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

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 8-03-2014



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass for 8-3-2014. This week we open with the first reading from Isaiah 55 that provides a picture of God's grace. Then we move to the second reading from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans and learn that is impossible for us to be separated from God once we have His Spirit living within us. Finally, we conclude with the Gospel lesson from Saint Matthew where we study Jesus' miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. We pray that your Bible study this week is enriching to you and helps perfect God's work He is doing in your life.

The first reading is from the Prophet Isaiah a person who Bible commentators call a major prophet because of the length of the Book that God inspired Him to write. The context of the reading is just after the depiction of Jesus as the Suffering Servant on the cross, something that happened over 700 years after Isaiah penned it (Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12). An interesting note about Isaiah 53 is that it is a forbidden Book in Jewish circles, something the rabbis avoid and the vast majority of Jews have never heard. "Who has believed our report and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed," Isaiah said (53:1). This powerful display of Jesus is followed by chapter 54 in which Isaiah shows God's everlasting kindness. "For a mere moment I have forsaken you, but with great mercies I will regather you. With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you, says the Lord your redeemer" (Isaiah 54:7-8). The reading today from Chapter 55 is just before God more fully revealed His plan to bring salvation to the Gentiles who would be in-grafted into His plan of eternal salvation (Isaiah 56). As you read try to keep in mind the context in which Isaiah gave his message in a time when the Jews weren't listening to the voice of God.

> *1 Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk Without money and without cost. 2 Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And delight yourself in abundance. 3 Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, According to the faithful mercies shown to David. (Isaiah 55:1-3)*

Isaiah's message is a picture of God's grace and provides some important information about God and our relationship to Him. God is impartial (v. 1). "Everyone who thirds" can come to Him. Second, God's grace cannot be earned (v.2), it is unmerited favor. Third, God's Word is life but we have to listen to it to obtain this life (v. 3). Fourth, God's promises to His people are eternal and specifically the ones in the Davidic Covenant will be fulfilled (v. 3). We can rest in the fact that God will complete the good work that He began with Israel regardless of how hopeless things may appear in the Middle East at any given instant.

As we move onto the next reading from Saint Paul, contemplate how this mighty saint may have felt hearing about the present day attacks by Israel's enemies. Would he rest in God's promises and His "faithful mercies shown to David" (v. 3)?

The second reading is from Paul's Letter to the Romans and is a continuation of the study from last week. Note that we have included verse 36 that was skipped in the reading. This is unfortunate because the verse contains a quote from Psalm 44 in which the Psalmist recounts how he continued in his walk with God in spite of his tribulations. In spite of hardship, "All this has come upon us: But we have not forgotten You. Nor have we dealt falsely with Your covenant" (Psalm 44:17). God allowed these trials to come upon the Psalmist to accomplish His sovereign purposes. "But for Your sake we are killed all day long; We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered" (Psalm 44:22). The Psalmist closes with a call for God's mercy. "Rise up, be our help, And redeem us for the sake of Your lovingkindness" (v. 26). As you read the text, imagine why God inspired Paul to quote from this particular Psalm.

> *35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35-39)*

One word that came to mind when we read this passage was "persistence." Paul said that we can persist and overcome our trials through patient persistence in prayer and trust in God, His nature and His promises. Paul provided a list of things that attempt to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Regardless of what comes upon us believers in the finished work of Jesus Christ we can never become separated from the love of God that flows through our Savior. Paul was no stranger to hardship and it's no wonder that he identified with the Psalmist plea to God for mercy. He recorded some of these hardships in his Second Letter to the Corinthians:

> *24 Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the*

> *deep. 26 I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; 27 I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. (2 Corinthians 11:24-28)*

Paul didn't boast about his hardships, rather he boasted in the fact that he was weak (2 Corinthians 12:10). He said, "Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (12:10). "

This week we received news about a terrible tragedy in our neighborhood. A ten-year boy was riding his bike just before dark and ran through a stop sign in front of a truck. He was taken by ambulance to the hospital, then flown to a children's hospital. In spite of the treatment, he passed away the next morning. His parents, who are strong Christians, made a statement to the media that they wanted to let the driver of the truck know that he hadn't done anything wrong and that he was forgiven. Would you have the strength and compassion to make such a statement in the midst of the most awful trial that could ever come upon a young family? "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (vv. 38-39). Or the sudden death of their beautiful son. Please pray that God's love would transcend all understanding during the time of tragedy in northern Indiana.

The Gospel lesson is from Matthew 14 and is Jesus' miracle of the feeding of the five thousand who were gathered to hear Him speak. This is the first recorded incident of Jesus multiplying food to feed a large crowd, the second time happens later in Matthew 15:29-39. The reading opens and closes with something that Jesus was fond of doing, praying by Himself. When you examine the Gospel records closely, you will see that Jesus often retreated to a private place to pray just before performing public miracles. The context of the reading is just after Jesus heard about the death of John the Baptist whom Jesus called the greatest man that ever lived (Matthew 11:11). As you read, note that we have included verses 22-23 in order to provide the most insight into the reading.

> *13 Now when Jesus heard about John, He withdrew from there in a boat to a secluded place by Himself; and when the people heard of this, they followed Him on foot from the cities. 14 When He went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick. 15 When it was evening, the disciples came to Him and said, "This place is desolate and the hour is already late; so send the crowds away, that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." 16 But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away; you give them something to eat!" 17 They said to Him, "We have here only five loaves and two fish." 18 And He said, "Bring them here to Me." 19 Ordering the people to sit down on the grass, He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food, and breaking the loaves He gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds,*

> *20 and they all ate and were satisfied. They picked up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve full baskets. 21 There were about five thousand men who ate, besides women and children. 22 Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away. 23 After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone. (Matthew 14:13-23)*

As we saw a picture of God's grace in the reading from Isaiah, so in the Gospel message Jesus' feeding of the five thousand was also a picture of grace. The bread and the fish are a picture of God's grace as we celebrate Jesus' death on the cross for us through the communion meal. Let's examine the reading more closely to find some significant points about both Jesus and the disciples.

Matthew said that when Jesus heard about the death of John the Baptist He retreated to a private place to pray. But Jesus wasn't going to have privacy that day as the crowds saw him get into the boat and followed Him (v. 13). In spite of His desire to pray by Himself, Matthew said that Jesus "felt compassion for them and healed their sick" (v. 14c). The word used in the original for "felt compassion" (plagchnizomai) is unique to Jesus and found only in the Gospels. It is used in referring to Jesus some 12 times and mostly in Matthew (5 times) , but also in Mark (4x) and Luke (3x) but not in John. Jesus was particularly moved when He experienced large crowds of people in need. In Mark 6:34 He said, "When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion (plagchnizomai) for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things." This was once again the case in the reading today. Matthew tells us that Jesus "saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick" (v. 14b-ff).

The five loaves and two fish were a meager proportion, image slicing five loaves of bread and then attempting to make sandwiches with it using just two fish. This didn't stop Jesus who fed the crowd so much that they had twelve baskets left over (v. 20). Notice how the number of baskets that were left over coincided with the number of Jesus' disciples, which also coincided with the number of the tribes of Israel. The number 12 in the Bible is used as a picture of perfection and symbolizes God's power and authority. Although the disciples missed the significance of the number, the count of the leftover baskets will be important to the disciples as they look back upon the event. Jesus said later in Matthew, "Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets full you picked up?" (Matthew 16:9).

Notice how both the disciples recognized Jesus authority over the crowds. In verse 15 Jesus' disciples asked Him to "send the crowds away." Then in verse 19 Matthew said, "Ordering the people to sit down on the grass." Their recognition of Jesus' supreme authority is significant because it shows the great level of faith that the disciples had for Him in spite of them totally missing the concept that Jesus could provide food for the crowd without the people having to return to town at the late hour when the bakeries were probably already closed. Jesus surprised the disciples with the huge miracle, yet the disciples didn't understand it until Jesus explained it to them later (Matthew 16:9).

What does all of this mean for our lives First, as we saw in the first reading we need to listen to God, and this comes from reading the Bible. Second, we like Jesus' disciples, also have to recognize Jesus' authority but at the same time we can rest in the fact that because Jesus has the authority we can place our faith in Him. We can trust that God will provide for our basic needs, such as Jesus did in feeding the crowd, but that He will also provide for our spiritual needs, especially in providing forgiveness for our sins and answering our prayers. Finally, God calls us to recount the blessings that He was provided to us. The disciples didn't understand the significance of Jesus feeding the crowd until He had explained it to them later. It is helpful to us when we are in the heat of the moment of the trials of our lives to sense how God may be working in that particular instant. This not only gives glory to God but helps us to trust in Him in future situations in which we can recall His past provision for us.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. We read in the Gospel lesson how Jesus' disciples underestimated Jesus' power yet at the same time they recognized His authority. Power flows from authority. Think one particular instance in which you underestimated Jesus power in your life. Based upon what you studied today, how would you look at this situation differently in the future?

2. Saint Paul said in the second reading, "38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39). What are some things in your life that work to separate you from God? Based upon your study today, list one or two and how God provides power to maintain your relationship with Him for each of these circumstances.

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/080314.cfm

First Reading Isaiah IS 55:1-3

Second Reading ROM 8:35, 37-39

Gospel Reading MT 14:13-21

Source(s):

Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB