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 with the first reading from the Book of Genesis in which we study the covenant that God made with Noah when he landed in the ark after the Great Flood. Then we move to the second reading from the Book of First Peter where we learn of the fate of those that were swept away in the Flood as well as the means by which God provides believers with safety through His ark of salvation in Jesus. Finally, we conclude with the Gospel lesson from Mark in which we see Jesus' temptation in the wilderness and the beginning of His earthly reign that brought the kingdom of heaven down to earth.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Genesis and provides the backdrop to the origin of the rainbows. The context of this passage is just after Noah and his family, eight people in total, landed in the ark at the conclusion of the Great Flood. This followed a 120 year period during which Noah both built the ark and at the same time ministered to the people that ended up perishing on the earth. After the Flood, God blessed Noah telling him to "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Genesis 9:1). At this point, God changed the human diet to allow the eating of animals and established capital punishment (Genesis 9:3-6). It was no wonder that God placed fear of humans in the minds of the animals (v. 2). Today's reading outlines what is known as the "Noahic Covenant."

First Reading:

> *8 Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying, 9 "Now behold, I Myself do establish My covenant with you, and with your descendants after you; 10 and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you; of all that comes out of the ark, even every beast of the earth. 11 "I establish My covenant with you; and all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth." 12 God said, "This is the sign of the covenant which I am making between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all successive generations; 13 I set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth. 14 "It shall come about, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow will be seen in the cloud, 15 and I will remember My covenant, which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and never again shall the water become a flood to destroy all flesh. (Genesis 9:8-15 NAS95)*

The unconditional promise that God made to Noah was that the earth would never again be destroyed by a global flood (v. 11). This "Noahic Covenant" is unconditional because it is not predicated upon Noah, his family, or anyone born afterwards to perform some duty. God's promise was confirmed by His giving of the sign of the rainbow, something that evidently did not exist before the Great Flood. In our day when we see the rainbow we can remember God's grace and faithfulness. God was faithful in accomplishing His promise to Noah in rescuing those that trusted in His ark. God showed His tremendous grace because He didn't altogether destroy the earth because "Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (Genesis 6:8). God provided the "ark of salvation" to all of those who believed. Had anyone else other than those eight people acted in faith and stepped onto the ark, they too would have been saved from the flood of God's wrath that was poured out upon the earth. In the same way, Jesus is the "ark of salvation" for all those who believe, which is what we will discuss in the next reading. In the

case of Noah's family, it was both the physical ark and their belief in it that saved them. They had to believe a global flood was coming, build the ark, and enter into it before the flood began. It is interesting to note that Noah's ark is a type of Christ that prefigured the coming of Jesus (the antitype). A "type" is a theological term for people, statements, or events prefiguring or superseded by antitypes. The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus is the only "ark of salvation." When we trust in Jesus we ourselves enter the ark by faith and by God's grace (Ephesians 2:8-9). Like the ark that only had one door, Jesus is the only door to heaven (John 10:9).

Introduction to the Second Reading:
The second reading is from the Book of First Peter. The reading follows Saint Peter's teaching on the characteristics desirable in a Christian including being "harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit" (1 Peter 3:8). This was in order to bring others to faith in Jesus even during times of spiritual persecution, and calling believers to provide a defense to the antagonists of the hope that we have in God (1 Peter 3:15).

Second Reading:

> *18 For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; 19 in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, 20 who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. 21 Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you--not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience--through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him. (1 Peter 3:18-22 NAS95)*

Peter explained that Jesus died **once** for our sins, which is a sacrifice that can never be repeated (v. 18, Hebrews 9:28). God used Noah as a "minister of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5) to preach to the people during his generation over the 120 years it took for him to build the ark (Genesis 6:3). Jesus' Gospel message was proclaimed through Noah during his days on earth "to the spirits now in prison" (v. 19), meaning Hell. This does not mean that Jesus went to Hell and preached to the dead spirits in order to give them a second chance. The Bible is clear that it is appointed for man once to die and then to face judgment (Heb. 9:27). Everyone that did not believe that they needed to be saved ended up in this terrible, eternal prison. Except for Noah, his wife, his three sons and their three wives, the entire population of earth was destroyed.

The apostle Peter is saying in this passage that salvation comes through faith in God's provision of Jesus. Just like the ark was God's provision in the time of Noah, God has made the ultimate provision for our sins through Jesus' death and resurrection. He is the one and only "ark of salvation." Peter is not saying that water baptism as we think of it saves you. Rather, he is making a correlation between the ark's ability to save Noah and his family and Jesus' ability to save anyone who comes to Him in faith ("an appeal to God for a good conscience" v. 21). Peter equated baptism with faith, and he explained that the "baptism" which does save us is our faith that we have in the Lord Jesus who is above all authorities and powers (v. 22b). The text uses the term "corresponding" (Greek "antitupos") in the first word of verse 21. Water baptism is the counterpart (corresponds) to the salvation that we as believers possess through faith in Jesus Christ and God's grace alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). During the time of Saint Peter, a

person who expressed faith in the Lord Jesus obediently submitted to baptism (Acts 2:38). We can be joyful that God has provided Jesus as our "ark of salvation" in which we can enter through the means of faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). Although we are members of the church universal, the church doesn't save us, Jesus does.

We encourage you to learn more about the practice of baptism in the Bible by reading the **Going Deeper Section** as the end of this week's Mass Notes.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:
The Gospel reading is from Saint Mark a few verses before that which we studied last week. This passage records Jesus' forty days of temptation in the wilderness (also found in Matthew 4:2). It is important to note that Jesus' temptation was all part of an ongoing story in the book of Mark that began with Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist and followed by Jesus starting His earthly ministry. Each of these components should be seen as Jesus' credentials for verifying His claim to be the Son of God (Mark 1:1).

Gospel Reading:

> *12 Immediately the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness. 13 And He was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts, and the angels were ministering to Him. 14 Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:12-15 NAS95)*

Immediately after Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist, Jesus was compelled by God the Holy Spirit to go to the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. Although God knew that Jesus would successfully endure this trial of 40 days without food and in constant temptation by Satan, Jesus still had to complete the test in order to show to the world both His victory over temptation as well as his triumph over His human condition. Who can imagine going without food for 40 days in the desert? Saint Paul said the following about Jesus:

> *Philippians 2:6-8 NAS95 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.*

Jesus voluntarily emptied Himself of the independent use of His divine attributes. Although he was fully God, He was also fully human, and as such was subject to temptations that only a human can experience. Where the first Adam failed, we find in this passage that Jesus (the last Adam 1 Cor. 15:45) resisted the deceptive lies of the Enemy. This is all part of the testimony that Mark is gathering to persuade his audience that Jesus is worthy of our worship as God's Servant to bring the good news that salvation is accessible (at hand).

Undoubtedly Jesus' temptation went far beyond anything that any of us will ever experience. However, we can have hope that in light of Jesus' example, we too can persist in our temptations. Saint Paul said, "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" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Finally, Jesus' successful completion of the 40 days of temptation brought about the beginning of His earthly ministry and the unveiling of the "kingdom of God" (v. 15). By this time, John the Baptist had been arrested and Jesus took over his message to repent and believe in the Good News (v. 15).

What does this week's study mean for us today? God calls us to identify with Reverend Noah's message of faith and a call to action the same way He calls us to faith and action in our times. Jesus took over where Noah left off and called for people to examine their hearts by repenting of their sin and trusting in His once for all sacrifice to take their transgressions away forever. As believers, we are vastly different from the "spirits in prison" who didn't believe in Noah's message and therefore perished in the Great Flood. Every time that we see a rainbow, whether it is in the sky or in the colors of a peacock, we can remember God's grace and faithfulness in granting us salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone and not because of any of our good works. God has provided us with the power to resist temptation. We have Jesus' example that a person can resist through trusting in God's dynamic power, the Holy Spirit who lives inside of those who believe.

Reflection Questions

1. Although it's not directly stated in the Bible, I have always maintained that Noah hired workers to build the ark during this 120 year construction project. Additionally, I think that Noah ministered to the people during this time, both in the building of the ark and in ways in which are not told in the Bible. In what ways are you a "preacher of righteousness" in the various contexts in which God has placed you (work, home, school, etc.)?

2. How does Jesus' fulfillment of all righteousness (even in resisting temptation) give you hope in the midst of your own journey? List one particular area in which you have recently been tempted. In what ways can you identify with Jesus' temptation in the wilderness? How does the application of 1 Corinthians 10:13 empower you to resist?

"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" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Going Deeper: Biblical Teaching about Baptism

What does the Bible teach about baptism? Throughout the ages the church's understanding and practice of baptism has developed. The following information is not meant to disparage any particular church's teaching on the subject, but to provide the biblical foundation from which the practice evolved.

The word translated "baptism" from the original is "baptizo" which means to immerse or submerge. The practice of baptism is very Jewish in that the Jews were familiar with ceremonial cleansings in a bath known as the "mikvah." It was in such a mikvah in which Bathsheba was cleansing after her time of the month when King David spied upon her. A popular myth is that Baptism was also a means in the Old Testament of confirming the reception of a Jewish Proselyte, although this practice is found nowhere in

the Bible. Nobody in the Bible was ever baptized into the Jewish community. This came about only through the prescriptions of the Law, and especially by circumcision (Exodus 12:48-49). The Jewish practices of ritual cleansing are, however, mentioned as an elementary doctrine by the author of Hebrews (Hebrews 6:2), one that is emblematic of the purity in which God requires of worshippers. We know from the Bible that a ritual cleansing of the body in a mikvah or any other type of bath, be it sprinkling, immersion, or pouring, cannot remove the **spiritual** dirt from anyone (1 Peter 3:21). The Scripture says that only God can forgive sin (Mark 2:7, Ephesians 2:8-9, and especially Luke 5:23-24).

John the Baptist initiated the practice of baptism, although his was a baptism of repentance. Saint Mark said, "John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4). This "baptism of repentance" signified the participant's testimony of their personal repentance of their sin, meaning they had a change of mind and agreed with God that they had sinned and they desired to follow a new direction in their lives. In the case of John's baptism, we see the believer's response to their need of repentance is to immediately submit to immersion in water as a public, outward expression of the inward change they had experienced in their hearts after hearing John's preaching. Jesus took over where John the Baptist left off and continued this baptism of repentance. It wasn't until the Book of Acts that we find the disciples teaching a different kind of water baptism.

In order to understand the transition brought about in the practice of baptism in the Book of Acts, we must first understand that this Book is itself one of transitions. The first transition was that of Jesus to heaven when he left His disciples in charge of continuing His ministry. As the disciples were all gathered with Jesus they watched Him ascend into the clouds with the promise to "come again in like manner" (Acts 1:11). The next big transition was when the disciples gathered to await the promised Holy Spirit on Pentecost. On that day they received a baptism of a different type, the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Finally, we see an interesting exchange that occurred between Paul and a group of disciples in Ephesus:

> *Acts 19:1-5 NAS95 1 It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples. 2 He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said to him, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." 3 And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism." 4 Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus." 5 When they heard this, they were baptized **in the name of the Lord Jesus** (emphasis added).*

John's baptism was qualitatively different as it was a baptism of repentance; whereas the baptism performed in the Book of Acts and hereafter is 1) a baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus (v. 5), 2) tied to the personal reception of the Holy Spirit, and 3) still contains the element of repentance, but also includes the recognition of Christ's resurrection power in living the Christian life. These elements are all tied together, creating a complex conglomeration of multiple dimensions of saving faith: repentance, believing in Jesus Christ, and receiving of the Holy Spirit from God. We find this in the Second Chapter of Acts during Peter's address to a large group of devout Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 2:5) on the Day of Pentecost:

> *Acts 2:37-41 NAS95 37 Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" 38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 "For the promise is for you and your children and for all*

who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." 40 And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" 41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

Here we see the instantaneous response of the people who repented of their sin, believed in Jesus "for the forgiveness of their sin" (v. 38b), received the Holy Spirit (v. 38c), and submitted to immersion as a public profession of their newfound belief. Baptism was for them a means of identifying with the death of Jesus by immersing themselves in the water, and then rising to a newness of life upon coming out. This ceremonial practice would have knit well with their previous Jewish religious practices. Baptism is Jewish, it was given to us by the Jew John the Baptist, practiced by Jewish Jesus, brought into its final form by Jewish Peter, and immortalized by the Pharisaical Jew, Paul.

Another case in Acts is descriptive of the later application of these same proscriptive principles:

*Acts 8:26-40 NAS95 26 But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert road.) 27 So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. 29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot." 30 Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" 31 And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: "HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO SLAUGHTER; AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT, SO HE DOES NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH. 33 "IN HUMILIATION HIS JUDGMENT WAS TAKEN AWAY; WHO WILL RELATE HIS GENERATION? FOR HIS LIFE IS REMOVED FROM THE EARTH." 34 The eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?" 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. 36 As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch *said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" 37 And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." 38 And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing. 40 But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea.*

In the story of Philip and the Jewish Ethiopian "eunuch" (one who voluntarily submitted to castration for the purpose of serving among a king's harem), we see the progression of events as they played out in the life of this royal official who was returning from Jerusalem where he had been worshiping.

1. The man read the Word of God,
2. He understood the Word of God and believed it (Philip was obedient to the Holy Spirit in answering the call to explain it to him),
3. He publicly expressed his faith (to Philip),
4. He was baptized as soon as it was practically possible.

In baptism a person symbolically expresses their death to their former way of life and their birth in the newness of life as a believer in the Lord Jesus. Through it, believers identify with Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection from the dead. One commentator put it this way. "Immersion = Death. Submersion = Burial (the ratification of death). Emergence = Resurrection." Saint Paul said:

> *4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection (Romans 6:4-5 NAS95).*

Regardless of how the practice of baptism has developed in the church, and God has granted liberty to them to make this determination, the biblical teaching is straightforward as to the meaning.

Keywords: First Sunday of Lent, Lectionary 23