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 this week with a reading from Genesis, the first and foundation Book of the Bible. This is one of the Books that I read once a year, along with the two other Books that I consider foundational for any student of the Bible. The other two that I read (and sometimes the entire Book in one sitting) are the Gospel of John and the Book of Acts. When I speak with new believers, I frequently tell them to proceed in the following order. Begin with Genesis, then with John, and finally conclude with Acts. In this way, the reader picks up many very important names and biblical constructs in a very short time. In addition, when reading in this order a person will quickly recognize the connections between the Old and New Testaments. This week as we begin with a reading from Genesis, we will see how Jesus connected this first Book of the Bible to His contemporary teaching on divorce as well as the Mosaic Law which His nemesis the Pharisees were trying to twist for their own advantage. We will also study in the second reading how the Old Testament proves that Jesus is the Christ as we look at the Book of Hebrews. The author of Hebrews was a star student of the Old Testament and understood extremely well the themes and theology of the Old Testament and how it connected with the New as revealed through the Person of Jesus Christ.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Moses Chapter 2. This reading is from Moses' retelling of the creation story that added additional details to the summary account he provided in Chapter 1. Beginning in verse 4 of this chapter, Moses adds additional details to his account. Although God had already created man (Genesis 1:26, 2:7) he was placed in the garden to work it alone (2:18). God knew that Adam needed a mate who was like himself, and provide a means to fulfil the commandment to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28). In today's reading, we will find out the remedy to Adam's loneliness.

First Reading:

> *Genesis 2:18-24 NAS95 18 Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." 19 Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. 21 So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. 22 The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. 23 The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." 24 For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.*

After God created the animals, He brought them to Adam who completed the task of giving names to each one (2:20). Adam's naming process may have taken a long time, and the absence of any helper in the process reinforced his need for a spouse. Early in the reading we see the phrase it was "not good" in reference to Adam being alone. This contrasted with the closing of chapter one at the conclusion of the creation account in which God said it was "very good" after everything, and everybody including Adam

and Eve, had been created (Genesis 1:31). During Adam's naming process the text says that "there was not found a suitable helper for him" (v. 20d) among the animal kingdom. Although Adam had close fellowship with the animals, as any pet owner can attest, these very special bonds still didn't satisfy his need for **human** companionship. Remember that during this time before the Fall the Lord God walked with Adam in fellowship with him (Genesis 3:8), however even this relationship left Adam desiring a mate because God had designed him for it. God then remedied Adam's need by creating the woman we know as Eve (Genesis 3:20) from out of Adam. In the Hebrew the word transliterated "woman" is "ish-shah" which sounds much like the word for man which is "aw-saw." In the original the word for rib also means side, so the woman was literally from Adam's side and named a word with the same root sound. In the English the idea of her name is similar, with "man" being the root and "wo-man" being the person taken from the man's side. In verse 18, the text says that a suitable "helper" was not found for Adam. The word there in the original is "ezer" pronounced "ay zer" which means aid. This word brings with it an association with another word found later in the Bible, "Ebenezer," which by interpretation is the "stone of help" and is used of God in the Old Testament. Ebenezer reminded the Jewish people of God's presence, and Eve created by God as a helper should do the same for us. Adam was created as a relational being, and God is a relational being consisting of three Persons in the Godhead. After the Fall we know that Adam and Eve's relationship was shattered, in contrast that which exists among the Persons of the Godhead is eternally in perfect relationship. Although Eve is literally the helper person drawn from Adam's side, the inevitable conflicts would begin between Adam and Eve after her creation, not matter how lonely he was before. These two had a mission, as the woman joined Adam in the work that God had given to him as the leader of the effort to maintain the garden that had been entrusted to him (Genesis 2:8, 15). Second, they were to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:28).

Later in the Gospel reading, we see how Jesus used the last verse of this reading to show how it was God's original plan that man and woman be united in the relationship of marriage during their lifetimes. Verse 24 explains that "for this reason" the man and woman shall leave their parents and become one in marriage, both in the spiritual sense and through the sexual union. The phrase "for this reason" points back to the previous verse where God explained that woman was formed from the man, and since this is so, the two are now one in marriage. Jesus will explain this essential truth to the Pharisees who were trying to twist the Law to hold their followers in the same bondage that they placed upon themselves.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from the Book of Hebrews, a Book about the superiority of Jesus Christ over angels and everyone else. This Book teaches us how Jesus was in the line of the Melchizedekian priesthood, which is eternal, rather than the Levitical priesthood which is tied to the human lifespan of the high priests. We know that one of the heresies that plagued the early church was the worship of angels, and the author of Hebrews attacked this headlong in showing Jesus' superiority over them. Saint Paul talked about this in the Book of Colossians when he said, "Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the **worship of the angels**, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind" (Colossians 2:18). In the first chapter of the Book the author explained how angels are "ministering spirits sent to those who will inherit salvation" (Hebrews 1:14). Angels are God's agents who do His business for Him. They are never to be worshiped in any manner, since there is only one mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5). The author's teaching on Jesus' position relative to the angels continues into chapter 2, which is the reading for today.

Second Reading:

Hebrews 2:9-11 NAS95 9 But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. 10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. 11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,

In today's reading, the author explains how Jesus submitted to God the Father's plan for Him by allowing Himself to be born as a man in order to serve the world. The theological term for the process by which Jesus emptied Himself of His independent use of His divine attributes during the ministry of His First Advent is "kenosis." This concept is explained most clearly by Saint Paul in the Book of Philippians in the reading below. We are including this because of the great importance of this subject and for the fact that the author of Hebrews assumes the reader's familiarity with this concept. Saint Paul explains this in the verses below.

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" (Philippians 2:5-10).

With Paul's teaching in mind, the meaning of the reading from Hebrews becomes clear. Jesus voluntarily became human during His earthly lifetime, making Himself "for a little while lower than the angels" (v. 2a). Jesus died for everyone according to God's rich grace by humbling Himself on the cross not as a victim, but as a victor. Nowhere in Scripture is Jesus ever called a victim, rather Jesus gave His life willingly for us in order to suffer the penalty for the sins of the entire world. The purpose of Jesus' work is explained in verses 10 – 11. Jesus is "bringing many sons to glory," and sanctifies (meaning makes perfect" those whom He calls brethren. At the first moment we believe we are given a new Spirit, the old one is gone and replaced with something new who knows God (Ezekiel 36:26, 2 Peter 1:3). In this new relationship, we are united in fellowship with the Holy Spirit, Jesus, and the Father. The author stated in the reading, "For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father" (v. 11a). This relationship is never something from which we can become divorced, as it was given to us by God. "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" (Romans 8:35). As we transition to the Gospel lesson, we will see how Jesus taught about the relationship of marriage as created by God for the purpose of a lifetime of fellowship between two followers of Him.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is a continuation of the study from Saint Mark. Before we continue let's take a step back and look at the big picture of this Gospel. Mark's writing was one of the earliest of the four Gospels. In this important Book of the Bible, the author emphasizes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. John Mark is held by tradition to be the author and there is strong evidence to regarding this. He was very likely influenced by ministry of Saint Peter, whom the Lord Jesus called the Rock of the church. Remember that this Rock of the church wrote about how as believers we become the heirs of God's great gifts through an eternal relationship with Him, something which the Pharisees did not understand. Peter said that as believers we are born again to a living hope "to obtain an inheritance which is

imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:3). Throughout Mark there are three primary groups of people, and in the reading this week each them appear. The first is Jesus' primary nemesis, the religious leaders including the Pharisees. The second is the crowds who follow Jesus and continually misunderstand Him. The third group is Jesus' disciples who also suffer from no small amount of misunderstanding even up until Jesus had risen from the dead when He had to explain everything to them regarding Himself from the Old Testament (Luke 24:13-32).

In today's reading, Jesus responds to a question from the religious leaders who came at Him not to learn but rather to test Him (Mark 10:2). Jesus responded with a question, something that He often did when questioned. Do we know anyone who when we ask them a question responds with a question, and afterwards we learn something from them? Jesus used this inductive approach when He was addressing the crowds, as contrasted with a deductive method in which He would have plainly given them the answer to their question. He uses those two different approaches consistently when He was addressing those two different groups of people. With the inductive method, He spoke mostly with questions and parables, but then later explained His public address privately to His disciples. In this case, the religious leaders didn't really desire to learn from Jesus by understanding the true answer to their question, instead they were trying to test or trap Jesus by asking Him a question about some obscure or difficult subject dealing with Jewish Law. In the reading, we see Jesus following a familiar pattern. Someone from one of the first two groups asks Him a question, and Jesus responds with a question, which if answered properly could have led them to the answer themselves. Then once He is away from them, He plainly explains to His disciples the answer to both questions. As you read, ask yourself how you would answer the question from the Pharisees, and then the question posed by Jesus.

Gospel Reading:

> *Mark 10:2-16 NAS95 2 Some Pharisees came up to Jesus, testing Him, and began to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife. 3 And He answered and said to them, "What did Moses command you?" 4 They said, "Moses permitted a man TO WRITE A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY." 5 But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. 6 But from the beginning of creation, God MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE. 7 FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, 8 AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH; so they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9 What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." 10 In the house the disciples began questioning Him about this again. 11 And He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; 12 and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery." 13 And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them. 14 But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 15 Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all." 16 And He took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands on them.*

The context of the reading is following Jesus' teaching on the seriousness and spiritually harmful nature of sin. Jesus had taught them, "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea" (Mark 9:42). Afterwards, He left Capernaum and came to the region of "Judea beyond the Jordan," meaning the largely Gentile land to the east of this important watery landmark (Mark 10:1). Here the crowds met up with Him again and were joined by the Pharisees who led with a question to test Him (v. 2).

The Pharisees asked Jesus whether it was lawful (according to Jewish Law) for a man to divorce his wife (v. 2). They didn't of course mean whether it was lawful according to Roman Law, but rather according to their strict, literal and often wrong interpretation of the Mosaic Law. Jesus responded with a question, asking them to locate the answer from what Moses had written in the Law (v. 3). Jesus explained to them following a method that would have been very familiar to the Pharisees from the Old Testament. In the Book of Nehemiah, the people after they had been held in captivity in Babylon for seventy years had lost track of the Scriptures. Once Ezra had located a copy, he gathered the people around him to teach them, and Ezra and the priests read the lost biblical text. We see there that is said that "They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading" (Nehemiah 8:8). This is what Jesus did by reading from the text and at the same time providing the interpretation of it. Moses didn't write in Deuteronomy Chapter 24 saying that God in any way favored divorce, but rather that God **authorized** divorce. Jesus explained this very crucial difference. Moses said that it was an abomination before the LORD for a man to remarry a woman whom he had previously divorced and had remarried, and taught the people through the Law not to do this because it would bring "sin upon the land" by doing so (Deuteronomy 24:4). Jesus continued the biblical teaching on the matter of divorce by drawing the people back to the Scriptures, a behavior which all of us would do well to follow. In responding to the question from the Pharisees, who didn't really care to hear the true answer, Jesus simply pointed them back to God's original teaching on the matter.

The closing of the reading was the second instance where the crowds were bringing children to Jesus (v. 13). Once again, Jesus rebuked His disciples for not allowing or even encouraging this. "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these," He said (v. 14). As true followers of Jesus, all of us must approach him humbly, and He was teaching His disciples this very important lesson.

This week we saw how Jesus turned to the Scriptures to answer a question by the Pharisees. Even though this group of religious legalists didn't desire to listen to His answer, Jesus still explained to them the sanctity of marriage and how this flowed from the relationship of the first man and woman God created during Creation about which we read in the first reading. In the closing of verses of the Gospel, reading Jesus had to remind His disciples to be humble and receive Him just like the children. In the second reading, we learned how Jesus humbled Himself in order to accomplish the will of His Father. As followers of Jesus He calls us to humble ourselves and receive Him as little children.

Reflection Questions

1. In the first reading we read how God created the first woman out of Adam as a helper and companion for him to accomplish the purposes that He had previously assigned to him. Later in the Gospel reading, we saw how Jesus used these same verses to explain the lifetime relationship of marriage as arising from God through this same creation account. Read the following verses and then discuss in what ways a husband and wife model the more perfect relationship that exists between the Persons of the Godhead.

> *John 14:16-20 NAS95 16 "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; 17 that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. 18 "I*

will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19 "After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also. 20 "In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.

2. How does knowing that God exists eternally in a perfect relationship help you in your own relationship, regardless if you are single or married?

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