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. This week we begin with the Book of Exodus where we will see Moses follow God's instruction to bring water from a rock. Then we move to Romans Chapter 5 where we will discover Saint Paul's explanation of how Christians are justified by faith alone. Then we study an amazing encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman at the well.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Exodus Chapter 17. The context of the passage was a few months after Moses guided the Hebrew nation out of Egypt where they had been subject to slavery for 400 years after Joseph's reign with the Pharaoh. God had provided them with manna some months earlier (Exodus 16:14). They had just left the Wilderness of Sin and had camped at a place called Rephidim after camping at other places along the way. This was right before the Amalekites attacked the defenseless Hebrews at that location (Exodus 17:8-16). We included the first two verses in order to add context for you while you read.

First Reading:

> *1 Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel journeyed by stages from the wilderness of Sin, according to the command of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, and there was no water for the people to drink. 2 Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water that we may drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" 3 But the people thirsted there for water; and they grumbled against Moses and said, "Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" 4 So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me." 5 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. 6 Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. 7 He named the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us, or not?" (Exodus 17:1-7)*

Moses said that the congregation of Israel journeyed "by stages," meaning that they made other stops along the way. Numbers Chapter 33 said that they made three stops between the Wilderness of Sin and Rephidim (Numbers 33:12-14) indicating that these in between campsites may have been less eventful than what happened here. Here Moses encountered serious opposition, to the point that he was concerned that if the conflict wasn't resolved the people would stone him (v.4c). It was so significant that Moses even named the place Massah and Meribah after the conflict (v.7), words which mean "testing" and "contending." The people commanded Moses to give them water for them to drink along with their animals (vv. 2-3). The significant point is that rather than pray to God themselves to ask for water, the people "quarreled" with Moses, who was their obvious intercessor between them and God (v.2). Moses asked the question, "Why do you test the LORD?" (v. 2e). A clue to what the people meant by this can be found in verse 7: "He named the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they tested the LORD, saying, 'Is the LORD among us, or not?'" What

happened was that they doubted that God was still watching over them to provide for them. This is amazing because God had just delivered them from the army of the Egyptians just a few months earlier, and was guiding them in their journeys through a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21)! How soon they forgot about God's divine deliverance of them from their slavery in Egypt, His supernatural parting of the Red Sea and His subsequent visible leadership on their journey!

As the story continued, Moses interceded in prayer on behalf of the people, something that he did very frequently as Moses was one of the most prayerful people in the Bible. Moses' prayer was something which shouldn't be taken for granted, as he evidently prayed so hard and so long for the people in the subsequent battle against the Amelekites that men had to hold his arms up (Exodus 17:12). God could have just provided water immediately upon Moses' request, but instead He answered Moses' prayer in a way that revealed Moses' authority as a leader of the people along with the elders.

The truth that emerges from the text is that everyone has access to God's miraculous provision through prayer without the need for an intercessor. Moses was their intercessor between them and God, and theologically was what is called a "type of Christ" meaning that he was a person that prefigured the Lord Jesus Christ. As believers in the risen Lord Jesus, we have direct access to God's miraculous powers through prayer, and our Intercessor lives in our hearts through God the Holy Spirit. When we face difficult challenges in life, God calls us to turn to Him in prayer, as well as to ask others to pray on our behalf, as Moses did for the Hebrew Nation. The Hebrew people turned to Moses to pray for them instead of the God that they could see in the pillars. God calls us to turn to the God that we can't see. James said in the New Testament Book by his name, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much" (James 5:16). The Book of Hebrews says, "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). The Apostle John in 1 John 5 said the following:

> *13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. 14 This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him. (1 John 5:13-15)*

We can rest in the fact that God receives our prayers *faster* than the speed of light. Although we don't always agree with the outcome or the timing of God's answer, we can have peace that God works on our behalf for our own good (Romans 8:28) regardless of our feelings.

Introduction to the Second Reading:
The second reading is from Chapter 5 in the Book of Romans. In the previous chapter, Paul explained the case that God justifies sinners on the basis of their faith in Jesus alone, and challenged the false notion in the Roman church that although believers receive salvation by grace alone they preserve it by their good works.

Read the text, noting that additional verses were added for context.

Second Reading:

> *1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which*

we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. 3 And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; 4 and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; 5 and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. 6 For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:1-8)

Paul started out by connecting this section of teaching with his previous teaching about justification by faith. "Therefore, having been justified by faith" (v. 1a). He said that believers have a new relationship with God, one of peace, through the Lord Jesus Christ. He went on to say that believers have hope in seeing the glory of God and that they can persevere during their trials because this produces godly character which in turn produces hope (vv. 3-4). Finally, Paul made an amazing statement about how Jesus died for us while we were still in our sinful state. He said, "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly" v.6). He continued, "***But God*** demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (v.8, emphasis added). Notice the phrase "But God." God's direct involvement in the affairs of our lives greatly reassures us of the reality of His love for us! God loved us so much that he gave his only begotten Son for us (John 3:16). He did this with the full awareness of the *future* sins that we would commit, yet He went through with a humiliating death on the cross for us anyway. As we approach Good Friday, think about the magnitude of Jesus' sacrifice for us. Moses left a heavenly palace in the court of the Pharaoh in order to deliver the Hebrew slaves from bondage, so that they might find rest in the Promised Land. Jesus left the realities of Heaven in order to deliver us from the bondage of our sin, so that we might find rest in His eternal home, our Promised Land. May we continue to appreciate and adore our Savior for what He did for us!

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading covers a story of Jesus freeing a woman of the bondage of sin. While we may or may not be able to relate to her particular sin struggle (sexual immorality), we can all relate to the problem of looking for love in all the wrong places.

Gospel Reading:

5 So He came to a city of Samaria called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph; 6 and Jacob's well was there. So Jesus, being wearied from His journey, was sitting thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour. 7 There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." 8 For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. 9 Therefore the Samaritan woman said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) 10 Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." 11 She said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water? 12 "You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself and his sons and his cattle?" 13 Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life." 15 The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw." 16 He said to her, "Go, call your husband and come here." 17 The

woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have correctly said, 'I have no husband'; 18 for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly." 19 The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. 20 "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." 21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." 25 The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us." 26 Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He." 27 At this point His disciples came, and they were amazed that He had been speaking with a woman, yet no one said, "What do You seek?" or, "Why do You speak with her?" 28 So the woman left her waterpot, and went into the city and said to the men, 29 "Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done; this is not the Christ, is it?" 30 They went out of the city, and were coming to Him. 31 Meanwhile the disciples were urging Him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." 32 But He said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." 33 So the disciples were saying to one another, "No one brought Him anything to eat, did he?" 34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work. 35 "Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest. 36 Already he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal; so that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. 37 For in this case the saying is true, 'One sows and another reaps.' 38 I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored and you have entered into their labor." 39 From that city many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all the things that I have done." 40 So when the Samaritans came to Jesus, they were asking Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. 41 Many more believed because of His word; 42 and they were saying to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world." (John 4:5-42)

Some key observations from the text include:

- This story of misunderstandings shows that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior of the world
- He shows Himself to those who are seeking to worship God in spirit and in truth (not just to the religious elite)
- While she is seeking validation and significance through temporal realities (water, wells, religious argumentation, human relationships), Jesus is wanting to open her heart up to eternal realities (living water that will truly satisfy her soul, a life that is regenerated and empowered by the Holy Spirit, a life that is not afraid of the truth).
- Jesus loves her enough to break through her misguided notions of where life comes from and helps her to see that He is the Messiah, the anointed Deliverer, to save people from their sins.
- As a result of her changed life, others see the reality of Jesus and believe in Him as their own Savior.

What about you? Are you thirsty?

It's easy to look with judgment on this poor Samaritan woman, who was looking for love in all the wrong places. She bumps into Jesus one day and gets a whole new lesson on her need for a Savior. But as Christians, we can grow cold to our need for a Savior. But, if we're honest, we have our own broken cisterns that don't satisfy our deep thirst:

- Finding approval from others
- Achieving goals and accomplishing things
- Perfectionism
- Religiosity
- Looking to others for our sense of identity and validation

It's easy to do what this woman did and argue about places and forms of worship, to punt to mystery, to look for love in all the wrong places.

What religious conundrums do you throw into Jesus' face when he is trying to deal with spiritual life issues? What strategies do you use to deflect the painful sense of thirst that gnaws at your soul?

He is patient and keeps pressing us to come out of hiding and be honest: to worship Him in Spirit and in truth. But what does it look like to drink this living water, to become true worshipers?

It looks like a relationship with Jesus. Do you have this? Are you pursuing Him? Are you letting Him love you, speak to you, fill you and change you?

Reflection Questions

1. One of the common themes for this week's reading has to do with being delivered from the bondage of sin. In what ways does sin feel like slavery or bondage? How does Jesus' conversation with the woman at the well reassure you that he is powerful enough to free you from the bondage and penalty of sin? How would you respond if He offered you living water?

2. How are you like the Hebrew people? Re-read the 1 Cor. 11 passage and take a personal inventory. How can this story be instructive to you in your life? Ask yourself who in your circle of believing friends and relatives prays for you on a regular basis. Ask yourself for whom you have been praying recently.

Second, reach out to one other believer this week with a specific prayer request and ask them to pray regarding this one specific issue throughout the week. Finally, ask the person with whom you communicated how you may pray for them in one specific way this week.

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