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 begin with the first reading from Genesis in which we see Abraham's journey to sacrifice his son Isaac and discuss the typology of Isaac. Then we move to the second reading from Romans where we discover more about God's special relationship with His believers. We conclude with the Gospel lesson from Mark in which we see Jesus' transfiguration in which a glimpse of his divinity is revealed to this very special subset of believers including Peter, James, and John.

Before we begin this week, I want to note something about the various formats in which we make these study notes available each week. For readers who have subscribed to the Mass Notes by email they receive the text of the study along with a link to both the PDF and the html version published on the web site. The version on the web site has the advantage of "mouse over" links for all of the verse references. This means that anytime an online reader positions their mouse over a verse reference the full text of that reference is made available to them. [In the cases where the text of the verse isn't provided this is a very handy feature.] Being able to see how Scripture interprets itself or correlates with other passages is a good skill to develop as you read and study God's Word. Please keep this in mind as you do your own studies.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Genesis. The context is the story of Abraham traveling to Mount Moriah to sacrifice his firstborn son Isaac. As you read, highlight any similarities that you find between Father Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac and God the Father's giving of His Son Jesus for a sacrifice on Calvary. *Note: All of the intermediate verses between 1 and 18 were included in order to provide the full context and meaning.*

First Reading:

> *Genesis 22:1-18 NAS95 1 Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 2 He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you." 3 So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. 4 On the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance. 5 Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you." 6 Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son, and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. 7 Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." And he said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" 8 Abraham said, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together. 9 Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But*

the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 12 He said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." 13 Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son. 14 Abraham called the name of that place The LORD Will Provide, as it is said to this day, "In the mount of the LORD it will be provided." 15 Then the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, 16 and said, "By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. 18 In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."

Abraham fulfilled God's commandment to journey to the mountain in order to sacrifice his son, the son of promise born to him and Sarah. Abraham likely believed that since God had already provided him a son through supernatural means in his old age He could provide him with another son once he sacrificed Isaac or He could raise Isaac from the dead. One thing that stands out is both Abraham and Isaac's faithfulness in obeying God. Abraham was obedient to his Father God, while Isaac was obedient to his father to the point of even carrying the wood for his own sacrifice and allowing himself to be bound. We wonder what was going through Isaac's mind during all of this. At the last possible moment, God provided a substitute sacrifice (v. 13). In the end, God complemented Abraham for his obedience (v. 18).

When I read these passages, I have always felt that somewhere during this event Abraham may have explained the situation to Isaac. Perhaps as Abraham was preparing to lay his son on the wood he may have told him about God's commandment to sacrifice him, and perhaps even his hope that God would bring him back to life. This would have revealed Isaac's great faith in God being able to raise him from the dead, as it is hard to imagine Isaac willingly laying down upon a pile of wood while Abraham raised a knife to kill him.

There are two main applications of the reading. First, God took note of Abraham's radical faith that was manifested in his obedience and blessed him for it. In the same way, we as believers and the seed of Abraham we are blessed by God for our radical faith that is manifested in daring steps of obedience. As children of Abraham, we are called to obey God even when it means taking radical measures in what He has revealed in His word for us to do. A second application has to do with the typology of Isaac. Isaac is what is called a "type of Christ." Here are a few of the similarities between Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac and the once and for all sacrifice of Jesus for sin on the cross (1 Peter 3:18).

- Abraham journeyed and on the third day reached the mountain (v. 4). Isaac was bound but then released on the third day because God provided a substitutionary sacrificial lamb. Jesus, God's sacrificial lamb (John 1:29), laid in the grave for three days and rose from the dead on the third day (1 Corinthians 15:4) whose sacrifice was a substitute for our sins. Both physical people were given back to their fathers on the third day.
- Both Isaac and Jesus were willing to offer their bodies as a sacrifice (vv. 7-8, Colossians 2:6-8).
- Father Abraham surrendered his son Isaac to God's will (v. 10). God surrendered His Son Jesus for His own will. The Scripture says, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

- Isaac carried the wood for his own sacrifice (v. 6) and Jesus carried his wood for His sacrifice (John 19:17)
- Ishmael was technically Abraham's first son, but he was a child of the flesh born to the slave Hagar, not the child of promise born to Sarah. Therefore, Isaac was his father's one and only son (v. 2). Jesus was God's one and only Son (John 3:16), Whom He loves (Matthew 3:17).
- Isaac was obedient to his father to the point of death. Jesus was obedient to His Father to the point of death and beyond (Philippians 2:8).

We see this story of a Father's sacrifice echoing the ultimate story of God's sacrifice that was made through Christ's death on the cross for us.

Introduction to the Second Reading:
The second reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans. The context is Paul's teaching on the very special relationship that exists between God and the believer. He said in the opening of this chapter, "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Next, he teaches on the difference between those living in the flesh and those living in the spirit. He said that those that live in the flesh cannot please God (v. 8), but as believers we are not in the flesh but in the spirit (v. 9). Next, there is a connection to the first reading as Paul said, "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him" (vv. 16 – 17). Like Abraham and Isaac, we are heirs with God through our faith in Christ. As you study the text of the second reading, remember the special relationship that you have with your Father God through faith in Jesus.

Second Reading:

> *Romans 8:31-34 NAS95 31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? 33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.*

We learn a few things from this short passage. Unlike as we saw in the first reading how God let Abraham off the hook in sacrificing Isaac, He did not allow such a provision for Himself when it came to the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus. His Son was the "Lamb slain since before the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). If God was willing to go to such great lengths to save us, we can be assured that He will continue to provide all we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3).

Paul said in this reading that since God is our justifier, and this does not come through our own performance or good works, how could anyone say that we are guilty when we have already been forever forgiven (v. 33)? He noted that Jesus is the One that intercedes for us. Later Paul said, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). We can have absolute confidence in the fact that since Jesus is our one and only intercessor with God the Father, nobody can bring a charge against us because we stand holy and blameless before Him. In the midst of our trials we can take hope that God is still in control and that He is at work for our good. A few verses previous to this concluding though Paul says that "God works all things together for good for

those who love God and are called according to His purposes" (Romans 8:28). God is in the business of conforming us to the image of His Son and no one can stop Him (Romans 8:29).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from Saint Mark and follows the miraculous feeding of the four thousand (Mark 8:9) which was after Jesus had also fed the five thousand (Mark 6:44). The disciples didn't yet understand that these two events were miracles (Mark 6:52) whereas the people continued to follow Jesus because they liked the good food that He provided them (John 6:26). After Jesus fed the 4,000, He left with the disciples in the boat and they forgot to take along enough food and had only one loaf of bread (Mark 8:14) even though seven large baskets had been left over after feeding the crowds (Mark 8:8). At this point Jesus knew about their lack of bread and told them to "Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod" (Mark 8:15). This confused the disciples so Jesus went on to explain to them about the two miraculous feedings. We are including this because it shows how Jesus corrected His disciples' unbelief in the events leading up to the revelation of His glory on the Mount of Transfiguration about which we will be studying in the Gospel reading.

> *"17 And Jesus, aware of this, *said to them, "Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? 18 "HAVING EYES, DO YOU NOT SEE? AND HAVING EARS, DO YOU NOT HEAR? And do you not remember, 19 when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces you picked up?" They *said to Him, "Twelve." 20 "When I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?" And they *said to Him, "Seven." 21 And He was saying to them, "Do you not yet understand?" (Mark 8:17-21)*
> *Note: The asterisks (*) denote a verb with the historical present tense, something that does not exist in the English language but does in the Greek text.*

For at least this instant, the disciples were being as hard hearted as were the people who were following Jesus for no other reasons than He provided them with food and healed their sick. Jesus, because of His kindness and special relationship with the disciples, especially the unique group of three (Peter, James, and John), explained to them the meaning of what had happened during the feeding of the two large groups. At this point the Holy Spirit moved mightily in Peter's heart and he proclaimed through the power of the Spirit, "You are the Christ" (Mark 8:29). This leads to the opening of Chapter 9 in which we as readers of God's Holy Word are honored with being able to partake in Jesus' transfiguration that included not only Peter, James, and John but also two additional biblical characters from the Old Testament living in heaven (Mark 12:26 – 27). Now let's read today's Gospel reading.

Gospel Reading:

> *Mark 9:1-10 NAS95 1 And Jesus was saying to them, "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power." 2 Six days later, Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John, and brought them up on a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; 3 and His garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them. 4 Elijah appeared to them along with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus. 5 Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 6 For he did not know what to answer; for they became terrified. 7 Then a cloud formed, overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is My*

beloved Son, listen to Him!" 8 All at once they looked around and saw no one with them anymore, except Jesus alone. 9 As they were coming down from the mountain, He gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man rose from the dead. 10 They seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead meant.

After the disciples had continually misunderstood the miraculous events surrounding the feeding of the two large groups of people, Jesus chose this special subset of His disciples to experience yet another miraculous event, His transfiguration before them. This event revealed an important aspect of Jesus. While He was fully man, He was also fully God. Moses and Elijah appeared with Him in this supernatural and surreal glimpse into Jesus' divinity (v. 4). Peter, a man who it seemed always wanted to solve problems, opened his mouth to suggest that since it was the Feast of Tabernacles that they should build three booths, one for each of the three men. He said this because he was terrified and didn't know what else to say (v. 6). At this point God spoke to them out of the cloud and commanded them to listen to Jesus, God's beloved Son (v. 7), His "Isaac."

What can we learn from the reading about living our lives as Christians? Peter, my personal favorite among all of the disciples, sought to be the "fixer" of the problem at hand. Not knowing what to say he just said the first thing that came into his mind. Which of us wouldn't have done the same thing? How many of us have gotten into trouble by not exercising good control of our internal filters and just saying what pops into our minds? The difference between Peter and us is that Peter had the first-hand testimony of Jesus fresh in his heart. Technically, Peter wasn't mistaken in what he said, but God corrected him and told him to simply listen to Jesus instead of rushing in to fix perceived problems. That is good advice for all of us; just listen to Jesus by reading and understanding His words given to us through the Bible and not rushing in with both of our gun barrels blazing!

I remember one time many years ago when I was working as an engineer at Ford. I was attending a small luncheon party given in my honor as I was transitioning to a new department as a part of my rotational training program. While standing in line at the salad bar my boss gave me a very good complement and I immediately responded by saying the first thing that popped into my head. Instead of just accepting the complement, I denied it by, saying that I really hadn't done a very good job! I knew immediately that I had messed up, but this wasn't something that was easy to take back. To this day, I regret my knee jerk response. However, I can be certain that God has forgiven my momentary indiscretion, regardless of whether or not I continue to allow it to be an indictment against me in my heart.

Reflection Questions

1. In the first reading, we read about Abraham's willingness to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice to God. However, Isaac was also obedient and as we saw is a type of Christ. A second type is also evident in the reading. In what ways can you determine that Isaac a type of believer similar to you and me?

2. Pay attention to the "voices" or messages you hear coming to you on a regular basis. When you hear accusation and condemnation what is your natural response? Do you hide, pretend, or defend yourself? Alternatively, do you run to the Savior and remind yourself of truth? In the second reading, Saint Paul gives us a glimpse of God's heart for those who are in Christ. What concepts resonate with you and how will you seek to live in light of these truths?

3. Have you ever gotten yourself in trouble by saying the first thing that came into your mind? What was the particular circumstance, and is there any way in which you can be redeemed in your mind through what you read about in the Gospel lesson?

Keywords: Second Sunday of Lent, Lectionary 26