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 for **9-20-2015**. This week I just returned from watching the movie *War Room* that featured a man who was engaged in a struggle between the wisdom of God and the "wisdom" of his carnal fleshly desires. We will read about what James said about this struggle in the second reading. Later I will provide some additional insights I gleaned from the movie. Then we will learn about servant leadership in the Gospel lesson from Saint Mark where we see the disciples arguing about whom among them was the greatest.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Apocrypha. This body of work provides some important historical insights into the 400-year silent period just prior to the birth of Jesus. We encourage our readers to become familiar with the cultural and historical context leading up to the publishing of the New Testament.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is a continuation of the study from James but picking up in Chapter 3. The context is just after James' treatise on the power of and danger of the tongue. He calls the tongue a fire (James 3:6), a "restless evil full of deadly poison" (James 3:8). He says, "From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so" (James 3:10). The main theme of today's reading is the contrast between human wisdom and godly wisdom. As you read, take particular notes of the words and phrases that constitute each side of this spiritual battle. Especially take note of repeated words and phrases.

Note: Although the reading omitted verses 14 – 15, we included them below. This was because although verse 14 forms a conclusion to his teaching on the dangers of our speech it also provides a natural linkage to his subsequent teaching below.

Second Reading:

> *James 3:14 - 4:3 NAS95 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. 18 And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. 1 What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.*

In the reading, James contrasts the "wisdom from above" (v. 17a) with that which arise from within the human heart and results in the ungodly speech about which he just finished speaking (James 3:1-12). James calls this outpouring of sinful thought patterns of the heart "bitter jealousy and selfish ambition" and repeats it twice (vv. 14a, 16a). These sinful patterns of the heart result in "arrogance and [lying] against the truth "v. 14b-ff). They are not from God (v. 15a), but are instead of non-divine "earthly,

natural, demonic" sources (v. 15b-ff). They result in "disorder and every evil thing" (v. 16). In contrast, wisdom originating from God as described verse 17 is 1. Pure, 2. Peaceable, 3. Gentle, 4. Reasonable, 5. "Full of mercy" and results in good works, 6. "Unwavering," and 7. "Without hypocrisy." It's like there are two freight trains pulling against one another in our hearts. The first is that of sinful patterns originating from within the fallen condition of our hearts with input from Satan our enemy feeding the coal into the steam heading pulling away from God. Opposing that train is another engine that is God's "wisdom from above" Who opposes all of these sinful seeds implanted into our lives. The planting of God's seed in our hearts, meaning the Word of God from the Bible, results in the fruits of righteousness and peace "v. 18).

As James continues his teaching in chapter 4 with the source of the troubles already clearly in our minds, he asks the hypothetical question, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you" (v. 1a). He answers his own question with a summary statement of the things that came before. The source of the "quarrels and conflicts among [us]" is our "pleasures that wage war in [our] members" (v. 1b). These "pleasures that wage war against our body parts" form Satan's tools to lead us to "commit murder" (v. 2b) because of following the lust in our heart (v. 2a). The war between our spirit and bodies continue and when we are "envious and cannot obtain," meaning we covet the things from others which we cannot have; we "fight and quarrel." James says that even when we pray because we want something we don't have, we "ask with wrong motives, so that [we] may spend it on [our] pleasures" (v. 3). Hidden within James teaching upon the contrasts between our fallen human condition and godly wisdom is a principle to ask God in prayer for the things that we desire (v. 3a). We will speak more about this later.

How many of us can identify with the ongoing struggle between our flesh and the devil's ways that rage in our hearts? In this section, James closely links our speech with the revelation of the secret battles that rages within us. Our ungodly speech provides an insight into the ways in which we are walking in opposition to the plan that God has for our lives. God said, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). I remember once I was talking to a friend of mine and as men have a habit of doing the subject moved to women. He made a statement about engaging in a certain specific form of carnal behavior with a woman. In my heart, I knew immediately that because of his current life situation he had been engaging in viewing pornography. Pornography is one of Satan's key ways in which he pours ungodly wisdom into the lives of people, be they unbelievers like my friend, or believers who know better. Engaging in the viewing of pornography is a channel through which flows the "wisdom" of our enemy. God stands ready to deliver us from our temptations, and as James said, all we have to do is to ask Him (v. 3a).

I mentioned in the introduction that I had just returned from watching the movie *War Room*. This Christian movie providing a powerful illustration to the power of and necessity of prayer for couples as they engage in the unseen spiritual battle surrounding their lives. The movie told the story of a young mother met an older woman who mentored her about the power of prayer. Once this young woman began honestly seeking God by honoring Him in prayer huge things began to her in her life as well as that of her husband. James said in verse 3 of the reading, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures." We need to ask the question, do we even ask? Regardless of our motives, we need to regularly assess whether we are honestly praying for the important things in our lives, such as our mate, children, and the lost people whom God has brought into our lives.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson continues from Saint Mark but moves ahead from 8:35 where we ended last week and picks up with Chapter 9 just after the story of Jesus' transfiguration with His chosen subset of disciples consisting of Peter, James, and John. In between, Jesus had healed a demon possessed boy (Mark 9:16-27). This miracle was unique because someone in the crowd had presented the boy to Jesus after the disciples could not heal him (Mark 9:18). Afterwards, when the disciples had asked Jesus about why they could not heal him, Jesus told them, "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer" (Mark 8:29). Interestingly this followed the father of the boy's request to Jesus when he said, "I do believe; help my unbelief" (Mark 8:24). It was as if Mark expressed a teaching moment with the disciples that the boy's father had the courage to ask Jesus to help his unbelief, yet the disciples were unable to heal the boy "by anything but prayer." As we saw in James, God calls us to ask Him in prayer for the things we desire (James 4:2e), yet at this stage the disciples did not yet understand the power of prayer in freeing the boy from him enslavement to the demon. Obviously, this was because Jesus was still with them, and they would understand later the powerful ministry of prayer.

Gospel Reading:

> *Mark 9:30-37 NAS95 30 From there they went out and began to go through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know about it. 31 For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, "The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later." 32 But they did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask Him. 33 They came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He began to question them, "What were you discussing on the way?" 34 But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest. 35 Sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all." 36 Taking a child, He set him before them, and taking him in His arms, He said to them, 37 "Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me."*

Jesus and disciples left "from there" (v. 30), meaning the event of the last healing. This would have been at the base of the mountain on which Jesus was transfigured before His disciples. The two traditional sites of this event are Mt. Tabor and Mt. Hermon. After they left "there," Jesus wanted to be alone with His disciples as we see in verse 30b, "He did not want anyone to know about it." Along the way on their journey to Galilee, after they got to Capernaum Jesus asked the disciples what they had been arguing about (v. 33c), but they refused to answer Him (v. 34). Mark tells us that they had been debating which among them was the greatest disciple (v. 34b). It's not coincidental that this argument arose after the chosen three (Peter, James, and John) experienced seeing Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. It is also possible that these three were still radiating some of God's glory after coming down from the mountain as happened with Moses. (Exodus 34:29). Perhaps this created in these disciples' minds a sense of superiority, and the others maybe wondered why they weren't chosen for the trip up the mountain. Jesus quickly corrected their misunderstanding concerning the pecking order by telling them, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all" (v. 35c). Next, Jesus proceeded to provide them with an object lesson by placing a child in front of them to illustrate this principle (v. 36). Jesus used this illustration of the child to show them greatness does not consist of one's position. Even the lowest "child of the kingdom" can act as an ambassador for Jesus, and an ambassador for Jesus is one for God the Father. Therefore, the disciples shouldn't be arguing about their relative positions of greatness but should purse the kingdom with a childlike faith and humility as servants of Jesus in pointing people to God the Father.

In summary, Jesus illustrated in the story today the principle of servant leadership. Even though He told the disciples that He was going to be "delivered into the hands of men" and killed (v. 31), they persisted in arguing about whom among them was the greatest. The presence of children provided Jesus with a means of using these young people as an example of how the disciples should view themselves.

What does this mean for our lives? Regardless of our social position in society, God calls us to view ourselves as servants of the Lord Jesus. This Lord of the Universe is the same One Who washed the feet of the disciples (John 13:12-17). Saint Paul emulated these principles of servant leadership in his ministry. He said, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (Philippians 2:3-4). God empowers us through His Holy Spirit to carry out the work that He has started within us (Philippians 1:6). As we go about the week, let's keep these principles in mind when we are tempted to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think (Romans 12:3).

God continues to teach me about my sinful pride and how I have often viewed myself as superior to others. This week I was mowing my lawn using my large zero turn lawn mower while my neighbor was mowing his using an older riding type mower with a missing hood and various Band-Aids holding it together. The background of this particular neighbor is that he is some two decades younger than his wife who moved in a few years ago with her first husband and two kids. However, something happened between them and she later married the much younger "boy" who was not out mowing her lawn. As I was contemplating the matter as I zoomed past him on my tiger-striped racing machine I admit that I felt superior to him as he mowed with the broken down junk that was handed down to him from the neighbor's former husband. In an attempt to get a handle on my pride I actually found myself saying, "When I was his age (i.e. riding a bike with training wheels), I would have been glad to have had a mower as nice as that." How's that for getting a handle on my pride! In reality, God calls me to be the servant even of my boyish neighbor who also needs to hear the message of the Gospel. In retrospect, what I can do in the future is to pray for him as I see him mowing his lawn, and even pray for an opportunity to build a bridge to him in order to be able to share the hope that I have through faith in Jesus Christ.

Reflection Questions

1. All of us have heard the expression, "put your foot in your mouth." Jesus said in Luke's Gospel, "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart" (Luke 6:45). From what you learned from the second reading today, reflect upon the last time which you put your foot in your mouth. What was the underlying condition that brought about this action? Through God's wisdom in the Bible, what are one or two ways that you can avoid this in the future?

2. The super disciples including Peter, James, and John had every right to view themselves as being in a privileged position since they were the only ones invited to the travel up the mountain with Jesus and subsequently experienced His transfiguration. In what ways are you tempted to view yourself as being in an exalted position either in society or in the church? Using what you learned from the Gospel lesson how does what you know about Jesus' view of leadership change your view?

Keywords: Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Lectionary 134