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 learn from the Book of Deuteronomy about the nature of God as One and the greatest commandment. We also discover the crucially important truths about God's one time sacrifice He made on our behalf and learn something about the shadowy priest figure known Melchizedek. Finally, in the Gospel we learn more about God's greatest commandment.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading from Deuteronomy, a word meaning "second law," is from chapter 6. This section opens with words fitting for a title of the entire book. "Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the LORD your God has commanded me to teach you, that you might do them in the land where you are going over to possess it" (Deut 6:1). Notice the use of the singular in the first phrase, "the commandment." The Book of the Law, the Pentateuch, contained in the first five Books of the Bible is "the Law" or the commandment together as a whole. However, as we will see in the reading that follows there is one commandment given by God to His people that is the capstone of them all, the calling for God's covenant people to make Him the center of their lives. We will see how this plays out in today's reading.

First Reading:

> *Deuteronomy 6:2-6 NAS95 2 so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. 3 "O Israel, you should listen and be careful to do it, that it may be well with you and that you may multiply greatly, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey. 4 "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! 5 "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart.*

As we saw in the introduction, God called the people to follow His commandments in the land to which they were going, meaning the Promised Land in Israel into which they were preparing to cross after a forty year wait (Joshua 5:6). God called the people to keep His commandments (v. 2a) so that their days would "be prolonged" (v. 2d). The Mosaic Covenant was conditional in nature, and in order to reap the benefits of it the people had to be obedient to the Law as given by Moses through the intercession of angels on the Mountain of God (Galatians 3:19, Exodus 19:3). If they people kept the commandments, they would blessed by God. One of the blessings of God is the honor (and responsibility) granted to Israel to understand the nature of God in order to get to know Him better. Verse 4 contains what is known as the "Shema Yisrael." This is a statement about the nature of God Who is one in contrast to the polytheism that existing in the worship of many gods during that era. The reading closes with perhaps the greatest single commandment, to "love the LORD your God with all [their hearts] and with all [their] soul and might" (v 5).

What does it mean for **us** to follow God's commandments and love Him with all of our heart, mind and soul? Following God means to put God at the center of our lives, to put and keep God in everything that we do. We are enabled in achieving this high calling by God's Holy Spirit Who was given to us the

moment we truly understand and trusted in God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9). Jesus said, “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest” (Mt 11:28). As Christians we can proclaim that although we are freed from the heavy constraints of the Mosaic Law covered in Deuteronomy, we are free to worship the Lord God in His Oneness through the empowerment that He has given to us through faith in his Son and His indwelling Holy Spirit.

Introduction to the Second Reading:
Today’s reading from Hebrews 7 is very important because it describes how Jesus fulfilled and set aside the Old Testament Law including the bloody sacrificial system. The first part of chapter 7 records the ministry of a mysterious priestly figure known as Melchizedek. Understanding the person of Melchizedek is of crucial importance to us as believers in Jesus Christ. This is because he came not from the line of Aaron which was completed after the cross but instead of a priestly line of Jesus that continues forever (Hebrews 7:3).

Second Reading:

> *Hebrews 7:23-28 NAS95 23 The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, 24 but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. 25 Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. 26 For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; 27 who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. 28 For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever.*

Unlike the Levitical priests whose death prevented them from continuing forever, the Melchizedekian line, consisting only of Melchizedek and Jesus, continues forever since the resurrected Jesus lives forever. Today’s reading also reveals the one-time nature of Jesus’ sacrifice in contrast to the repeated sacrificed offered by the priest which could never erase the sins of the people. Instead, these sacrifices pointed forward to the ultimate, one-time, willing sacrifice of Jesus Christ Himself for our sins. Jesus gave His life not as a victim, but as a victor, as our High Priest Who lives forever.

As Christians living in the era after the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, we are freed from obedience to the long line of Levitical priests which never took away the remembrance of sins from the people. Instead, we see later in Hebrews what this new, permanent, one and only successor to Priest Melchizedek means for us. “Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD” (Hebrews 10:11-12). We now have only one Priest, and that Priest is Jesus Christ Himself who bore the penalty for our sins on the cross for us once and for all.

In closing, let’s read what the author of Hebrews said as a summary statement in this section.

> *Hebrews 10:15-18 NAS95 15 And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying, 16 "THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART, AND ON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM," He then says, 17 "AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE." 18 Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.*

The moment we believed, God placed His law in our hearts through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit. At that same moment He forgave us of past sins, present sins, and future sins. Finally, He did away with the sacrificial system which required priests to make offerings on our behalf.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:
Today's reading provides a fitting close to what we read in the first reading from Deuteronomy about the greatest commandment.

Gospel Reading:

> *Mark 12:28-34 NAS95 28 One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" 29 Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD; 30 AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.' 31 "The second is this, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' There is no other commandment greater than these." 32 The scribe said to Him, "Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that HE IS ONE, AND THERE IS NO ONE ELSE BESIDES HIM; 33 AND TO LOVE HIM WITH ALL THE HEART AND WITH ALL THE UNDERSTANDING AND WITH ALL THE STRENGTH, AND TO LOVE ONE'S NEIGHBOR AS HIMSELF, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." 34 When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions.*

A scribe, someone whom we could equate to as a lawyer or legal scholar in our day, approached Jesus with a most important question. "*What commandment is the foremost of all?"* Jesus' answer left this scribe speechless. Jesus repeated the Shema, and then added, "Love one's neighbor as Himself" (v. 33b). Loving one's neighbor was indeed a very high calling in an era when neighbors may include Roman soldiers or even Samaritans since Jerusalem from which Jesus was speaking was such a crossroads of trade and culture. Interestingly, Jesus commended the scribe by telling him that he was "not far from the kingdom of God" (v. 34). This was, it seems, because this particular scribe properly understood that the heavy matters of the Law and it's sacrificial system were greatly outweighed by the spiritual component: loving the Lord God with all of his heart, mind, and soul (Deuteronomy 6:5). The scribes, as representatives of the Law, pointed the people to how they were to observe the Law and through the presentation of various sacrifices through the Levitical Priesthood. We saw in the second reading how the priesthood could never take away the people's sins. Instead, it only pointed the way to the one time, forever sacrifice that Jesus would make to take away people's sins forever. The scribe rightly understood the fuller meaning of the Law, the way in which it pointed people to love God, and not only God but also his neighbor.

The whole of today's readings provides substantial implication for us as Christians living with the knowledge of Jesus' fulfillment and completion of the Old Testament Law. Consider the following points in light of all of today's readings.

- Jesus is our High Priest and the Priest for all, including both Jews and Gentiles, in contrast to the Old Testament sacrificial system which required conversion to Judaism in order to take part in the sacrificial system. However, the old sacrificial system always pointed towards its fulfillment through Jesus Christ which then terminate the sacrifices forever.

- We no longer require priests to stand as a mediator between us and God. “For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5).
- The Old Testament sacrificial system repeatedly cost the worshipers money to provide the necessary sacrifices. In contrast, Jesus paid the price for our sins and redeemed us from the curse of the Law (Galatians 3:13). The cost that we pay is in the giving of our lives to Him for our service (Ephesians 2:10).
- In contrast to the repeated offerings of sacrifices in the old system, Jesus died once for our sins forever. Students of the Bible know that the biblical authors use repetition to draw particular focus to a given concept. The author of Hebrews used repetition to show us how Jesus died once for sins and that His sacrifice could never be repeated:

  *Heb 7:27 who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did **once** for all when He offered up Himself.*
  *Heb 9:12 and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place **once** for all, having obtained eternal redemption.*
  *Heb 9:26-27 Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now **once** at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.*
  *Heb 9:27-28 And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, 28 so Christ also, having been offered **once** to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.*
  *Heb 10:10 By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ **once** for all.*
  *Heb 10:12 but He, having offered **one sacrifice** for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD,*
  *Heb 10:14 For by **one** offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.*

For us, loving God with all of our heart, mind, and soul, and loving our neighbor as ourselves is indeed a high calling. In the Gospel reading Jesus commended the scribe in his recognition of this grandest aspect of the Law, to love God with all our mind, heart, and soul. This is in contrast to the prevailing religious system in that Jewish culture which was predicated upon the works of the people in paying for and offering sacrifices through the priestly system. We can rest in the fact that Jesus set aside the old system and now calls us to a new, fuller understanding of what it means to love God.

Reflection Questions

1. In light of the increasing secularism of the culture in America and the world, what does it mean for YOU to follow God’s commandments and love Him with all of your heart, mind and soul?

2. What is the significance of the single, one-time, forever offering of the Lord Jesus Christ willingly (not as a victim) for our sins in contrast to ongoing, repeated ministry of the Old Testament Priests? In what ways does knowing this change the way you view your worship of God?

Keywords: Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time, Lectionary 152