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 open with the first reading from the Book of First Kings in which Elijah hides in a cave and waits to hear from the voice of God. Then continue the study in Romans in the second reading and conclude with yet another continuing study in the Gospel of Matthew in which Jesus and Peter walk on water.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of First Kings where Elijah was fleeing from Queen Jezebel who had threatened his life (1 Kings 19:1-2) after he had killed the Prophets of Baal at the conclusion of a contest with them. Elijah had fled first to Beersheba where an angel of the Lord had fed him leading him on a forty day journey to Mt. Horeb "the mountain of God" (19:8). The reading skipped the ending of verse 9 and all of verse 10 that provides important contextual information for the eventual revelation of God's message to Elijah. Therefore these verses are included in our study.

First Reading:

> *9 Then he came there to a cave and lodged there; and behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" 10 He said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." 11 So He said, "Go forth and stand on the mountain before the LORD." And behold, the LORD was passing by! And a great and strong wind was rending the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. 12 After the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of a gentle blowing. 13 When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. And behold, a voice came to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (1 Kings 19:9-13)*

Elijah incorrectly thought that he was the only remaining follower of the Lord (v. 10, "I alone am left"). God corrected his false belief later in the chapter and told him that seven thousand believers remained (1 Kings 19:18, see below). It is important to note that Elijah had just come from a very important spiritual victory. Sometimes after a victory, we can be the most vulnerable. So God, in His mercy, meets Elijah in his place of need in a cave at Mt. Horeb. This is the same mountain where God met Moses and gave him the Ten Commandments. Now hundreds of years later Elijah, another great leader, met God in an unexpected way. God caused the wind, earthquake, and fire, but these things weren't His voice. No, these fearful things brought about by the fall of Adam (Genesis 3) were not the Word of God for which Elijah was waiting, this came in the sound of a "gentle blowing," or as rendered in some versions "a tiny whispering sound" (v. 12). When Elijah heard this he knew that this was God's voice. This is what Elijah needed to continue on.

Some life lessons through which we can learn from Elijah's interaction with God as follows, God may be wanting to get our attention in the same way. First, God may be asking us, "What are you doing her?" This is a question of purpose, personal meaning and identity. Only God can give us the answer to this question. Second, God may be telling us where to find Him. In Elijah's case it was geographical, however

in our case it may be more of a state of our heart, seeking Him where He has chosen to reveal Himself – His Word, the Bible. Finally, He may be showing us Who He is. Surprisingly enough, God chose to reveal Himself in a still, small voice. Our world shouts, but God whispers. What can we do to quiet ourselves and listen?

This is how the story ended with God giving Elijah specific instructions and information.

> *14 Then he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." 15 The LORD said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus, and when you have arrived, you shall anoint Hazael king over Aram; 16 and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. 17 "It shall come about, the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall put to death. 18 "Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him." (1 Kings 19:14-18)*

Elijah thought that he was alone when in fact God revealed that there were at least 7,000 in Israel that had remained true to Him. Oftentimes we may feel all alone as believers in Jesus Christ, especially when we find ourselves in circumstances around nonbelievers for extended periods of time.

Introduction to the Second Reading:
As we move to the second reading, Saint Paul likely felt that way as he poured out his heart to his fellow Jews who stubbornly resisted the Gospel message. The reading this week is a continuation of the previous weeks study in Romans. Romans chapter 9 through 11 mark a section in which Saint Paul outlines Israel's past (chapter 9), present (chapter 11), and future (chapter 12).

Second Reading:

> *1 I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, 2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, 4 who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, 5 whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. (Romans 9:1-5)*

The big idea is that Paul was a Jew, "my kinsmen according to the flesh" (v. 3) born into the tribe of Benjamin (Philippians 3:5) and is greatly distressed that as a Jew his fellow Israelites haven't believed in the Messiah Jesus. We can learn several things from this passage. First, may we be grieved over those we care about who don't know Jesus Christ. Are we willing to make even minor sacrifices to reach the lost with the Good News of the Kingdom? Second, this section about the Jewish people reminds us that God chose this specific people group to be a blessing to the rest of the world. It was through the Jews that God established His covenants (relational commitments), gave the Law (moral, dietary, religious and code of conduct), set up a place and avenue for worship (the responding to God's worth), and the

promises (God's record of faithfulness). Their lineage includes the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), King David, and ultimately Jesus. Finally, Paul emphasis who the Person of Jesus Christ is: God over all forever praised. This is clear evidence that the early church had a solid sense of who Christ is (Christology) which includes His deity. His followers worshiped Him as God, and we would be wise to do the same.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:
The Gospel lesson is a continuation of the study in previous weeks that began in Matthew with the Jesus' parables in Chapter 13. Here Jesus once again proves by performing mighty miracles that He is God.

Gospel Reading:

> *22 Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away. 23 After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone. 24 But the boat was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary. 25 And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea. 26 When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid." 28 Peter said to Him, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." 29 And He said, "Come!" And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. 30 But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31 Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32 When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. 33 And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "You are certainly God's Son!" (Matthew 14:22-33)*

As we saw the forces of nature in the first reading, the wind and the waves caused a frightful condition on the lake. This scene then became even more frightening when the disciples saw a man walking across the water (v. 26), evidently not recognizing the person as Jesus until He called out to them (v. 27). By this point, similar to what had happened to Elijah, they knew that they had heard the voice of God (v. 32).

There are actually three miracles in the story. First, Jesus Himself walking on that water (v. 25). Second, Peter's walking on the water through Jesus' power (v. 29). Finally, the calming of both the wind and the waves (v. 32). Notice how Jesus sought solitude away from the crowds (v. 22). Jesus often did this right before he performed a might miracle. He did this just before He fed the crowd that we studied last week. He wanted to be by Himself to pray to His Heavenly Father. This is a good reminder to us that if Jesus Himself needed to pray, how much more do we need this time with the Father?

Peter was the disciples with courage. We can sometimes look at this story of Peter sinking in the water as a show of fear, but he was the only one that got out of the boat! Sometimes God grows our faith by allowing turbulent circumstances and impossible odds. These are opportunities for us to turn our attention to Christ and trust Him to provide for us in the midst of the storm. I bet that Peter had a great time talking about his experience of walking on the water. We too will enjoy talking to others about how God has enabled us to do what we thought was impossible.

Reflection Questions

1. We read in the Gospel lesson how Jesus enabled Peter to walk on water, and also how as Peter's faith grew weaker his ability began to fail. Faith is a key element in accepting God's empowerment in our lives. How has God empowered you to "walk on water" in a certain circumstance?

2. In the Gospel lesson, Peter experienced the exhilaration of walking on water holding the hand of Jesus. If you were going through a time when your faith is being tested, how can Peter's story of walking on water encourage you to keep looking to Christ? Second, how might this experience help you to take a more radical approach in your outreach to the lost in your own life?

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