Study Notes for the Sunday Mass

Published by Christians for Christ Ministries. Find us on the web at:
http://www.christiansforchrist.org

We are a non-denominational Christian ministry that seeks to encourage and facilitate Christians in studying the Holy Scriptures.

"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 First Kings in which we find the great Prophet Elijah running away from wicked Queen Jezebel. The story reminds us that God will provide for us in order to accomplish the works that He has in store for us. Then we move to the second reading from Ephesians, which helps us to see what the contrast is between living as a child of the world and living as a child of God. Then we close with the continuing study on Jesus in John 6 where he confronts the unbelieving people by calling Himself the "bread of God."

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from First Kings and deals with the Prophet Elijah who was a mighty man of God in a dark era in Israel during the decline of the theocratic kingdom. This period followed the time of the Judges in which the Scripture said, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). There were bright spots in this age and one of them was the prophet Elijah. Elijah was perhaps best known for the incident recorded in First Kings 18 during a time of severe famine in Samaria. According to the Scripture Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal as to whether they could bring fire down on their sacrifice by calling on their god while Elijah would offer his sacrifice to God and ask Him to send fire to complete his burnt offering. The Priests of Baal began calling upon their god and cutting themselves in order to invoke a response, but failed miserably. Next, Elijah was so certain the God would act upon his request that he soaked the wood with water (1 Kings 18:33). He prayed a simple prayer and asked God to bring down fire on the sacrifice. With a dramatic display of power, God burned up not only the entire sacrifice, but the fire licked up the water as well. Afterwards, Elijah had the Priests taken captive and then put them to death (v. 40). What an amazing victory Elijah had that day! After such an important victory one would think that Elijah would have continued his momentum and never suffered from any sort of worry. If God could light even wet wood on fire in front of the pagan priests Elijah could accomplish anything by calling upon the only true God in prayer. At least that is what one may think. Leading up to today's reading, soon afterwards the Scripture records that Elijah fell into a period of deep anxiety because of the actions of a certain ungodly woman named Jezebel. Jezebel was the evil wife of King Ahab, a king of Northern Israel. Immediately after Elijah's victory over the Prophets of Baal, wicked Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah saying, "So may the gods do to me and even more, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time (1 Kings 19:2b). His response was to flee for his life because of Jezebel's threat. "And he was afraid and arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, 'It is enough; now, O LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers'" (vv. 3-4). Later, Elijah fled even further into the mountains to hide in a cave (1 Kings 19:9). How could such a mighty man of God, who had just witnessed God's dynamic power in the victory over the Prophets of Baal find himself holed up and worrying in a dark cave? If a mighty man of God like Elijah could suffer with anxiety, it's no wonder that Christians can also fall into patterns of worry.

This leads us to today's reading in which we find Elijah on the run from wicked Queen Jezebel.

First Reading:

1 Kings 19:4-8 NAS95 4 But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers." 5 He lay down and slept under a juniper tree; and behold, there was an angel touching him, and he said to him, "Arise, eat." 6 Then he looked and behold, there was at his head a bread cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank and lay down again. 7 The angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise, eat, because the journey is too great for you." 8 So he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God.

Even though Elijah was fresh from his mighty victory, he fled in fear to the wilderness and asked the Lord to take his life (v. 4). God responded to his prayer in a different way by sending an angel to provide fresh food for him (vv. 5-6). After Elijah ate and rested the first time, the angel came back to him again and caused him to eat a second time (v. 7). Subsequent to these two meals, Elijah traveled without food for forty days and nights until he reached Mt. Horeb (v. 8). Evidently, God miraculously delivered Elijah through this extended period of fasting in a similar way that He did when Jesus Christ fasted for a forty-day period (Matthew 4:2). We are not told whether the bread that God provided to Elijah allowed this extended fast but in all likelihood the two meals given to him were for the purpose of lifting his spirits to the point that he continued on his journey to Mt. Horeb. These things happened at the end of Elijah's earthly existence, as shortly after these events he appointed Elisha to be his successor and was then taken up into a cloud.

What can we learn from the reading? Even though we may despair of living because of the impossible obstacles we face, God will provide for us when we call upon Him. He may or may not use his angelic helpers in the way that He did for Elijah, but we can trust that God will not leave us or forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6, Hebrews 13:5). God knows in just what manner and quantity to provide for us the things that will move us to the next step in accomplishing the plans that He has for our lives.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Ephesians 4 and shows us the contrast between life as a non-believer and a believer in Christ. It reminds us that our hearts need to be in right relationship with God in order for our outward behavior to reflect God's value system.

Second Reading:

Ephesians 4:30 - 5:2 NAS95 30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. 1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; 2 and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

Saint Paul called the people in the Ephesian church not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God by carrying out sinful thoughts in their hearts and engaging in ungodly behaviors. The emphasis for changed behavior is a changed heart. A changed heart comes from being in a right relationship with God through faith in Christ. When we put our faith in Jesus Christ, we are "sealed for the day of redemption" by the Holy

Spirit (4:30, see also 2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:13-14). God has placed upon each believer the seal of redemption through His Holy Spirit and this invisible marking is His certification that He will deliver upon what He has promised. What this means is that we are now inhabited by the very presence of God through His Spirit. Where we go with our thoughts and with our body, we take God with us. Because God lives in us, we are a new creation, the old way of life has gone and a new way of life has come (2 Corinthians 5:17). The Holy Spirit helps us to see our lives and the world from God's perspective. We can now make decisions based on God's value system, which is in sharp contrast to the world's value system.

Christians are not to have any part in the ungodly behaviors that are associated with the unbelieving world. These behaviors are generated from a "me-first" mentality that is easily offended, resulting in bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander and malice. You can see the progressive nature of sin as it takes on more and more momentum to divide us from others and actually engage in hurtful ways of interacting with others. This is a reflection of the value system of the god of this age, the devil, who is the father of those who do not have God as their father (John 8:44).

Instead, Paul called the people to emulate God through the model of Jesus Christ who willingly sacrificed Himself, not as a victim, but through His own choice (John 10:18). When we receive God's kindness, tenderness, forgiveness and love, we become children of God (John 1:12) and our hearts are shaped by this new value system. We begin to do things more like God our Father and less like our former father. Titus 2:11-13 corroborates this when it says: "The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age as we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearance of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people of his very own, eager to do good (NIV)."

This means that "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it" (1Corinthians 10:13). In the same way that God provided for Elijah's physical and emotional needs when He asked, God will also provide the things we need in order to serve Him. This includes the ability through His power to forsake the ungodly behaviors that Paul listed in the reading.

How can we apply this to our lives? This reading is helpful to consider as we interact with others throughout the week and before we partake of communion. God's love transforms how we approach relationships and the community of believers. Communion has in its very word the idea of common unity. The church comes together to participate in remembering God's way of interacting with us, which is typified by Christ's sacrifice on the cross for our sins. As a result, our way of interacting with others changes as well. Communion reminds us of Jesus' admonition in Matthew's Gospel about asking forgiveness from a person we may have offended before we bring an offering to God. "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering" (Matthew 5:23-24). When we partake of communion we shouldn't grieve the Holy Spirit of God (Ephesians 4:30) by clinging to ungodly feelings towards others and bringing this into the celebration of remembrance of our Lord's death which took the place for the penalty for our sins. Instead of coming with thoughts of wrath, anger, slander, and bitterness (vv. 30 – 31) we have been changed so that we can come with minds cleansed from these things and present to God hearts filled with kindness, tenderness forgiveness, and love (vv. 32 – 4:1).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:
The Gospel reading is a continuation of the story that was started last week. The context is Jesus' teaching of the crowds that followed him after His feeding of them through the multiplying of the loaves and fishes in the closing of Chapter 5.

Gospel Reading:

> *John 6:41-51 NAS95 41 Therefore the Jews were grumbling about Him, because He said, "I am the bread that came down out of heaven." 42 They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, 'I have come down out of heaven'?" 43 Jesus answered and said to them, "Do not grumble among yourselves. 44 No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. 45 It is written in the prophets, 'AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me. 46 Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father. 47 Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh."*

The main point of Jesus' teaching is that belief in Him is the only way to obtain eternal life and be restored to right relationship with God the Father. Repeating our statement from last week, Jesus' point in this particular teaching wasn't whether or not He is spiritually present in the elements of communion. These issues were not even a part of the mentality of the Jewish people that He was addressing.

The passage opens with the grumbling of the Jews in disbelief against Jesus' claim to be the Messiah. They point to His human origins as proof that He could not be God's promised Messiah (v. 42). They believed that only God or possibly an angel can come down from heaven. Since some in the crowd knew Jesus' earthly father and mother they couldn't accept His statement that He came down from heaven. We know from John 7 that the people held to a tradition about the nature of the Messiah. There they said, "However, we know where this man is from; but whenever the Christ may come, no one knows where He is from" (John 7:27). Jesus cut to the heart of the issue which was their unbelief in God. Earlier Jesus had told them:

> *John 5:37-40 NAS95 37 "And the Father who sent Me, He has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form. 38 You do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent. 39 You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; 40 and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life."*

This leads us to the central point of the story: the only way to God the Father is through belief in Jesus the Son (v. 47). For "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36). Jesus said that they could not come to Him because the Father was not drawing them (v. 44). But we know that God wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). It seems that their hard-heartedness and lack of

being willing to be "taught of God" was preventing them from being drawn to faith in Jesus. If they would let themselves hear and learn from the Father, then Christ's divinity would be obvious to them. Then they would come to Him and have assurance of a life that is eternal (v. 44b). By offering resurrection life, Jesus is overtly claiming His deity. He continues to make claims of divinity by saying that He is the One who was sent by the Father and has seen Him (vv. 45-46). It is with this backdrop that Jesus makes a bold claim, emphasized by the phrase, "Truly, truly," which is basically putting His word on the same level as Holy Scripture, infallible and inerrant. He says, "he who believes has eternal life" (v. 47).

In order to unpack this a little more, he uses an analogy that the Jews would have been familiar with from the Pentateuch (the first 5 books of the Old Testament). He harkens back to the days when the Hebrew people were in the wilderness and ate manna, which was a supernatural food that God provided for them (see Mass notes from last week). Even though they ate this supernatural food, their bodies still died. Jesus was claiming to be more than manna, He is the "manna" (or bread) that brings life to the soul (John 10:10). Being in relationship to Him who is the resurrection and the life, allows one to live eternally, even if the body dies (John 11:25). When Jesus said "and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is my flesh," he was referring to His bodily sacrifice that He would make to bring atonement for our sins. The Old Testament set a precedent for the need for a blood sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins (Hebrews 9:22). So Jesus was showing that His impending death would be that sacrifice required by the Law to forgive us of our sins (1 John 2:2).

What can we learn from this reading to apply to our lives? When we celebrate communion we remember how Jesus gave up His life to bear the penalty for our sins. When we take of the bread, we remember His body that was broken on the cross for us. When we partake of the cup, we remember Jesus' blood that was poured out for us. Before we partake of communion we should examine our hearts in preparation. We can ask ourselves if we too have become so familiar with Jesus that we overlook that He is God? In addition, when this world starts getting to us, we can look to Him for life that is truly life, realizing that this world is not our home. We walk by faith that someday we will be with Him and all things will be made right. We can also be a spokesperson for God, sharing with others the wonderful opportunity to be made right with the Father through Jesus.

Reflection Questions

1. We said about the second reading:

> *God has placed upon each believer the seal of redemption through His Holy Spirit and this invisible marking is His certification that He will deliver upon what He has promised. What this means is that we are now inhabited by the very presence of God through His Spirit. Where we go with our thoughts and with our body, we take God with us. Because God lives in us, we are a new creation, the old way of life has gone and a new way of life has come (2 Corinthians 5:17). The Holy Spirit helps us to see our lives and the world from God's perspective. We can now make decisions based on God's value system, which is in sharp contrast to the world's value system.*

In what ways do you bring God into your relationships? In your work life? In your relationship with you wife? In relationship to nonbelievers?

2. Reflect upon the last time you celebrated communion. Was your heart focused upon the Lord Jesus' sacrifice for you?

Saint Paul gave us a clue as to the importance of the celebration of communion. He said in 1 Corinthians 11:30 about those who were doing so in an unholy manner, “For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.” Although his words were in the context of the full love feast he indicated the sincere need to examine our motives as we celebrate communion. In light of what we studied today, the next time you take communion examine your heart and sincerely prepare for the remembrance of Jesus dying on the cross for you sins.

Keywords: Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Lectionary 116