Study Notes for the Sunday Mass Published by Christians for Christ Ministries. We are a non-denominational Christian ministry that seeks to encourage and facilitate Christians in studying the Holy Scriptures. **"For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus."** 1 Timothy 2:5

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 1-29-2017



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with a reading from Zephaniah, one of the so-called "Minor Prophets," largely because their 12 prophecies are shorter than the Major Prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah. We will also read from 1 Corinthians and then the section of the Gospels known as the Beatitudes.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Zephaniah has been called "the Royal Prophet," probably because he was the great-great-grandson of King Hezekiah of Judah. He was the last of the prophets before the captivity of Judah and ministered during the reign of Josiah who tried to restore proper worship practices that had been pretty much abandoned in Judah. His message centers on "the Day of the LORD," which is seen from two perspectives: 1) a time of judgment against sinners, and 2) a time of blessing for those who follow God.

Today's reading, however, is in a concluding portion of the book that looks forward—beyond the captivity—to a time, yet future, when Israel will rejoice in the promised Kingdom blessing, chapter 3:9-20). Such a blessed future will be occasion to "shout for joy … shout in triumph … rejoice and exult." Why? Because God has "taken away His judgments against you" and "He has cleared away your enemies." What causes for joy and rejoicing? But, even more astounding, the promise is that

God Himself will be among them. The phrase is repeated: "The LORD is in your midst" (vv. 15, 17).

First Reading:

Zephaniah 2:3 NAS95 3 Seek the LORD, All you humble of the earth Who have carried out His ordinances; Seek righteousness, seek humility. Perhaps you will be hidden In the day of the LORD'S anger.

Zephaniah 3:12-13 NAS95 12 "But I will leave among you A humble and lowly people, And they will take refuge in the name of the LORD. 13 "The remnant of Israel will do no wrong And tell no lies, Nor will a deceitful tongue Be found in their mouths; For they will feed and lie down With no one to make them tremble."

As in other Old Testament prophecies, Zephaniah warns his people that judgment is certain; it will come at the Day of the Lord's wrath. In chapter 2, verses 1 – 3, the latter of which is included in today's reading, he admonishes them to "Seek the Lord … seek righteousness; seek humility." As today's reading continues in chapter 3, we see that here will be a restoration, when a remnant will be saved. This remnant left by God's sovereign actions among the people will be a godly people who "do no wrong and tell no lies" (v. 13).

God has always preserved a remnant of believers among His people. We saw this during the time of Elijah when even though this mightiest of all the prophets thought that all of God's people were dead, however, a remnant of 7,000 people remained (1 Kings 19:18). In a future age before the Lord Jesus returns, a remnant of Israel will arise and herald God's righteousness through the world. God will seal these "12,000 from each of the 12 tribes" and divinely protect them from the plagues coming upon the earth and the wrath of the Antichrist (Revelation 7:4, we leave it to our readers to determine whether this is a literal or symbolic number of people or just the fullness of Israel). Interestingly, the Christian believers alive during this time of trouble won't be so fortunate during their physical lives for we see how John describes "a great multitude that no one could number" in heaven who were martyred for their faith (Revelation 7:9-17).

God calls each of us as Christians to function as His faithful remnant to a dead and dying world. As we will see in the second reading, God's divine hand is upon this relatively small group of humble people to live as "called out ones," the "ekklesia" is the word used in the original Greek language. Peter says in 1 Peter 2:9, "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light." One day these two groups, those on the narrow road of the ekklesia in the Christian church and the others in the ekklesia of Jewish Israel will be joined together as one people of God.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

This reading from the opening chapter of Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians focuses upon

the necessary attribute of humility found among the true believers of God in the church. These "called out" people

Second Reading:

1 Corinthians 1:26-31 NAS95 26 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; 27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, 28 and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, 29 so that no man may boast before God. 30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, 31 so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."

Paul told of how "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise." God's true believers on earth have always been considered ignored and foolish by the worldly people around them. These "walkers of the narrow road of salvation" through their faith in Jesus Christ shun the proud ways of the world surrounding them. In the same way that the people in Noah's day shunned the safety and salvation offered by God in the ark as the only means of survival, the proud in our day shun the only means of salvation offered by Jesus Christ.

Paul sums up the reading by quoting from the prophet Jeremiah who was speaking in that Old Testament context about the imminent destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians. During that time, Jeremiah said "The corpses of men will fall like dung on the open field, And like the sheaf after the reaper, But no one will gather them" (Jeremiah 9:22b). During this time of tremendous trouble that came upon the people of Jerusalem, God calling was, "but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things" (Jeremiah 9:24).

God calls us in our day to focus upon Him by boasting only in the Lord (v. 31). Faith in Jesus Christ is the only means of our rescue from a sinful and dying generation and world. Today's reading reveals to us that the attribute believers have in common among themselves is a sense of spiritual humility. True believers trust only in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross and not in their "good" works as means of earning their salvation (see Ephesians 2:8-9). *"LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD"* ***(v. 31b).***

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The message today is from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount known and contains the "Beatitudes." The Beatitudes are pronouncements of blessings for those waiting for the promises of the Messiah, and curses for those who were trying to obtain God's blessing through their own effort.

Gospel Reading:

Matthew 5:1-12 NAS95 1 When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. 2 He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying, 3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. 5 "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. 6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. 7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. 8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. 9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. 10 "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. 12 "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

In this reading, Jesus announced a total of nine blessings, each opening with "Blessed are." Jesus is fulfilling the role of Prophet by providing a series of blessings, a word which means "happy." This contrasts with the usual words given by the Old Testament prophets who announced a series of curses and woes against those who refused to follow God. Jesus came to announce that the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and this is what the kingdom looks like. Therefore, it is important to recognize that the Sermon on the Mount is not a list of new things that people have to do in order to be right with God, but rather it is a list of defining qualities of people who have been transformed by God.

Jesus is redefining the blessed life. Think about how these traits contrast how the world defines blessing. Someone living the blessed life:

1. Is poor in spirit, meaning humble which leads a person to recognize their spiritual need for God.
2. Mourns, meaning they recognize that this world is not their home and looks to God for comfort.
3. Exhibits gentleness, meaning they don't have to be aggressive to get things done because their heart is established in Christ's power.
4. Hungers and thirsts for righteousness meaning they prioritize eternal things over finite satisfaction in the world.
5. Shows mercy, because they were offered mercy themselves through the forgiveness given them by God and can extend it to others.
6. Is pure in heart, meaning they are not entangled with the evil ways of the world including lying, deceiving and manipulating people in order to get their own way.
7. Is a peacemaker, not just someone who tries to keep the peace at all costs. They actively seek peaceful solutions even in difficult situations which forces them to rely upon God more deeply.
8. Endures persecution with a vision toward eternity knowing that it is better to suffer than to succumb to temptation to compromise.
9. Endures insult because of their proclamation of truth (Word of God) just like happened to the prophets.

In summary, Jesus raised the bar of understanding to show the people that righteousness was not a bunch of behaviors that came by trying harder, but rather were qualities of the heart that were only possible through God's transforming power. These nine traits are the result of being born from above (John 3:3). Instead of being depressed that we can never be this good, Jesus delivered this sermon in order to invite us into a new way of life. This new way of life recognizes that our self-righteousness is as filthy rags before the LORD (Isaiah 64:6). We must come to the place where we receive Christ's righteousness into our hearts as a substitute for our former way of life (Romans 3:21-22). Jesus went before us as the extreme example of divine forgiveness. Jesus not only sinned those who sinned against Him but also bore the penalty for our sins. Through His example, we can persevere in our Christian lives to forgive those who sin against us.

Reflection Questions

1. How do you respond internally when you read the Sermon on the Mount? Does it feel like another list of impossible feats that you must accomplish in order to win God's favor? Or, have you responded to Jesus' invitation to life in the kingdom (where He is the King of your heart), and the Sermon on the Mount is a reflection of the work that He is doing in your life? If your response is more the former, that this is another list of impossible feats, you can turn to God in prayer and ask Him to give you His life from above and so be born anew.

2. What does it look like in your life to live as a chosen remnant of God among a spiritually dead and physically dying generation? What are two or three actions you can take each week to set yourself as a beacon of God's hope to the people around you?

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