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. First, this week we discuss the Old Testament reading from Exodus in which we will take a substantial look at the Ten Commandments. Because of the importance of this topic, we will dedicate most of this week's study to it. During that study you will see how wise God was to establish His chosen people with these foundational rules for living. We will also learn how many of these are repeated in the New Testament and expanded upon by Jesus. Then we look at four very profound verses from the opening chapter of Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians before we discuss Jesus' first Passover celebration with His newly gathered group of disciples. Finally, as we look forward to celebrating Easter in just a few weeks, we reflect upon the importance of Jesus' celebration of the Passover as we study the Gospel lesson from John 2.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Exodus in which we see God giving the Ten Commandments to Moses. These statements are essentially a restatement of the Jewish Law. We often think of rules in a negative light. Instead, we should consider God was gracious to His people in giving them these elements of the Law, which was for their benefit. This is because if they followed these with their whole heart it would help them to live life according to His design and accomplish the basic calling that He had given to them. This would be their greatest joy. After Noah and his family had landed and departed from the ark God said, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Genesis 9:1b). As you read the Commandments, meditate upon how keeping them helps you to accomplish God's purposes for your life and can help you to live according to the Designer's specifications.

First Reading:

> *Exodus 20:1-17 NAS95 1 Then God spoke all these words, saying, 2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 3 You shall have no other gods before Me. 4 You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, 6 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. 7 You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain. 8 Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. 11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy. 12 Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you. 13 You shall not murder. 14 You shall not commit adultery. 15 You shall not steal. 16 You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. 17 You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor."*

Before we enumerate the Commandments, the question may arise, are Christians in the Church Age bound to the Ten Commandments? To understand the answer we must remember that there were three types of Law in the Old Testament: civil law, ceremonial law, and moral law. As Christians we live not under the Law but under grace (Romans 6:14), and are not citizens of the Theocratic Kingdom as were the Jews in the Old Testament. Christians are not bound to Jewish ceremonial law, but are bound to aspects of the civil law to the extent that they follow either biblical absolutes or biblical principles repeated in the New Testament. In fact, a total of nine out of the Ten Commandments are clearly repeated in the New Testament with the exception of the Sabbath Day, which we will discuss below. As Christians, we also pledge to uphold the moral law found in the Old Testament because this stems from the holiness of God and does not change. In fact, Jesus Himself taught on and expanded these Ten Commandments in His Sermon on the Mount (found in Matthew 5-7). Mt 5:17-20 records Jesus' opening thoughts from the Sermon on the Mount: "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven."

So, the answer to the opening question is "yes" New Testament Christians are wise to follow the moral law found in the Old Testament, including the Ten Commandments. But as Jesus stated, our righteousness must exceed the outward appearance of righteousness, as was displayed in the Pharisees. Instead, our righteousness must come from the inside out, the fruit of a changed heart that is surrendered to God's will (Ezekiel 36:26).

The following is a list of the Ten Commandments from the reading along with some notes about each, including a reference to the respective verses in the New Testament. The number of the commandments has historically been stated as ten throughout the centuries (the Decalogue), including the use of that number in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint or LXX). However, there have been differences among theologians in the numbering and ordering. In this study, we follow the numbering and ordering developed by Saint Augustine.

1. *I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 3 You shall have no other gods before Me (vv. 2-3). You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, 6 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments (vv. 4 – 6).*
   Some theologians have broken this section into two between verses 3 and 4, but such a split is immaterial because if a person makes an idol then they are also worshiping a different god. A definition of idolatry is the assigning of godlike power to anything or anyone other than God. Another way of thinking about idolatry is when we hold something or someone as more important than God. In Matthew 4:10, Jesus reaffirmed this teaching when He said: "YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY." As a corollary, Scripture is clear that people are to pray to God alone and to no one else. The Hebrews, to whom this commandment was given, were thoroughly immersed in a culture of idolatry. If you read further in Exodus you

will see that after Moses went up on Mount Sinai to meet with God the people assumed he was dead and then commenced to build an idol of a golden calf (Exodus 31:1-6). It is important to recognize the forbidding of creating idols in verses 4 – 6. This teaching is clearly repeated in the New Testament. Paul warns the Corinthians about worshiping idols in 1 Corinthians 6:9, "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor **idolaters**, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals" (shall enter the kingdom of heaven). He also did this in Galatians 5:19-20 saying, "Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions." In our day, many religious societies such as Hinduism are built around the worship of idols representing false gods. The bottom line is not to worship a false god, whether it is in the shape of an idol or not. We need to be careful to place our focus on God, not on other things or people.

2. *You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain (v. 7).*
   This means that a person is not to use the Lord's name in an irreverent manner. Jesus said in the Lord's Prayer, "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name'" (Matthew 6:9). This admonition is repeated in Matthew 5:33-37.
3. *Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. 11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy (vv. 9 – 11).*
   This commandment is not found in the New Testament, although there is a strong biblical **principle** in the Bible about observing one day of rest and focused worship unto the Lord. We will discuss in detail later in this study after we finish the listing of the Commandments.
4. *Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you (v. 12).*
   This is the only commandment with a promise and is repeated in Ephesians 6:2, "HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise).
5. *You shall not murder (v. 13).* This is repeated in Matthew 5:21-22 "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell."
6. *You shall not commit adultery (v. 14).* Jesus affirmed this and expanded on it by saying: "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY'; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Mt 5:27-28). This is repeated in Hebrews 13:4, "Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge."
7. *You shall not steal (v. 15).* This is repeated in Ephesians 4:28, "He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need."
8. *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor (v. 16).* Simply stated, you are not to tell a lie. This principle is repeated in Revelation 22:8.
9. *You shall not covet your neighbor's house; (v. 17a)*. For the NT teaching see below.
10. *you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor (v. 17b - ff).*
    This principle is repeated in Hebrews 13:5, "Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the

marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge," and again in Colossians 3:5 in which it is called idolatry. "Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry." If we as Christians were honest we would agree that covetousness is present in our own lives.

Concerning the Sabbath, there is a biblical principle about setting aside one day a week to worship the Lord and rest from work following the examples of believers in the New Testament. Even in the wording of the original commandment, God provided the principle of a day of rest. "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day" (Exodus 20:11). Obviously, God isn't the One Who needs to rest, instead the seventh day was created for humans because of their physiological and psychological needs. In addition to resting on one day of the week, both the Jews and the early Christians set apart this day of rest for worship. In the Book of Acts we see how Paul met on Sunday (the first day of the week) with the believers in Troas (Acts 20:7). In First Corinthians, Paul commended the people to take up a collection on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:2). It was on Sunday (the Lord's Day) that John received the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ in his glory in heaven (Revelation 1:10). The Bible teaches that this day of rest isn't obligatory to Christians. In Second 2 Timothy a list of some 18 sins is given, but not one of them is the breaking of the Sabbath (2 Timothy 3:1-4). Again in Galatians a list of 15 more are given (Galatians 5:19-21), and in Romans some twenty more are given (Romans 1:29-32), however none are the breaking of the Sabbath. But, before we run ourselves ragged by not resting, we must pay attention to what the author of Hebrews says: "and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near" (Heb 10:24-25). He commends believers who continued to make meeting together a priority, for some had stopped joining together with other believers on a weekly basis. It is clear from the New Testament teaching that the keeping of **a** "sabbath" day is a matter of principle, not a matter of law. When you set Sunday aside for rest and worship, or some other day of the week, you are following a solid biblical principle ordained by God.

Understanding the Commandments of God is of profound importance for Christians today for a variety of reasons. First, following God's Commandments provides us with God's protection for our lives. The law is a safety net, a framework through which God can bless us and protect us throughout our lives. There is something inherently destructive to us when we break the Commandments. While we live in God's grace we are free to continue to pursue the work that God has preordained for us (Ephesians 2:10). God gives these to us in His grace to show us what abundant and true living is all about. Second, one of God's purposes in giving the Ten Commandments was to show us that we couldn't obey His Laws and therefore, we need a Savior. Paul put it this way when he explained the role of the Law: "What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COVET'" (Romans 7:7). The demanding and exacting nature of the Law is to point out our flaws and to let us know that there is something inherently wrong with our moral compass. The inability we have as humans to live up to the Ten Commandments (especially defined by Jesus), was to point to our need of a beautiful Savior. Because Jesus kept the Law from the heart, He is able to provide us with a righteousness that surpasses the scribes and the Pharisees. His righteousness is applied to our account (2 Corinthians 5:21). We are set free from the consequences of breaking God's commands and do not reap the end result of spiritual death (Romans 6:23).

Following the Ten Commandments will not guarantee a person's entrance into heaven. Instead, they point us to faith in Jesus Christ because they reveal how nobody can perfectly keep them. Paul said, "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). He also said about the entirety of the Jewish Law, "Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith" (Galatians 3:24). We don't keep the commandments by trying harder. Instead, our obedience flows out of a heart that has been changed by God, what Jesus called being "born from above" (John 3:3) This mystery of the second birth comes about when a person comes to believe that they are a sinner and unable to earn their own forgiveness of sins before God. When they place their trust in the Lord Jesus as their substitute, their "Passover Lamb" slain for their sins (1 Corinthians 5:7), then they can begin to walk in true obedience of God. This is in contrast to following their natural human inclination to strive to try harder in their own strength.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

As we move onto the second reading from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, let us place ourselves in the proper context in the First Century Church. The context is the opening of the Letter that Paul wrote to address some specific concerns that he had about things happening in the Corinthian Church. Corinth was a city filled with idolatry, and as Paul ministered to the church there, he opened his First Letter to them with a high-level summary of the prevailing theological positions of the two main opposing forces to Christianity. The first group were the Jews who were thoroughly immersed in the Greek culture. Just as had happened during Jesus' ministry (as will see later in the Gospel reading), the Jews sought to be convinced by miraculous signs before they would believe in God. Then even when signs were given, they still did not believe. The second group were the Greeks who searched endlessly for wisdom and new things. For example Luke said in the Book of Acts, "Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new" (Acts 17:21). As you read the second Mass reading for today, notice how the unbelievers disregarded the truth of the Gospel message.

Second Reading:

> *1 Corinthians 1:22-25 NAS95 22 For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

Paul shows in this passage how God's value system is upside down in contrast to these two opposing, worldly ways of thinking. Paul stated how Christ is the "power of God" which contrasts with the Jewish idea of power being displayed through miraculous signs and victorious displays of political rulership. He also said that Christ is the "wisdom of God" appealing to the Greek's desire for wisdom in which wisdom was personified in the scholars of the golden era of Socrates and Plato. In our world, Jesus Christ can be an offensive term to those who do not know Him. We must decide whether we let the world intimidate us or whether we will continue to trust in His Name.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson is from John Chapter 2 in which we see Jesus' cleansing of the temple during the Passover. The celebration was an important feast which commemorated the "passing over" of the death

angel of the houses marked by the blood of the sacrificial lamb just before the Jews' Exodus from Egypt (Exodus 12). The Lord struck the firstborn of every family and animal in households throughout the land of Egypt that did not mark their doorpost with the blood of the lamb as God required. It is foundational for every Christian to understand the Passover feast because of the fact that Jesus is our sacrificial Lamb, the One whom we commemorate during the Easter season. Jesus is the "Lamb slain since before the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). As you read, remember that Jesus' disciples did not yet understand these things about His upcoming death that atoned for the sins of the world.

Gospel Reading:

> *John 2:13-25 NAS95 13 The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. 15 And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; 16 and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a place of business." 17 His disciples remembered that it was written, "ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME." 18 The Jews then said to Him, "What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?" 19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20 The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" 21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body. 22 So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken. 23 Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing. 24 But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, 25 and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.*

In the reading, the Jews asked Jesus, "What sign do you show us as your authority for doing these things" (v. 18). This corresponds to what Paul said in 1 Corinthians that the Jews ask for a sign. Jesus in His grace provided them with a sign, but they still did not understand about the analogy between the destruction of the temple and Jesus' death and resurrection. It wasn't until after He resurrected that the disciples understood that Jesus had an authority beyond any earthly power.

Why did Jesus take such drastic measures to cleanse the temple during the preparation for Passover? The system that was supposed to point people towards worship had been corrupted into a crime syndicate in which the ruling Jewish powers sold sacrificial animals and exchanged currencies for outrageous profits. Very likely any sacrificial animal that was brought in by the people would have been deemed unworthy and would need to have been replaced by one provided by the syndicate for a very high price. The religious leaders were exploiting the people and abusing their power. This touched Jesus in a tender spot, for His passion was for God's glory. Clearly, God's glory was not the passion of those who were in charge of the religious system of that day. Instead, their self-serving passion echoed the indictment of the Old Testament prophets who vehemently opposed the exploitation of the "sheep" by the shepherds of Israel (Ezekiel 34). Once Jesus opposed this system, he in effect signed His death warrant. But Jesus did not cower to the corrupt religious leaders; instead He surrendered Himself to His heavenly Father. It is this ability to separate ourselves from the need for approval of others that Jesus now gives us. Jesus stood up for what is right so that we can now stand up for what is right in our age. May our passions be directed for God's glory.

Reflection Questions

1. In the first reading we studied an aspect of the Old Testament Law, which is God's standard for righteousness under His Theocratic Kingdom rule. His standards for righteousness have not changed, which would be daunting for us if we did not have Christ. The bad news is that "we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). The Good News is that Christ died for our sins so that when God looks at us He sees Christ's perfect righteousness. This is a gift that we receive when we "confess with [our] mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in [our] heart that God raised Him from the dead" (Romans 10:9a-b). Have you made this transaction in your heart with God?

2. As you grow in your Christian walk, you might wonder what to do with your ongoing guilt that you have when you are disobedient. Nobody can perfectly keep the Ten Commandments or the other principles that are stated in the New Testament. Reflect on this cycle that all of us have experienced. You sin, then you feel guilty, then you promise to never sin again, then you try really hard not to sin, and then at some point, you commit that same sin again. Why would God not just make us perfect, once we give our heart to Him? Well, maybe it's because He wants us to live in dependence of Him (not independently of Him). Our pre-converted response to sin is to try harder. Our converted response to sin should be to run to our Savior. Guilt should lead you to a renewed place of surrender and dependence, convincing you of your ongoing need for a Savior. When you recognize throughout the weeks ahead that you have been disobedient to God's Command, let the guilty feelings remind you of Christ's sacrifice and provision of righteousness provided for you through faith in Him. You can take yourself down off the cross while remembering that Jesus placed Himself there for you. When you experience guilty feelings talk to Jesus about your ongoing need for His saving grace. Let your guilt and shame bring you back to a place of brokenness and dependence on Him.

List one thing with which you are struggling that you can turn to Jesus to carry for you this week.

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