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 07-21-2024



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with a message from Jeremiah regarding the ungodly rulers of Judah which includes a message of restoration under a future ruler sent by God whom we know as Jesus Christ. Then we look at how Jesus removed the wall of separation between God and the Gentiles through faith in Jesus Christ. We conclude with the Gospel lesson from Mark in which Jesus' apostles rest period is interrupted by the incessant needs of the people.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Prophet Jeremiah. The context is Jeremiah's proclamation of condemnation of the civil rulers, since later in verse 9 (after today's reading) he condemns the prophets (Jeremiah 23:9). This section is the prophet's condemnation of the last five kings of Judah. Included in the gloom is a message of hope and restoration especially that of the reign of ruler called the "righteous Branch."

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First Reading:

> *Jeremiah 23:1-6 NAS95 1 "Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of My pasture!" declares the LORD. 2 Therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel concerning the shepherds who are tending My people: "You have scattered My flock and driven them away, and have not attended to them; behold, I am about to attend to you for the evil of your deeds," declares the LORD. 3 "Then I Myself will gather the remnant of My flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and bring them back to their pasture, and they will be fruitful and multiply. 4 I will also raise up shepherds over them and they will tend them; and they will not be afraid any longer, nor be terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the LORD. 5 "Behold, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "When I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; And He will reign as king and act wisely And do justice and righteousness in the land. 6 In His days Judah will be saved, And Israel will dwell securely; And this is His name by which He will be called, 'The LORD our righteousness.'"*

The rulers of Judah during this time were exceedingly evil, and God blamed them for the ultimate scattering of the tribe to Babylon which happened during the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 586 BC. God then promises to rebuild the fallen nation by regathering them under the rulership of "David a righteous Branch" (v. 5). This prophecy points clearly to the future reign of Jesus Christ on earth after His return. Jesus will "reign as a king and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land" and be called by the name "The LORD our righteousness." One day the Nation of Israel will be restored under the righteous rulership of Jesus Christ. Israel will awaken to the identity of the Ruler whom they rejected. Zechariah said it this way: "I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn" (Zechariah 12:10).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. The context is Paul's message of hope to the Gentiles who were formerly "separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:12).

Second Reading:

> *Ephesians 2:13-18 NAS95 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, 15 by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, 16 and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. 17 AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR; 18 for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.*

God through Jesus' finished work of redemption on the cross made one "church" out of the formerly separate Jews and Gentiles. This one group of believers was united through the ministry of Jesus who "preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near" (v. 17). The two groups now provide access to God the Father through the single Holy Spirit. As believers in Jesus Christ, we are united with all of the believers that ever existed or exist in the universe. Ultimately, we will be joined into one kingdom under the rulership of Jesus, the "Righteous Branch" as we read in the first reading.

As believers in the twenty first century, we may forget just how separated the first century Gentile believers felt from the Jews. All along, God had created the Law to separate the Jews from the surrounding world. He did this through the creation of things like food laws, moral laws, and ceremonial laws. During the time when this was written, the temple in Jerusalem was functioning and the Gentiles were prohibited with the penalty of death from entering past a certain point. Through Jesus Christ they were now granted access to the Holy of Holies Who dwelled behind the curtain of the temple, what Paul described in this reading as the "dividing wall." This wall of separation was broken down through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul said in Romans, "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9). He went on to say, "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him" (Romans 10:12). Jesus is the One that unites all believers through faith in Him.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson is from Mark Chapter 6 and the context is just after the apostles had returned from going out two by two to preach the message of repentance to the Jews. It seems that God had opened the hearts of the people to receive their message for it seems that Judas the treasurer had acquired at least two hundred denarii with which to be able to volunteer to buy bread for the feeding

of the five thousand (Mark 6:37). Their ministry was to preach repentance, cast out demons, anoint people with oil and heal them (Mark 6:12 – 13).

Gospel Reading:

> *Mark 6:30-34 NAS95 30 The apostles gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught. 31 And He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while." (For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.) 32 They went away in the boat to a secluded place by themselves. 33 The people saw them going, and many recognized them and ran there together on foot from all the cities, and got there ahead of them. 34 When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things.*

Upon the return from their ministry, the apostles reported to Jesus about their ministry. Jesus, knowing they were tired, called them away to a time of refreshing away from the presence of the people who it seems began coming to them in crowds (v. 34). Their rest and solitude was short lived though, as the crowds continued to come to Jesus and the apostles to the extent that they anticipated their movements (v. 33). Saint John provided a clue that the reason the crowds were so evident was because they were gathering in Jerusalem for the celebration of the Passover (John 6:4). Jesus accommodated the people's great needs because "they were like sheep without a shepherd" (v. 34b). The main point was that the spiritual teachers of the age had left the preaching of the true ministry of God. Jesus came to awaken the people to their true needs, to repent of their sins and to turn to God in faith.

How many times has God called us to set aside our preconceived notions about what we are planning to do in certain circumstances? How many times have we settled down with a good book during a long airplane ride only to be disturbed by someone in an adjacent seat trying to strike up a conversation with us? As you go through the activities of the week, try to find circumstances in which you sense God would have you go in a different direction. Rather than being disturbed by disruptive circumstances, pray to find God's hand in what He would have for you in the unexpected event. Though all of us need times of rest, pray that you don't allow your preconceived time of rest to hinder what God would have you do during an interruption, even if you don't understand the reason or even the outcomes.

I remember one afternoon while I was driving home from work in suburban Detroit I saw a young woman alongside the road with a flat tire. Though I wanted to drive on past something within me caused me to stop and volunteer to change the tire. As I began my work, I had in the car some worn out gloves and placed those on my hands. One of the gloves had a hole in the hand and as I was removing the worn-out tire from her car some of the steel from the belting found its way through that hole and into my hand making a nice cut. I didn't say anything but internally cried out in pain. Meanwhile, the woman's boyfriend pulled up and stood by talking to her and watched me finish the job without saying anything to me. Between the pain of the pricks in my hand through the "holy" gloves and the awkwardness of having her boyfriend watching me, I wondered why I had stopped in the first place. There was a racial element in place as well. Although I didn't understand any of the implications of what I did, I still followed through with what God put on my heart to accomplish. I could have simply continued my leisurely drive home to my cushy suburban condo. Instead, I drive home with a bleeding hand and with uncertain kinds of metal fibers embedded along with a healthy helping of grease. When I get to heaven I plan to ask Jesus in what ways he used my service in the lives of these young people that afternoon. Until then I am called to do the things that God puts on my heart regardless of my understanding of the reason.

Reflection Questions

1. One of the things with which I have struggled is with the strong sense of separation I felt after leaving my job at Ford Motor Company as an engineer after a tenure of nine years. During this time, much of my life revolved around the people at my workplace. Once I surrendered my magic ID card which provided me access to things like the revolving gate in the engineering center and the test track across the street, I felt a deep sense of separation. Through the years after my separation, I have attempted to make peace with my decision as I kept in contact with a small group of people back at the company. After I came to faith in Jesus, I found that I could deal with my decision much more easily in part because I discovered that God had brought me into contact with this large group of people in order to intercede for them in prayer. At times, I still have dreams about being locked out of the company gate without an ID card to get through the turn style security gate.

A. In what ways have you found yourself separated from others in your life? How has your personal relationship with Jesus helped you through these trials?

B. Consider some ways in which you can use this separation in a positive way.

2. What do the first century Gentile believers have in common with groups of believers in our world such as the Chinese or Iranian Christians? In what ways does Jesus provide hope to them that we perhaps have difficulty in understanding?