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. We open with the first reading from Isaiah 49 in which we study one of the "Servant Songs" of God. Then we learn from Saint Paul's message to the Jews in Pisidian Antioch and end with the reading from Luke heralding the birth of John the Baptist.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Isaiah 49 covering the second of the Servant Songs in which God the Father addressed the Nation of Israel as a personification of His Servant, and secondly, He spoke to His Son the Messiah. The Servant Songs prove in a powerful way that Jesus of Nazareth is God's Righteous Servant, the long-awaited Messiah. As you read, take note of the purposes of the two servants mentioned, the servant Israel and the Messiah Servant whom we know as Jesus.

First Reading:

> *Isaiah 49:1-6 NAS95 1 Listen to Me, O islands, And pay attention, you peoples from afar. The LORD called Me from the womb; From the body of My mother He named Me. 2 He has made My mouth like a sharp sword, In the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me; And He has also made Me a select arrow, He has hidden Me in His quiver. 3 He said to Me, "You are My Servant, Israel, In Whom I will show My glory." 4 But I said, "I have toiled in vain, I have spent My strength for nothing and vanity; Yet surely the justice due to Me is with the LORD, And My reward with My God." 5 And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel might be gathered to Him (For I am honored in the sight of the LORD, And My God is My strength), 6 He says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth."*

The context of the passage was God's promises for the complete restoration of Israel given to the Nation just prior to the judgement of the Northern Kingdom. The chapter opens with the restatement of both the purposes of the Prophet Isaiah as well as Israel. God said about Isaiah that "He has made My mouth like a sharp sword, In the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me; And He has also made Me a select arrow, He has hidden Me in His quiver" (v. 2). Isaiah was God's chosen instrument to bring the message of His judgment and promise of future restoration to Israel. Next God stated His purpose for the Nation. Isaiah said, "He said to Me, 'You are My Servant, Israel, In Whom I will show My glory'" (v. 3). Isaiah was chosen to be God's messenger to the Jews, and the Jews were chosen to bear this message of salvation to the world. These chosen people were to be a "called out" group, set apart and established by God as salt and light to the surrounding nations. Isaiah continued, "And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel might be gathered to Him (For I am honored in the sight of the LORD, And My God is My strength)" (v. 5). The reading concludes with God's promise to restore the entire nation of Israel such as to reach the entire earth with the good news of God's salvation (v. 6).

Now let's look at the servant themes in the reading where we see the purpose of God's servants. The first purpose of the servants was to restore the Jews to God. The LORD said to His Servant Son that He "formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, in order that Israel might be

gathered to Him" (v.5b-ff). Though Israel was the God's servant (v.3 "My Servant Israel"), this Servant Son was born with the express purpose of restoring the people of God to true communion with Him. Jesus said in the Gospel of Saint Matthew, "How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling" (Matthew 23:37). The second purpose of the servants was to be a light to the Gentiles so that "My salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (v.6d). The mechanism through which the restoration came wasn't through Israel, but through Jesus. The Christian Church has temporarily usurped the role of Israel as a light to the nations, a condition which will be restored during the Great Tribulation. Jesus said to His disciples, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20b).

By means of application, the Christian Church is yet the third servant of God. Despite the temporary unbelief of the Jews, Israel's disobedience was used by God to bring light to the Gentiles through the ministry of this third servant, the Church of Jesus Christ. Saint Paul said that, "a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in (Romans 11:25c). The Church hasn't replaced Israel, because once God has completed his divine plan through the refining fire of the tribulation period all of Israel will be obedient to Him. Paul said, "[A]nd so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB" (Romans 11:26).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The context of the reading from Acts 13 is Paul's Sabbath day speech to the Jews in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch. He was accompanied by Barnabas, while Saint John had just left them and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). Paul's address to them began in verse 17 during which he reminded them of their history and how God had answered their call for a king by giving them Saul (v. 21).

Second Reading:

> *Acts 13:22-26 NAS95 22 "After He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, 'I HAVE FOUND DAVID the son of Jesse, A MAN AFTER MY HEART, who will do all My will.' 23 From the descendants of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, 24 after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. 25 And while John was completing his course, he kept saying, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not He. But behold, one is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.' 26 Brethren, sons of Abraham's family, and those among you who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent."*

Paul told the Jews in the synagogue about God had raised up the Messiah from the line of King David (v. 23). He then moved further forward in history to tell them about how God had raised up the prophet John (the Baptist) who pointed the way towards the Messiah (v. 25). Finally, he told them about how this message of salvation through the Messiah was for them, "sons of Abraham's family" (v. 26a).

Verse 22 says that King David was a man after God's own heart. What does it mean to be a person after God's own heart like David? First, people seeking to be people of God are empowered through His Holy Spirit Who indwells everyone that has been born from above (John 3:3). We learn from 1 Samuel that when King David was ordained by God "the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward" (1 Samuel 16:13b). Second, we people walking with God must submit themselves to the Lord

by being obedient to Him (James 4:7). One of the main stumbling stones that many have in submitting to God is pride. Saint Peter said, “You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE” (1 Peter 5:5). Finally, people walking with God must develop a love for the Word of God. King David said the following about this in the Book of Psalms. “I shall delight in Your commandments, Which I love. And I shall lift up my hands to Your commandments, Which I love; And I will meditate on Your statutes” (Psalms 119:47-48).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:
The Gospel reading from the opening of Luke and provides the details of the birth of John the Baptist through his parents Zacharias the priest and Elizabeth, the cousin of Mary. Zacharias was unable to speak up until the birth because he didn’t believe the Angel Gabriel (Luke 1:19 – 20).

Gospel Reading:

> *Luke 1:57-66, 80 NAS95 57 Now the time had come for Elizabeth to give birth, and she gave birth to a son. 58 Her neighbors and her relatives heard that the Lord had displayed His great mercy toward her; and they were rejoicing with her. 59 And it happened that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to call him Zacharias, after his father. 60 But his mother answered and said, "No indeed; but he shall be called John." 61 And they said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by that name." 62 And they made signs to his father, as to what he wanted him called. 63 And he asked for a tablet and wrote as follows, "His name is John." And they were all astonished. 64 And at once his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he began to speak in praise of God. 65 Fear came on all those living around them; and all these matters were being talked about in all the hill country of Judea. 66 All who heard them kept them in mind, saying, "What then will this child turn out to be?" For the hand of the Lord was certainly with him.*
> *80 And the child continued to grow and to become strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel.*

This John the Baptist was Jesus’ cousin, the one spoken of Paul in the second reading whose purpose was to announce the coming Messiah Jesus. His birth was similar to the miraculous birth of Isaac to Abram and Sarai in the Old Testament because Elizabeth was both barren and old (Luke 1:7). The miracle of John’s birth to his elderly parents continued after his birth when his father was able to speak again (v. 64). John the Baptist was a herald of God’s plan of salvation in a similar way as Isaiah was whom we read about in the first reading. We know that Jesus said that John was the greatest man that ever lived (Matthew 11:11). John the Baptist was yet another of the prophets sent by God to draw people to Himself through his announcement of the Messiah Jesus.

Reflection Questions

1. In the first reading we discussed the purpose of God’s servants. What about us, what has God raised us up to be watching for? What are the purposes that God has placed upon *our* hearts as servants of the Lord? Consider taking the following action. Pray right now for God to reveal one or two things, write them down, and reflect upon them this week.

2. Frequently when someone brings up King David our mind automatically jumps to the story about his indiscretion with Bathsheba (see 2 Samuel 11). In reality this is similar to what the Pharisees did to Jesus by accusing the formerly blind man of being a sinner, and glossing over the great miracle of his healing – though they said that this type of healing had never been seen before.

A. Do you catch yourself being a Pharisee overlooking the heart and focusing upon minor, outward faults in yourself and others?

B. How does knowing that God looks on the heart change how you evaluate what's important in your own life and in relationship with others.

C. Ask God to reveal to you in what areas you are glossing over God's goodness in a certain person and missing His heart for them.

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