit for Him. We also saw Paul modeling the fulfillment of this, for though he was in very unpleasant circumstances, he pointed the way to have peace in God through connecting to God in prayer. In what ways is God calling you to be His image-bearer in the world, despite your less than ideal circumstances? How can depending on God through prayer be a life-line for you to fulfill your God-given purpose?

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