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 Marla shares the study of the readings beginning with Acts 1 where Peter explains how God's plan unfolds just as the Scriptures said. Next, we move to 1 John 4, where the apostle John tells us that those who abide in God, love as He loved. Finally, we conclude with John 17:11-19 where St. John records Jesus' prayer for His disciples just before He sends them out to minister in His name.

Introduction to the First Reading:

If you were a fan of the 80s show *The A-Team,* you will remember the iconic phrase spoken at the end of nearly every episode, "I love it when a plan comes together." In a make-believe story the plan always comes together—the writers make it so. Real-life human plans are not so reliable and can be thwarted. God's plan, however, always comes together exactly as God says. No one is strong enough to thwart His plan.

Before Jesus was taken up into heaven, He told His apostles to wait in Jerusalem until they received the baptism of the Holy Spirit which would give them power to be Christ's witnesses to the world. (The baptism of the Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit indwelling believers, enabling them to understand the truth and empowering them to do the work God has for them.) It was during this period of waiting that Peter spoke to the apostles and over 100 believers gathered with them. Here Peter reminds them that God's plan was being fulfilled just as the Scriptures said.

First Reading:

> ***Acts 1:15-26 NAS95 15 At this time Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren (a gathering of about one hundred and twenty persons was there together), and said, 16 "Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. 17 For he was counted among us and received his share in this ministry." 18 (Now this man acquired a field with the price of his wickedness, and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his intestines gushed out. 19 And it became known to all who were living in Jerusalem; so that in their own language that field was called Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) 20 "For it is written in the book of Psalms, 'LET HIS HOMESTEAD BE MADE DESOLATE, AND LET NO ONE DWELL IN IT'; and, 'LET ANOTHER MAN TAKE HIS OFFICE.' 21 Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us-- 22 beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us--one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection." 23 So they put forward two men, Joseph called Barsabbas (who was also called Justus), and Matthias. 24 And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen 25 to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." 26 And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.***

Judas, one of the original twelve apostles, walked intimately with Jesus during the three years of His ministry. He heard Jesus' powerful words, witnessed His healing touch, and participated in His

miraculous acts. Yet by a decision of his own evil heart, Judas betrayed his Lord and turned Him over to the Roman authorities to be crucified. It did not catch Jesus by surprise but was, with all its tragic detail, just as the Scriptures foretold. Judas' betrayal, as sinful as it was, did not thwart God's ultimate plan for man's salvation but rather was a step in its fulfillment.

When Judas, consumed by guilt, took his own life, a new apostle had to be chosen from the men who had been with Jesus from the beginning. Only two men qualified, Joseph and Matthias. The apostles prayed for God guidance and cast lots to discover God's choice. In that day, lots were cast by writing each eligible person's name on a piece of stone or wood, putting the pieces in an urn, and drawing out a name. * God's plan was fulfilled when Matthias' name was chosen.

We can be confident that God has a plan for us, too, and He will make it come together for our ultimate good and His glory. I love it when His plan comes together!

Introduction to the Second Reading:
The second reading is from First John. A theme of the overall Book could be suggested as something like "tests for salvation" since so many times throughout John uses phrases which follow a pattern of if / then. In the context of today's reading, chapter 4 opens with his admonition, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). He then provides a test by which believers may know whether a spirit is of God or of the enemy. "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God" (v. 2). Since God is love (v. 8) we share in the love of God as believers that the Lord Jesus has indeed come in the flesh. The reading expands upon this common love that we share as believers.

Second Reading:

> ***1 John 4:11-16 NAS95 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. 13 By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. 14 We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 16 We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.***

In the six verses of our reading, the word *love* and its derivatives are used eight times. God is the author and source of true love. If God did not exist, love would not exist for God is love. He powerfully demonstrated it by sending Jesus to fulfill the greatest act of love known to mankind—a substitutionary death on a cross. Romans 5:8 says, *"God demonstrated his own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."* Jesus didn't die for a good cause or a good man. He died for you and me, not after we cleaned up our life, but while we were still lost in our sin. His death for us was the Innocent dying for the guilty, the Perfect dying for the broken, the Holy dying for the sinful. Can there be any greater demonstration of love?

Is it any wonder then, that love is a hallmark of one who abides in God? *Abide* is a word that means "to stay in a given place, continue, dwell, remain" (Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, # 3306). St. John tells us we come to abide in God by confessing Jesus is the Son of God and believing the love God has for us

as demonstrated through Christ's death. And when we abide in Him we will love as He loved. It is important to understand, however, that we don't love *in order* to abide. We love *because* we abide in Him. When we receive God's love and extend it to others, we prove that we abide in the One who is love.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:
When I left my son at college for the first time, I knew I would not see him again for six months. On the 12-hour ride, his father and I reminded him of the important precepts we had taught him about God and living the Christian life. We were hoping he would continue to walk the path of faith and not stray from the truth of the Scriptures. After settling him into his dorm and expressing our love through hugs and tears, we prayed and released him into the Father's care.

For three years, Jesus had lived and ministered with the ones he chose to be his disciples. He loved them, revealed himself to them, and taught them what was to come. Though they heard him and were witnesses of His miraculous works, they didn't fully understand that He would die for sin, rise from the dead, and return to God the Father. It was now time for Jesus to fulfill His Father's will and to set in motion all the prophesies spoken about Him in the Old Testament. And it was time to say goodbye. The disciples would have to face a world of opposition and persecution without him, and they were understandably bewildered and sad.

In Ch. 13 of the Gospel of St. John, Jesus begins an extended, heart-felt goodbye. He would shortly send them out to serve others so He gave them a powerful demonstration of servanthood by washing the disciples' feet, an act typically done by the servants of the household. Jesus said, *"… I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you* (John 13: 15). In Ch. 14, He comforts them by explaining that He is building a home for them in heaven and someday will come again to take them there. In the meantime, they are to get their nourishment and power by abiding (remaining) in Him as branches get their life by remaining in the vine (Ch. 15). In Ch. 16, He promises the Holy Spirit will empower them (and every believer) to carry on His ministry and to lead them into all truth. Now in Ch. 17, on the night He was betrayed, Jesus prays for the disciples as he sends them out to minister in His name.

Gospel Reading:

> ***John 17:11-19 NAS95 11 "I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are. 12 "While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled. 13 "But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves. 14 "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 15 "I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. 16 "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 17 "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. 18 "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. 19 "For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.***

In the Gospel Reading, Jesus makes three requests of the Father:

1). Jesus prays that the Father would keep the disciples in His name.

What is Jesus asking for when He says to the Father, *keep them in your name*? His *name* refers to all that God is and all that Jesus revealed Him to be. Jesus and the Father are one. As Christians, we are united to them and carry the same name. To live in God's name is to live in a way that reflects his character. While Jesus was with His disciples, He kept them in God's name and none of them were lost except Judas. Did Jesus fail to keep Judas in God's name? D.A. Carson in his commentary on The Gospel of John explains, "The defection of Judas is foreseen in Scripture [Ps. 41:10], and therefore no evidence of failure on Jesus' part." Jesus had kept His disciples and now that He was leaving, He asks the Father to keep His disciples faithful to His name.

2). Jesus prays that the Father would keep them from the evil one.

The forces of evil are real and oppose all God wants to accomplish in the world. Satan himself prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). God could have taken His disciples out of the world, but left them here as ministers of the good news of Jesus Christ. It is also why we are here. Jesus doesn't ask for them to be removed from the world but that they might be protected from the evil one while they do His work.

3). Jesus prays that the Father would sanctify them by truth.

Sanctify means *to make holy* and has the idea of being set apart for holy use or a holy purpose. (Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, # 37, 40). Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, is holy in his being but was also set apart for a holy purpose—to be the sacrifice for sin. As God the Son, He is separate from the evil world system, but He willingly entered into the world to save it through His death on a cross. As the disciples came to believe in Jesus, they also were sanctified for a holy work—to take the truth of the gospel to a lost world. Everyone who believed the disciples message would also be sanctified in truth for the words they bring are God's words. And we also are sanctified when we believe the Bible, God's written word of truth.

Reflection Questions

1. If we abide in God we will love others as God loved us. What can you do this week to demonstrate God's love to those around you?

2. Like the disciples, you have been sanctified (set apart) by God for a holy purpose—to take the truth of the gospel to a lost world. What can you do this week to begin fulfilling God's purpose for your life?

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