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 see how God protected the holy family of Jesus and how this reveals God's love and concern for us in our own Christian lives.

First Reading:

The first reading is from the Apocryphal book of Sirach.

> *1SIR 3:2-6, 12-14*
> *God sets a father in honor over his children;*
> *a mother's authority he confirms over her sons.*
> *Whoever honors his father atones for sins,*
> *and preserves himself from them.*
> *When he prays, he is heard;*
> *he stores up riches who reveres his mother.*
> *Whoever honors his father is gladdened by children,*
> *and, when he prays, is heard.*
> *Whoever reveres his father will live a long life;*
> *he who obeys his father brings comfort to his mother.*
>
> *My son, take care of your father when he is old;*
> *grieve him not as long as he lives.*
> *Even if his mind fail, be considerate of him;*
> *revile him not all the days of his life;*
> *kindness to a father will not be forgotten,*
> *firmly planted against the debt of your sins*
> *—a house raised in justice to you.*

Sirach was written during the timeframe of around 200 BC. This was a time during which the Jewish people had experience terrible hardship following the destruction of the temple in 586BC, but before the persecution and desecration of the restored temple during the reign of the anti-christ figure Antiochus IV Epiphanes which ultimately led up to the Maccabean revolt. In the reading the writer emphases the biblical theme of respect of children for their parents, both their mother and father. This is reflected in the Exodus 20:12, "honor thy father and mother." The writer admonishes the readers to go further and take care of their parents in their old age. It is interesting that the Ten Commandments included a promise for those who honored their parents. "Honor your father and your mother, so that **you may live long** in the land the LORD your God is giving you" (Exodus 20:12, NASB, emphasis added). This admonition is also noted by Saint Paul in Ephesians 6:2. The bottom line is that God calls us to honor or mother and father and God will reward us for doing so.

Introduction to the Second Reading

In many of the Apostle Paul's letters, he presents a tragic picture of us in our sinful, fallen state and contrasts us with Christ in his holiness and perfection. In addition, he recounts what God has done for us

in His grace, when we deserved only wrath. Once we understand the depth of our sin and the riches of His grace toward us, only then does he ask us to live a life that properly honors God and reflects His glory.

In the book of Colossians, St. Paul tells us that we were enemies of God, alienated from Him and living in spiritual and moral darkness (Col.1:13,21). Jesus on the other hand, is the perfect image of the invisible God and supreme over all creation (1: 15-18). By His death He rescued us from the dominion of darkness and reconciled us to God, presenting us free from blemish and accusation (1:13, 22). Because of this, St. Paul says we are to live a life displaying His virtues and being thankful.

Second Reading:

> *Colossians 3:12-21 NAS95 12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. 18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them. 20 Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.*

To display these virtues, we must cooperate with God's work of transformation. If you read all of Ch. 3, you will notice how this passage is interspersed with action verbs that indicate there is something God wants us to do. Col. 3: 2 tells us to *set* our mind on things above—that is, to think about what we possess in the spiritual realm—salvation from our sin, peace with God, and eternal life, to name a few. Verse 5 tells us to *consider* ourselves dead to evil desires. Verse 9 tells us we are to ***put aside*** the old self and ***put on*** the new self. That means to actively put aside old habits and patterns of living associated with our old, sinful self and actively live out the virtues of our new life in Christ by the power of God's Spirit.

In this reading we are told to *put on* the virtues of compassion, forgiveness, peace, and love. We are to *let* the Word of Christ dwell in our hearts, living its wisdom and teaching its precepts to others. Wives are to *submit* to husbands, husbands are to *love t*heir wives, and children are to *obey* parents. God is transforming us into Christ's likeness and calling us to intentionally live out those virtues for the benefit of others and the glory of God.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Chapter 2 of Saint Matthew opens just after the birth of Jesus with the arrival of the magi, the mystical priestly type people from the east (Matthew 2:1). These visitors were likely influence by the Prophet Daniel such that they possessed prophetic information regarding the promise of the coming Jewish Messiah. Verses 1 – 12 record the events of the magi's visit where we take up with today's reading in verse 13.

Note: In this verse the asterisk (*) character marks the use of the a "historical present" tense verb, but which was translated with an English past tense. This made the most sense to the translators to extend the most correct meaning to the English translation.

Gospel Reading:

> *Mt 2:13 Now when they had gone, behold, an angel of the Lord *appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him." 14 So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. 15 He remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON."*
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> *Omitted Verses (16-18):*
> *16 Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi. 17 Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: 18 "A VOICE WAS HEARD IN RAMAH, WEEPING AND GREAT MOURNING, RACHEL WEEPING FOR HER CHILDREN; AND SHE REFUSED TO BE COMFORTED, BECAUSE THEY WERE NO MORE."*
>
> *19 But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord *appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said, 20 "Get up, take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child's life are dead." 21 So Joseph got up, took the Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Then after being warned by God in a dream, he left for the regions of Galilee, 23 and came and lived in a city called Nazareth. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: "He shall be called a Nazarene."*

Today's reading showed how God directed Joseph to protect the baby Jesus from King Herod by directing him to flee to Egypt. Keep in mind that Matthew did not record the time that elapsed between the birth of Jesus, the visit of the magi, the flight of Joseph and Mary with Jesus to Egypt, the return of the holy family to Israel. We know from Luke that the holy family returned at some point to Bethlehem when Jesus was about two years old, such that Herod's decree was to murder all children two years old and younger. Regardless of the details and timing, we see how God divinely superintended the protection of Jesus, Joseph, and Mary. The consequences of Herod's wickedness are shown in verses 16 – 18, which were omitted from the Lectionary in today's reading. In order to be sure that the newborn king Jesus was killed, Herod directed that all the children be killed in the region in which Jesus was born during the particular timeframe (v. 16, "two years old and younger."). God, through the angel of the Lord, then directed Joseph to return (with Mary and Jesus) once King Herod had died (v. 20). Joseph fulfilled the Scripture (likely unknowingly) by settling in the town of Nazareth.

The big ideas in the reading is how God sovereignly protected Jesus, how He used his angelic beings to guide and direct Jesus' earthly parents, and the extent to which the evil rulers of the age attempted to exterminate Messiah Jesus. No plans of God could be foiled in bringing about Jesus as the supreme sacrifice for the people sin. Joseph and Mary obediently followed the directions given to them by God through angels and dreams. Finally, ever last bit of prophecy written about Jesus in the Old Testament was fulfilled.

There are two applications of today's Gospel reading. First, In the same way that we look back at how God's sovereign hand both guided and protected Jesus and His parents, we too can be sure that as believers in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (Romans 10:9-11) God is divinely watching over our lives and directing us and even His angelic being to help us. Hebrews says about the angels, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14).

Second, in the same way that the prophecy concerning Jesus concerning Jesus was fulfilled, biblical prophecy concerning all believers will be fulfilled down to the smallest detail. Knowing the promises of God is required if we as believers are to understand how God can fulfil them. No plans of the enemy will prosper against God's promises, although at times we may not always understand how things will play out. Joseph and Mary likely never anticipated that they would have to flee to Egypt after Jesus' birth. However, as the story played out, we can see how God both guided and protected the holy family to accomplish His divine purposes. We can rest in the fact that God will work out all things for those who love Him and are called according to His purposes (Romans 8:28). For, "If God is for us, who is against us?" (Romans 8:31b). The story that follows helped me to remember this.

An employee of mine (Dave) once told me a story about a time that he was driving one dark, very foggy night in Jackson, Michigan with a friend in the car with him. As this person was driving, someone in the car suddenly screamed, "watch out for that person walking!" The driver then swerved and narrowly missed a person dressed in dark clothing walking in the road. Once he recovered from his fright, he told the passenger, "Good thing you screamed and told me about that person walking or I would have hit him for sure!" The passenger then told him, "I didn't scream." He then asked him what he meant; didn't he hear anyone scream warning about the person in the road? The passenger told him that not only didn't he scream, but he never heard anyone else scream either. Dave immediately recognized this as a miracle. God works out all things for Dave, and the person dressed in black walking on the road, in the fog, in the dark, and wearing black clothes.

Reflection Questions

1. In the Gospel reading we saw how God divinely protected Jesus and his parents. God works in all believers lives to protect them. When was a time that you can remember how God divinely protected you or a family member / friend? How does remembering this help you to face your current and future challenges?

2. Will you commit to telling someone your story about God protected you or someone else?

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Keywords: The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, Lectionary 17