Study Notes for the Sunday Mass

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"For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus." 1 Timothy 2:5

Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **6-12-2016**. This week we will read about the confrontation and consequences that King David experienced after his sin of adultery with Bathsheba, killing Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, and then taking Bathsheba as his own wife. The second reading is from the letter to the Galatians, which reminds us that faith in Christ is what saves us, not works. The Gospel reading illustrates this truth by recounting the story of the unrighteous woman who showed great love for Jesus, for she had been forgiven much. All three readings weave together the redemptive story line of the gravity of sin, the inability of humans to fix themselves, and the beauty of the Gospel, which is embodied in Christ's righteousness that has been given for our salvation.

Read Online:http://www.christiansforchrist.org/articles/weekly-study-notes-for-the-sunday-mass/06-12-2016

Introduction to the First Reading:

King David, the second king of Israel, is famous for a few things. One of his most shining moments was his miraculous defeat of the giant, Goliath (1 Samuel 17). One of his darkest moments was his adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah (2 Samuel 11). To cover up her pregnancy, David brought Uriah home from battle, so that her pregnancy would look legitimate. However, because Uriah was an honorable man, he would not sleep with his wife while his men were still on the battlefield making sacrifices for the nation of Israel. Instead of confessing his sin, David dug himself in deeper, and instructed the army leader to put Uriah in the fiercest part of the battle and to pull back on him, so that Uriah would be killed in battle. The once shepherd boy, turned King, had hit one of the lowest points of his life. Instead of coming clean, turning to God, and confessing, King David continued to try to deal with his sin on his own terms. This all came to a climax when the prophet Nathan came to tell the king a story as a way to help David come to terms with his sin (2 Samuel 12:1-6). The story was about a man who was extremely wealthy, who had livestock in abundance. One day a traveler came to him, and instead of killing one of his many animals for the meal, the wealthy man took the one and only ewe lamb of his neighbor to make this man's meal. David's response to this story was one of complete outrage and disgust for the insensitivity and injustice of the wealthy man. In fact, David said "this man" should be put to death. Little did he know that "this man" was him!

First Reading:

Note: This includes verses 11-12 that were omitted from the reading.

> *2 Samuel 12:7-13 NAS95 7 Nathan then said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul. 8 'I also gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your care, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added to you many more things like these! 9 'Why have you despised the word of the LORD by doing evil in His sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the sons of Ammon. 10 'Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' 11 "Thus says the LORD, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you from your own household; I will even take your wives before your eyes and give them to your*

companion, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. 12 'Indeed you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and under the sun.'" 13 Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die.

It can be difficult for us to read passages like this, which recount God's just consequences for sin. But it is necessary to be exposed to the gravity and weight of sin or else we will try to brush it off, marginalizing its destructive effects. Our key character, David, tried to do this, but it didn't work. We have Psalm 32 that recounts David's internal suffering over his sin which had a crushing effect on him. He states, "When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away . . . for Your hand was heavy upon me" (Psalm 32:3-4).

In addition to the internal weight of sin, Nathan told of the external consequences that would be experienced as a result of his sin. Nathan's predictions came to fruition in a variety of ways. David not only had conflict with Israel's enemies, but conflict plagued his own household. For example, Amnon, one of his sons, raped David's daughter, Tamar (2 Samuel 13). Then, Absalom, David's son killed Amnon. This severe conflict culminated in an overthrow of David's rulership, where Absalom pitched a tent in the sight of all Israel and had sexual relations with David's concubines, thus fulfilling Nathan's prediction that David's companion would lie with his wives in broad daylight (2 Samuel 16:21-22). The gravity of sin and its destructive consequences are seen in an unfolding and snowballing way in David's life. There was no way for David to fix the problem of sin in his own life. His only hope was to cry out to the Lord for help.

After Nathan's confrontation with David, we have insight from Psalm 51 into what it looks like to be a man after God's own heart, which is the New Testament's description of King David (Acts 13:22). Here are some key thoughts from Psalm 51, David's response to the Lord after Nathan confronted him that can guide our understanding of sin, confession, and forgiveness:

- He confessed his sin and grieved over the way he had betrayed God.
- He recognized that sacrifices and burnt offerings would never "make up" for his sin and that God was not looking for him to do heroic deeds to off-set the guilt.
- The sacrifice that David brought was a broken spirit. He knew that a broken and contrite heart would not be despised by the Lord.
- He turned to the Lord for forgiveness and trusted in God to take away his guilt. He rested in God's character, not his own righteousness.
- He asked God to "create in me a clean heart" so that his righteousness would come from the innermost being and would reflect the character of God. He basically told the Lord to do whatever it takes to make him clean from the inside out.

David's life is an example to us about the gravity and destructive force of sin. We learn from him that sin is a part of even the most promising and stellar people. Even if we have not committed adultery and tried to cover it up by having someone killed, Jesus said that lust and anger in our heart are equivalent to adultery and murder (Matthew 6:21-48). We all have sinned and fall short of God's glorious standards for the life He has given to us (Romans 3:23). Like David, we cannot fix ourselves with our own moral deeds. It is only God's mercy that provides a way of escape from the destructive force of sin in our lives. The next reading elaborates on this point and provides the clear antidote to our sin problem.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

In the letter to the Galatians, Saint Paul clarified that a sinner's right standing before God is only achieved through faith in Christ. This passage is one of many in the New Testament that point those who are guilty of sin to the only One who can assuage guilt, namely Christ Jesus. We pick up the passage right in the middle of Paul's defense of his practice not to make the Gentile Christians fulfill the Mosaic Law. The fact that this was a controversial question that needed to be answered in writing allows us, as current day Christians, to have insight into the dimensions of our standing in Christ.

Second Reading:

Note: This includes verses 17-18 that were omitted from the reading.

> *Galatians 2:16-21 NAS95 16 nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified. 17 "But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be! 18 "For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor. 19 "For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God. 20 "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. 21 "I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly."*

This passage starts out by saying that man is not justified by following the Law, but through faith in Christ Jesus. In the early days of Christianity, there was some confusion over whether Gentiles who became Christians needed to follow the Jewish laws or whether faith in Christ alone was sufficient for salvation. Paul alludes to this controversy in the opening of this chapter and throughout these verses in the reading. At the Jerusalem council, which is recorded in Acts 15, the question about whether Gentiles have to live like Jews was definitively answered with a resounding "no."

This controversy allowed the key doctrine of justification by faith to be introduced into the record books of the Bible. The word "justified" is a term used in a court of law that is pronounced over one who is declared not guilty. As we saw in the previous reading and explanation of David's life, all have been pronounced guilty, for sin is part of the human condition. Paul shared that having right standing before God is not achieved by working really hard to please God ("works of the Law"—16), but by surrendering to Christ by faith ("I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me"—20).

In verse 16, Paul pointed out that even he, a Jew, was justified by faith in Christ, not in fulfilling the requirements of the Mosaic Law. In verses 17-18, Paul counteracted the implied argument that if Gentiles are not required to fulfill the Mosaic Law, then they will persist in sin and nullify the work of Christ and not achieve the righteous life that God desires for them. In response to this line of thought, Paul stated that the only thing that the Law does is to point out one's sin; it cannot save the law breaker. If he were to go back and build his faith on fulfilling the Mosaic Law, this would only result in being declared "guilty." He explained that he had to die to the Law so that he might live to God, which meant that the Law no longer hounded him to compliance. His compliance to God's standards was now generated from a new place in his heart—a place of surrender, devotion, and union with Christ. Because of Christ's love, he was now free to love God back and be in right relationship with Him. This freedom from the Mosaic Law did not negate God's grace, it actually celebrated it and relied upon it. For if one can fulfill the Mosaic Law from the heart, Christ's atoning death would be meaningless.

Paul realized the gravity and weight of his own sin and encouraged others to do likewise. He found forgiveness and grace by confessing His need for the Savior, Jesus Christ. Paul's new outlook can be ours as well, as we die to the old way of life that is structured according to handling sin on our own; and instead, live out of the new life that God has placed in every believer in Christ, the life of relational dependence on our wonderful Savior.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:
The Gospel reading paints a vivid picture of what it looks like when one encounters the forgiveness of Jesus in a very personal way. The story of the sinful woman who wets Jesus' feet with her tears, wipes his feet with her hair, and pours perfume on his feet provides a display of tender-hearted devotion that should characterize all believers.

Gospel Reading:

> *Luke 7:36 - 8:3 NAS95 36 Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him, and He entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. 37 And there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, 38 and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume. 39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner." 40 And Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he replied, "Say it, Teacher." 41 "A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?" 43 Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have judged correctly." 44 Turning toward the woman, He said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45"You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. 46 You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. 47 For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little." 48 Then He said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven." 49 Those who were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?" 50 And He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." 1 Soon afterwards, He began going around from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God. The twelve were with Him, 2 and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, 3 and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who were contributing to their support out of their private means.*

Right before this encounter in Luke, Jesus' authority had been questioned by the Pharisees. The common people were being convinced that Jesus was a prophet from God, but the religious leaders "rejected God's purposes for themselves" (Luke 7:20). Therefore, this story of the sinful woman and Simon, the Pharisee serve Luke's purpose in illustrating a sharp contrast between a receptive heart and a hard heart toward God.

Luke sets up the sharp contrast right at the opening of the story. A Pharisee, who had means, invited Jesus to a pleasant evening of eating and reclining at a table of equals. In this culture, the table would be set down low to the ground and diners would lay on their side, propped up on one elbow at the table and their feet behind them, away from the table. Hospitality was a high value and varying degrees of fanfare would have been shown in accordance with the status of the guest of honor. It would have been customary to have a bowl of water at the front entrance, where a servant would wash the guest's feet after walking dusty roads to arrive at the home. Obviously, this did not happen. Simon's passive display of honor is contrasted with the sinful woman's active pursuit of Jesus.

The woman who had a bad reputation came in (uninvited and unwelcomed by Simon) and wept at Jesus' feet. Why would someone weep in Jesus' presence? Why would this woman actively seek Jesus out and come unwelcomed into a powerful and judgmental person's home, breaking all social norms and lavishing a display of devotion that was unprecedented? The clue is in Luke's descriptive term for her. She was a sinner. In Jewish society back then, there were different categories of people. The highest castes were reserved for people of good moral repute and coming from honorable families. The people in the lowest caste of society were those who were ethnically not Jewish and those who had dishonored themselves as Jews by sinning in a public way. This woman was a Jew, but had been relegated to the lowest cast of "sinner" by dismantling her reputation in the eyes of respectable people. The shame she would have endured is probably something that would be hard for us as Westerners to comprehend. Her sinful reputation made her part of an untouchable caste, as if her uncleanness would make anyone she touched unclean by association. Somehow, she had enough understanding and possibly even an earlier encounter with Jesus where she had felt loved and forgiven by him, despite her sinner status.

Put in this context, her boldness in approaching Jesus and touching him shows a level of devotion that is beyond being a fair-weathered "fan" of Jesus. This woman overcame a lot of social obstacles to display this level of gratitude to Jesus. Her heart was on trial before the respectable people, for Simon's revealed thoughts show the judgement and scorn that she endured. In some sense, then, Jesus' heart was on trial too, for Simon's expectation is that a prophet would not let an unclean and sinful woman touch him. Respectable people distance themselves from unrespectable people.

But Jesus did not follow this cultural norm. He broke the social rule and praised this woman for her display of love. He defended her tenderness with a clever story that allowed Simon to see that his sense of respectability caused him to be a self-righteous man, blocking him from having a realistic evaluation of his own sinfulness. The short story that Jesus told had 3 characters and a question. Two men owed the same man money. One man owed a little (about 50 days of work) and the other owed a lot (about 500 days of work). Neither of them could pay the moneylender back. Both of them had their debt cancelled. Which one of them loved the moneylender more? The point was made. Jesus had corrected Simon's misevaluation of his own sinfulness and this woman's sinfulness. Both debts of sin were beyond human fixing. Simon sheepishly responded to the question with the right answer, softening the blow of conviction by saying "I suppose." The moral of the story is summed up by Jesus' words: "*For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little*" (Luke 7:47).

Have you ever wept in a "holy" moment? Have you ever lovingly "wiped Jesus feet with your hair," so to speak? Have you ever poured out something valuable to show your love to Christ? Maybe you were gripped with the gravity of your own sin and rebellious heart, convicted that you were not able to fix yourself. Maybe you were overwhelmed with the truth of God's love for you, deeply impressed with His desire to risk His reputation to restore you to Himself. Maybe you were struck with the fact that you are

just a small dot on the face of the earth and you are amazed that God cares about you. If you have responded to these prompts of conviction by the Holy Spirit, then you are like the sinful woman, who received Jesus' love and actively pursued him to show him her love. If you tend to brush these promptings away, reminding yourself what a good person you are and priding yourself that you are not as bad of a sinner as most people, then you are hardening your heart and you are in a dangerous place, like Simon the Pharisee. This story can be a turning point for all of us as we allow God to show us places in our hearts that are tender or hard towards him.

The last part of this reading recounts the lives of others who had been touched by Jesus and were devoted to him in various ways. It's almost as if the camera pans out from the focused tender moment of the sinful woman's devotion and flashes a wide-angled lens to plethora of ways others responded to Jesus' lavish love for them. For example, The Twelve (disciples) and the women who traveled with Jesus were giving their lives on a daily basis to share the good news of the kingdom of God. Some of these followers had dramatic experiences of rescue from demons and others were considered more respectable by society. But each of them was denying their old way of life, counting the cost and following Jesus. This is the way of true discipleship.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Jesus said that when we serve people in need, it's as if we are doing it to him. You may have never physically poured perfume on Jesus' feet, but if you have served those around you by listening, caring, meeting needs, sacrificing your own reputation and time, etc., then you have shown your love for Jesus in these tangible ways. How does linking your service to others with your devotion to Christ affect your attitude and motives for service? How can this picture of the woman pouring perfume on Jesus' feet provide you with a renewed focus for the moments of obedience that you are being called to in your pursuit of Jesus?

2. All three readings reinforce key truths to which our lives need to respond if we are to be wise. Review the readings and write out what you learned about each of the following themes and how this impacts your life:

- The gravity of sin
- The inability of humans to fix their sin problem
- Various responses to conviction of sin
- The gift of God's grace, which offers forgiveness for sin
- Various responses to God's grace and forgiveness

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass, visit this web site:
http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/061216.cfm
Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time Lectionary: 93
Source(s):
Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/
Scripture quotations taken from the NASB
Keywords:
Sin, Consequences of sin, Justified, Pharisee, Sinner, Conviction, Forgiveness