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 Saint Paul's letter to the Corinthian believers, encouraging them to be generous with their suffering brothers and sisters in Christ. The Gospel lesson tells the story of Jesus healing two marginalized people: a little girl who died and a woman who suffered with bleeding for many years. In both passages, we see that the heart of God is tender toward those who are suffering.

The first reading is from the Apocrypha. Our study will begin with the second reading, which is from Saint Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

On his third missionary journey, Saint Paul encouraged Gentile Christians to help their struggling brothers and sisters in Christ who were impacted by a severe famine in Jerusalem (see Acts 24:17). In this part of his letter to the believers in Corinth, he is urging them to excel at being financially generous and to complete their pledge of support to those who are in physical need. In the first part of this section, he commends them for leading the way in their faith and conduct. He then asks them to become leaders in the area of generosity. So it is not only important to want to give, but to follow through and actually sacrifice on behalf of others. He calls the act of giving a "gracious work" (v. 7). He then ties in this "gracious work" with the sacrifice that Christ made on our behalf, which is the motivating force behind the compassionate giving that should characterize Christians.

Second Reading:

(Verses 8, 10, and 11 which were omitted from the reading were included in order to provide the full context and meaning).

> *2 Corinthians 8:7-15 NAS95 7 "But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also. 8 I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also. 9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich. 10 I give my opinion in this matter, for this is to your advantage, who were the first to begin a year ago not only to do this, but also to desire to do it. 11 But now finish doing it also, so that just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it by your ability. 12 For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. 13 For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality-- 14 at this present time your abundance being a supply for their need, so that their abundance also may become a supply for your need, that there may be equality; 15 as it is written, "HE WHO gathered MUCH DID NOT HAVE TOO MUCH, AND HE WHO gathered LITTLE HAD NO LACK."*

Saint Paul points out a few key principles to encourage the Corinthian believers to follow through on their pledge to provide financial relief to the starving Christians in Jerusalem. Paul challenged the Corinthians to be generous in giving the things that God had so generously provided, saying that they "abound in everything" else (v. 7), so why would generosity not be part of their reputation as well? This

calling to give was not a command but rather a challenge that Paul provided to reveal the true "sincerity of [their] love" (v. 8b). He is clear that this calling to gracious giving is his opinion, but from what we know about the other times that Paul has given his personal views it is a sound biblical principle if not an outright command.

Paul went on to explain how Jesus was the example of sacrificial giving by saying, "though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich" (v. 9b –ff). Paul's reasoning is twofold. One, if the Corinthians give during their times of prosperity they can count upon other Christians to give to them during their own time of need. The most basic decency of a human citizen of the world is in giving to others in need out of one's abundance. Second, sacrificial giving is evidence of their true calling to serve God. Although a seed must of course be initially planted, it doesn't go far without proper watering and continued nurturing. Paul admonished the Corinthians not to just begin the good work of giving, but to carry it to completion (v. 11). He closed with a quote from Exodus 16:18, a passage in which Moses explained how through God's sovereign control everyone gathered manna in the exact amount that they required. In the new economy of God after the Exodus God called the Hebrews and all people subsequent to them to act as His agent in distributing goods evenly from each person's excess to fill other people's needs.

What was happening back then historically can be a lesson to us in our own day and age. First, he calls them to recognize the connectedness of the universal church. He challenged them to step up to the plate and become an example for the other churches, who were already contributing generously to the cause of helping their brothers and sisters. Paul wrote to this group of believers in a previous letter about the connectedness of the church by calling Christians the "body of Christ". In explaining how each believer is interdependent, he said, "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26). What happens to one believer (good or bad) impacts the rest of the body. This interconnectedness with the universal church should awaken our sensitivity to others around us; those we know and even those we do not know. Being others-oriented can release us from the tyranny of self-absorption, which is more oppressive than we often recognize. God's structure of connecting us to the larger body of Christ and giving us an awareness of others in need is a blessing to our spiritual growth and maturity.

The second main point that Paul makes about giving in this passage is that the motive behind the giving is more important than the actual amount of the gift. He emphasizes that generous giving can be an outward display of sincerity of heart and love for others. The supreme example of generous giving is Jesus Christ Himself. Though Christ had all of the privileges of heaven, He gave up His rightful place of authority and riches to submit Himself to the poverty of this world. One of the early hymns of the church focused on Christ's humility for our sake and reinforces the theme of why we should be generous to others. It is a way that we can show the world who Jesus is. The following Scripture helps us to understand this more.

> *Philippians 2:5-11 NAS95 5 "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*

The end result is that through Christ's lowering of Himself to our poverty level, He could bring us to a place of richness beyond what this world could offer. Being motivated by Christ's great sacrifice for us is a sign of really understanding the immensity of grace that has been given to us.

Another important and encouraging principle that Saint Paul gives in regard to giving is that God entrusts us with different amounts of financial means so that we might steward resources in a way that promotes equality and unity in the body of Christ. Some parts of our world have very little in regard to material resources. These ones who are not rich in the world's eyes are often rich in other resources, such as faith, relationships and having an eternal perspective. Paul says that their richness can supply what a materially wealthy community of believers might not have. And a materially wealthy community can benefit those who are impoverished by giving sacrificially and providing a sense of unity among the believers (see also 1 Timothy 6:11-19). So while God could magically provide for all of the needs in the world, He does not override the will of believers, but instead, trusts us to live in the power of Christ so that we participate in this "gracious work". We have received grace and so we give graciously to others out of the abundance of what Christ has given to us. This passage encourages all believers to consider our part in being the hands and feet of Christ.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:
The Gospel reading is from Mark where we will see the story of a miraculous healing.

Gospel Reading:

> *Mark 5:21-43 NAS95 21 When Jesus had crossed over again in the boat to the other side, a large crowd gathered around Him; and so He stayed by the seashore. 22 One of the synagogue officials named Jairus came up, and on seeing Him, fell at His feet 23 and implored Him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter is at the point of death; please come and lay Your hands on her, so that she will get well and live." 24 And He went off with him; and a large crowd was following Him and pressing in on Him. 25 A woman who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years, 26 and had endured much at the hands of many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was not helped at all, but rather had grown worse-- 27 after hearing about Jesus, she came up in the crowd behind Him and touched His cloak. 28 For she thought, "If I just touch His garments, I will get well." 29 Immediately the flow of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction. 30 Immediately Jesus, perceiving in Himself that the power proceeding from Him had gone forth, turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched My garments?" 31 And His disciples said to Him, "You see the crowd pressing in on You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?'" 32 And He looked around to see the woman who had done this. 33 But the woman fearing and trembling, aware of what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth. 34 And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your affliction." 35 While He was still speaking, they came from the house of the synagogue official, saying, "Your daughter has died; why trouble the Teacher anymore?" 36 But Jesus, overhearing what was being spoken, said to the synagogue official, "Do not be afraid any longer, only believe." 37 And He allowed no one to accompany Him, except Peter and James and John the brother of James. 38 They came to the house of the synagogue official; and He saw a commotion, and people loudly weeping and wailing. 39 And entering in, He said to them, "Why make a commotion and weep? The child has not died, but is asleep." 40 They began laughing at Him. But putting them all out, He took along the child's*

father and mother and His own companions, and entered the room where the child was. 41 Taking the child by the hand, He said to her, "Talitha kum!" (which translated means, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"). 42 Immediately the girl got up and began to walk, for she was twelve years old. And immediately they were completely astounded. 43 And He gave them strict orders that no one should know about this, and He said that something should be given her to eat.

This is a powerful story of Jesus' healing power and His compassion for marginalized people. The two females in this story ran parallel lives until the day that Jesus came to town. The day the little girl was born must have brought great joy to Jairus and his family twelve years earlier. Jairus was a religious man, obviously respected in the community, which is shown by his upfront request to have Jesus come to his home to heal his daughter. At the time when this little girl came into the world, the woman with the hemorrhage began her long journey on her desperate reach toward her last hope, Jesus. Twelve years was a long time to be struggling with a bleeding issue, which would have marginalized her in the ceremonial world of the Jews as "unclean" in everyday social settings. After twelve long years of seeking help in every possible form, it is understandable how desperate she would have been. She was so desperate that she was willing to go against the social taboo of being in a crowd of people even though she was "unclean" in order to reach out and touch Jesus' garment in hopes of being healed.

In the end, Jesus did heal her, but not without correcting her theology. While she placed all her hope in touching his garment, as if his clothes held some special force that could be invoked by her grasping reach, He helped her to see that it was her faith that so moved the heart of God to heal her. This is an important point for all of us to recognize. Faith is living as if something unseen and unrealized is actually at work. When your faith is put in God, it means to lean your full weight on Him, as if there is no other lifeline. The Bible describes it this way: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). It also says that without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Jesus thought that is was important for her to understand that she was healed by reaching out to the right Person, not because of her superstitious beliefs.

Now that the woman was healed and made clean, it was time for Jesus to turn his attention to the original request that brought Him on the journey to begin with, Jairus' daughter. She was sick when Jairus went to implore Jesus to come heal her. But in this delay, she died, and the report came to Jairus that all hope for healing was gone. Jesus, though, encouraged Jairus to have faith and believe that He could not only heal a sick daughter, but that He could also bring her back to life. The Gospel records other incidents where Jesus raised people back to life: the widow's son (Luke 7:13-15) and Lazarus (John 11:43-44). These important accounts were recorded so that we could believe and have life that is truly life in Jesus. Saint John put it this way: "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:30-31).

How does this story contribute to our understanding of Jesus and the role of humans as we seek to have relationship with Him? We learn that Jesus is God because He has power to heal and to raise the dead. While magicians and charlatans could conjure up evil powers to perform signs and wonders, no one but God has the authority to bring people back from the dead. It is clear from this account that the Gospel writer is making a case for Jesus' divinity and authority. Our response, then, is will we believe and surrender to His divinity and authority in our own lives? Will we come to Him as the One who said that He is the way, the truth and the LIFE (John 14:6)? Or will we try to find life on our own terms, pursuing a little bit of religion to satisfy our guilty conscience? Obviously, the Gospel writers went to great lengths

to provide enough information about Jesus to convince us of His rightful place as King and Lord of our lives. May our search for His leadership in our lives be as desperate and as focused as that of Jairus and the woman with the bleeding issue.

As I type, I am reminded of a recent incident that has left me desperate for Jesus to be in control of my life and to experience His lordship over my knee-jerk reaction to defend myself. I was criticized for not doing part of my job well. At first I wanted to defend myself and prove my worth to others. But after taking a deep breath, I turned to Jesus and silently asked Him what He wanted me to learn in this situation. I still don't know what that is, but I trust that He will help me to let Him be Lord of my life so that I don't have to rely on my accomplishments or my self-defense to prop up my ego. Instead of taking matters into my own hands and trying to find life in my own sense of self-righteousness, I can rely on Him, leaning my full weight on His perfection. I can learn from people's criticism and solicit feedback so that I can learn and grow. We are all a work in progress!

Reflection Questions

1. How do you feel when you consider the great compassion that Jesus had for the two women who were in need? What needs do you have that you can talk to Him about today? How does knowing His compassion for you encourage your approach to Him?

2. In both passages, Jesus was highlighted as One who has ultimate power. In the New Testament lesson, He became poor to bring us to His heavenly riches and in the Gospel lesson, He was able to heal and raise the dead. When you look at your life and the obstacles that seem to get you down, how does knowing that Christ has ultimate power influence your walk of faith? Sometimes, we are discouraged because we do not see Him using His power to do what we think He should do on our behalf. But take a few moments and ask Him to help you to see where He wants to exercise His authority in your life. See if in this next week your heart might be willing to desperately seek out His lordship in your life as you come up against obstacles and discouragement.

3. The Bible says to pray without ceasing (1 Thess 5:17) regardless of the circumstances. How hard do you think the woman in this story prayed for help? Since she had nowhere else to turn it's easy to imagine that she was very persistent in her calling upon God for help. Certainly, God allowed these dire circumstances in the woman's life in order to bring her to faith in the Lord Jesus for the forgiveness of her sins. Perhaps the woman was always faithful to pray, even before she became afflicted with the disease. Jairus, too, was a religious man, yet he lost his little daughter to a terrible illness. He knew where to turn when life got out of control. He desperately searched for Jesus, the Son of God and the rightful Lord of the universe. These two individuals are pictures of desperate hearts seeking God's help.

How bad do things have to get before we pray? Regardless of our circumstances**, God has called us not to wait until troubles come our way, but to be faithful and pray in order to obey.** This includes praying not only about our needs but also for the needs of others.

What are some practical ways that we may improve our level of persistence in prayer? Here are some methods that have worked for me, although they may not be suitable for everyone.

A. Write your prayer requests down on a 3x5 card. Carry this with you and as you find time pray throughout the day. It's helpful to categorize your requests, such as "Healing" or "Come to Faith in Jesus."

B. A very easy way to remember to pray for a very short list of people is to assign each of them to one finger, I call these "finger prayers." If you want to go one step further, meet with one of them and when you pray with them the first time have them hold that particular finger and tell them that this will help you to pray for them.

C. Consider the concept of constructing a kind of "prayer maze" in your head by assigning the people for whom you are praying to a geographical map of where they are located. For example, you could begin with praying for people in your home town, then move on to prayers for those located in the western part of your state, then to the north, east, and so on. This has proven very helpful to me since many times I pray for people during my daily exercise where I would not have access to cards on which I had listed prayer requests.

D. Finally, pray! Ask God to show you ways to improve your prayer life. In a previous edition of Mass Notes we discussed Luke 16:1-13. The application of this text was that God has called us to use our talents and ingenuity in order to lead people to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Pray and ask God to energize your prayer life through the use of your time, talents, and materials possessions. This includes using our technological devices like smart phones and computers.

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