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 **9-25-2016**. This week we examine a reading from Amos and learn about the dangers of luxurious living when it brings people further away from God. In the Gospel reading, we learn from Jesus through the story of Lazarus and the rich man. We see how important it is to trust in the Lord Jesus as the only source of our salvation before we die. Unless we do it while we are still alive it will be too late once we die.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The context of the first reading from Amos is in the Northern Kingdom (Israel) just before the invasion by the Assyrian Empire that occurred in 722 BC. This was a time of prosperity for the Israelites who had fallen into idolatry and oppression of the poor people among them. Just one verse before the opening of today's reading God warned them about the inevitable invasion that was to come upon them along with their exile to a land "beyond Damascus" (Amos 5:27). In the reading, God continues His warnings to them about the wrath that he was going to allow to come upon them through the reigning Gentile empire to their north. This invasion from enemies in the north prefigures the invasion that will occur in the last days just prior to the return of the Lord Jesus. These final events will culminate in the outpouring of God's wrath upon the unbelieving world after Jesus returns to gather His church. Interestingly, some "pharisaical" people during Amos time were calling for this Day of the Lord to come (Amos 5:18a,b). God responded to their plea by saying that this day of judgment was one of "darkness and not light (Amos 5:18c, 20). He also told them (through Amos) that it is "as if a man fled from a lion and a bear met him, or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall, and a serpent bit him" (Amos 5:19). During times of oppression of the poor and idolatry, God's judgment is *not* something for which anyone should pray for!

First Reading:

> *Amos 6:1-7 NAS95 1 Woe to those who are at ease in Zion And to those who feel secure in the mountain of Samaria, The distinguished men of the foremost of nations, To whom the house of Israel comes. 2 Go over to Calneh and look, And go from there to Hamath the great, Then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are they better than these kingdoms, Or is their territory greater than yours? 3 Do you put off the day of calamity, And would you bring near the seat of violence? 4 Those who recline on beds of ivory And sprawl on their couches, And eat lambs from the flock And calves from the midst of the stall, 5 Who improvise to the sound of the harp, And like David have composed songs for themselves, 6 Who drink wine from sacrificial bowls While they anoint themselves with the finest of oils, Yet they have not grieved over the ruin of Joseph. 7 Therefore, they will now go into exile at the head of the exiles, And the sprawlers' banqueting will pass away.*

God warned the Israelites, those Jews of the northern kingdom (v.1, "in the mountain of Samaria") that their self-satisfied living and sense of security was false for they "will now go into exile at the head of the exiles" (v. 7a). God compared them to various Gentile nations whom He had already judged to a certain extent by the prior invasion of the Jewish people into their homelands (v. 2). The mention of the other nations contains a note of sarcasm. The opulent lifestyle of the Israelites (vv. 4-6) would ultimately lead to their downfall.

The people of Amos' day were no different than those who came after them, and those alive today. Jesus gave many warnings to the rich people during His day in order to turn their hearts to God, for example His discourse with the rich young ruler (Luke 18:18 – 27). Riches aren't bad in and of themselves it is the *love of money* that is the root of all kinds of evil (1 Timothy 6:10). In the Gospel reading we will see Jesus teaching on the critical importance of focusing upon God during people's earthly lifetimes because afterwards it is too late to receive forgiveness of their sin. This forgiveness is only available through faith in Jesus Christ while a person is still alive, there is no second chance to earn a person's way into heaven.

Introduction to the Second Reading:
The second reading from 1 Timothy coincidentally picks up just after the verse mentioned above regarding the love money. "For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs" (1 Timothy 6:10). This provides an important context into the teaching that follows.

Second Reading:

> *1 Timothy 6:11-16 NAS95 11 But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. 12 Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 13 I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, 14 that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 which He will bring about at the proper time--He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.*

Paul told young Timothy some very important spiritual truths. Instead of focusing upon riches which leads many people to an eternal, spiritual death, believers are to focus upon the attributes of God. This includes things like "righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness" (v. 11). Paul urged believers to live the Christian life seriously as if it were a battle (v. 12). He concluded the reading by reminding believers about the imminent return of the Lord Jesus, the only One who can give eternal life because he alone possesses it (v. 16). God's kingdom is one of light and immortality. In contrast, and as we will see in the Gospel reading, the kingdom of hell is one of darkness and eternal punishment.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:
In the Gospel lesson this week we return to Luke chapter 16 and move forward to verses 19-31 in what has been called "The 'parable' of the rich man and Lazarus" by some commentators. However, from all evidences in the text this isn't a parable at all, rather it's a story about a true event in history.

In the text in Luke we covered the past several weeks Jesus addressed his teaching to the group of legalistic Jews known as the Pharisees. Notice that the readings passed over verses 14 to 18. Since it's always important to consider the context of any part of the Bible that we study let me point out some insights from these missing five verses. Luke stated explicitly that the Pharisees were "worshipers of money" and that this group ridiculed Jesus. This prompted Jesus to tell them that they are the ones

"who justify themselves before men, but God knows their hearts." He said that what they exalt (money and status among other things) is an abomination in the sight of God. Jesus used strong words in an attempt to penetrate the hard hearts of the Pharisees. He said something very important which gives us an insight into God's kingdom that we will be discussing later in this Gospel lesson. Jesus said, "The Law and the Prophets were until John, since then the good news of the **kingdom of God** is preached, and everyone forces his way into it." How may someone attempt to "force themselves" into the kingdom of God? The better question would be, "How were the Pharisees attempting to force themselves into the kingdom of God?" Remember that John the Baptist's call was "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matthew 3:20). John's message was one of repentance and belief in the "one who was to come," Jesus. This was a time of transition, from the Old Testament Law to the as yet unseen mystery of the age of grace we now know as the "church age." The Pharisees were not heeding John's call for repentance and were instead attempting to force themselves into the kingdom through the establishment of their own law. This is clear because Jesus went on to say in verse 17, "But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void." Jesus came to fulfill the Old Testament Law and usher in the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Kingdom of Heaven also referred to as the Kingdom of God is referred to many times in the New Testament. In the Gospel of Saint John Jesus addressed Nicodemus the one we know as "Nick at Night" because this interaction was in the evening outside the hearing of the rest of the religious leaders. John 3:3 gives a crucial insight into the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus said, "You must be born from above to enter the Kingdom of Heaven." He then went on to explain to Nicodemus the meaning of the spiritual birth and how this comes about. Jesus said in verse 15, "that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." He continued in verse 16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but has eternal life." Jesus said that we obtain entrance into the kingdom of heaven through belief in Him which results in our second birth, a spiritual birth. We must believe in Jesus in order to cross over from the kingdom of darkness that the Pharisees were in to the Kingdom of God. In summary we see from the teaching of the forerunner John the Baptist the call for repentance and from Jesus the means to find eternal life through being born again (or from above) through the Spirit of God which comes about through belief in Jesus' finished work of atonement for our sins on the cross at Calvary.

Let's read the text and learn what Jesus was teaching the Pharisees about how to obtain eternal life through their entrance into the Kingdom of God.

Gospel Reading:

> *Luke 16:19-31 NAS95 19 Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. 20 And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, 21 and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. 22 Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. 23 In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.' 25 But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. 26 And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over*

from there to us.' 27 And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house-- 28 for I have five brothers--in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' 29 But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' 30 But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' 31 But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'

Here we see the study of two contrasts, the rich versus poor man in this world, and the kingdom of the dead versus the kingdom of God in the next. The rich man enjoyed God's gracious provisions while he was alive, but after he died he not only didn't have these generous provisions but suffered in torment, while no longer even having a physical body. Yet this man soul still craved for water and for relief from the flames. In life, the rich man was prosperous enough to have a wall around his house which required a gate through which to enter. The walls protected him during his lifetime but after this rich man's life ended his soul was bared naked before God. In contrast, the poor man enjoyed none of the rich man's outlandish provisions while he was living in poverty on the earth. Yet this very same man that spent his years begging outside of the rich man's gate was in the comfort of "Abraham's bosom," a place of peace and security we call heaven. Clearly, Jesus' teaching in this section isn't a parable at all but is instead a rare glimpse into the next world, that shadowy place known in the Bible as Hades. Jesus reveals to us that Hades consists of two regions; one is a place of torment and outside the provision of God, the place that we know as hell. The other region is a place of peace that we know as heaven. Between these two regions is a "great chasm" which separates the two realms. The contrast is between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light.

Here is a bit of background that will help to explain the cultural milieu. In that culture a rich person was seen to carry more favor with God than a poor person. This was partly due to the agrarian nature of their society. If a rancher had a herd of cattle and over a period of time doubled the size of his heard he was believed to carry favor with God. This belief came in part because of the conditional nature of the Mosaic Covenant under which the people had been living. Remember that during the period of judges and later during kings the people's prosperity was directly proportional to their obedience with God. When they walked with God He blessed them with material possessions as well as with a certain degree of peace and safety. However, when they walked away from God he removed their material goods as well as their peace and safety. The rich man in this true story told by Jesus had all of the perceived blessings from God during his human life. He enjoyed material possessions (called a rich man and clothed in royal purple and fine linen) and safety (a house surrounded by walls). The Jewish people at this time would have viewed him as a man that carried much favor with God because of God's great provision for him. In contrast, Lazarus had none of these things and lived a miserable life. He would have been perceived as a terrible sinner in this culture. Once both of them died the tables turned upside down. God said in Matthew 20:16, "So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

Look more closely at the text in Luke 16. The rich man is able to communicate directly with Abraham from within his new humble position in Hades, the place of the dead. But he is anything but humble. He is still trying to order people around, even begging them to do his will. Jesus explained that Abraham was "far off." When he spoke to Abraham he asked for mercy though God, the only One that can possible grant mercy, isn't mentioned. Abraham is what is known in literary circles as a "foil." He is present in this story for no other reason than to introduce information which they reader would otherwise have no other way of knowing. Abraham's response to the rich man's request to send Lazarus back from the dead to warn his five brothers about hell is, "They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them." The rich man replied that if someone came back from the dead they would not be

convinced. This is a remarkable request on the part of the rich man because now he was at the mercy of Lazarus to save his brothers from hell. The Scriptures are clear that when Jesus Himself did return from the dead many of the people did not believe in him.

Stepping back and looking at the audience of the Pharisees, we ask how can a religious person be sent to hell after they die when they truly believe that the merit heaven? This is the key point of today's lesson. The only way a person can merit heaven is through first repenting and then believing that only Jesus merited salvation for them by dying on the cross for their sins. Pharisees in any age are not willing to enter through the narrow door of belief in Jesus, instead they chose their own way and attempt to force their way into the kingdom of heaven. This type of thinking continues in the present day among anyone who believes they deserve heaven because of their good works or church attendance. The predictable end is what we see with the rich man in Hades.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Based upon what you learned in today's study in Luke, if you were Lazarus and were sent back from heaven to warn your brothers what would you tell them?

2. We saw in the Gospel reading how you can only cross the great chasm between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light while you are still alive. You may ask, why hasn't anyone ever told me about this? They have, they're doing it now. Do you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead and confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord to the Glory of God (Romans 10:9)? We have written a comprehensive analysis of where spiritual life comes from in an article by that name. Read *Where Does Spiritual Life Really Come From* on the Christians for Christ web site.

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/092516.cfm
Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Lectionary: 138
Source(s):
Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/
Scripture quotations taken from the NASB
Keywords:
Salvation, rich young ruler, riches, Pharisees, hell