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 8-2-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **8-2-2015**. This week we open with a reading from Exodus, where God performed a miracle to feed the multitude of Hebrew people who had just been delivered from slavery in Egypt. We then move to the letter that Saint Paul wrote to the Ephesians, where he describes what being a Christian looks like, contrasting new life in Christ to the old way of life in darkness. Finally we conclude with Jesus' declaration that he is bread from heaven, harkening back to the manna that was described in the first reading from Exodus.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Exodus. The Hebrew people had just been delivered from the captivity of the Egyptians. God raised up Moses to lead His people out of Egypt. As we will see, even though God performed many miraculous signs and provisions in this first phase of the Exodus the people quickly complained against Him and wanted to return to their captivity. As you read, ask yourself in what ways you too find it easy to complain about God's ways and would wish to return to captivity's predictability.

First Reading:

Exodus 16:1-15 NAS95 1 Then they set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the sons of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from the land of Egypt. 2 The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. 3 The sons of Israel said to them, "Would that

we had died by the LORD'S hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." 4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction. 5 "On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily." 6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the sons of Israel, "At evening you will know that the LORD has brought you out of the land of Egypt; 7 and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, for He hears your grumblings against the LORD; and what are we, that you grumble against us?" 8 Moses said, "This will happen when the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening, and bread to the full in the morning; for the LORD hears your grumblings which you grumble against Him. And what are we? Your grumblings are not against us but against the LORD." 9 Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, 'Come near before the LORD, for He has heard your grumblings.'" 10 It came about as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. 11 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 12 "I have heard the grumblings of the sons of Israel; speak to them, saying, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'" 13 So it came about at evening that the quails came up and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. 14 When the layer of dew evaporated, behold, on the surface of the wilderness there was a fine flake-like thing, fine as the frost on the ground. 15 When the sons of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "It is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat.

The Hebrew people were in an interesting transition All of their lives, they had been slaves. Now slavery is not desirable in any context, but it is predictable and structured. You don't have to make any decisions, everything is decided for you. In the midst of the oppression, though, your basic needs are taken care of. While it was not luxurious living, the Hebrew slaves had a sense of security that was no longer available to them in their new found freedom. Instead of looking at all that God had done to deliver them from their oppression and trust Him for their daunting future, they chose to rehearse the "good" points of their slavery (the security of food and shelter) and accused God of not caring about them.

This wasn't an isolated instance of grumbling, rather the text says, "The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness" (v. 2). In spite of their hard hearts, God heard the people and answered by telling Moses that He would "rain bread from heaven for you" even in the case when they did not obey Him (v. 4), which He knew they wouldn't. Moses explained to them that their complaints weren't against him but against God (v. 8). God made a special provision to provide for the sabbath by making the manna quantitatively different (a double portion) on the day before as well as qualitatively different – it would not spoil during the sabbath rest day. God then announced the miracle to Moses through the appearance of the Shekinah glory which the people saw (v. 10). In the meantime in the evening before the raining of the manna from

the sky began, God sent quail to the people (v. 13). The text concluded with the people seeing the manna and not recognizing what it was until Moses explained it to them (v. 15).The word "manna" in Hebrew means "what is it." As you can imagine, this was an extraordinary way for God to provide for His people. God seems to work in very unexpected ways.

There are many spiritual parallels in this reading between the provision of God through the manna and the person and work of Jesus Christ who, as we will see in the Gospel reading, called Himself "the bread of life" (John 6:35). In spite of the fact that the people grumbled against God He still provided food for them. The parallel in the New Testament is that in spite of the fact that most of the people didn't accept Jesus as their Messiah, God still provided salvation through Him. The manna was a very unique provision that was done only by God and could not come about by any natural means. In the same way, Jesus was God's supernatural provision and also did not come about by natural means but was instead born through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Ephesians and the context is Paul's teaching on the spiritual unity of believers in the church and the unique calling to which God calls His people to walk together in a new way outside of sensual and greedy practices.

Second Reading:

Ephesians 4:17-24 NAS95 17 So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; 19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. 20 But you did not learn Christ in this way, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, 22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

Paul typified the Gentiles as unbelievers who "walk[ed] in the futility of their mind[s], being darkened in their understanding" of the true salvation that comes only from God (v. 17). Their behavior is typical of the qualities displayed in the unbelieving world, and even among the grumbling Hebrews about whom we read in the first reading. In contrast, believers are called to set aside their former practices and walk in the newness of life, being renewed in their spirits and to put on the "new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth" (v. 24). Like the manna in the desert on the six day which was qualitatively different, believers are also called to be different from unbelievers who by their nature embrace ungodly behaviors because of the spiritual darkness that reigns in their hearts. As believers in Jesus, we now have a new nature in us. In order to understand our new nature, we must learn the truth about our identity

in Christ, which Paul says begins when our minds are renewed. This renewing of our minds is why Bible study, prayer and being with other believers is so important for our growth in the Christian life. These practices help us to begin to see things as God sees them and then our lives become transformed as we let His ways be our ways (Romans 12:1-3).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from John 6 where Jesus reveals to the people the parallel between God's provision of the manna in the desert and to Himself as the "bread of life" that provides eternal life through faith in Him. Knowing what happened in the story before we pick up the reading will be helpful. The immediate context of today's reading is just after the multiplying of the loaves and fishes in the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:1-15). Afterwards Jesus fled from there because He sensed that the people were going to take Him by force to make Him their king (v. 15). Jesus, though, did not leave the region with the disciples on their boat, but he nonetheless showed up on the other side with them. This is why they ask Him when he got there and explains why they are confused in today's reading (v. 25). It was during this time that a storm arose and the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water (v. 19). Jesus got into the boat which was then immediately at the opposite shore (v. 21). In this instance, the text says that Jesus wasn't in the boat and never mentioned whether or not He calmed the sea (refer to Mark 4:35-41, Luke 8:22-25, and Matthew 8:23-27). But from these other references, we know that Jesus was able to do miraculous things, which was part of Him showing His legitimate right to claim Himself as the Messiah.

Gospel Reading:

John 6:24-35 NAS95 24 So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they themselves got into the small boats, and came to Capernaum seeking Jesus. 25 When they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, "Rabbi, when did You get here?" 26 Jesus answered them and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. 27 Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal." 28 Therefore they said to Him, "What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?" 29 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." 30 So they said to Him, "What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform? 31 "Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'HE GAVE THEM BREAD OUT OF HEAVEN TO EAT.'" 32 Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. 33 "For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world." 34 Then they said to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread." 35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst."

Before we study the text we need to make an important statement about beliefs regarding communion. Jesus' point in this particular teaching wasn't whether or not He is spiritually present in

the elements of communion. These are matters that we leave to the church to decide as believers in many different Christian denominations believe including not just Catholics but also some Protestant denominations including Lutheran and Episcopal. The main point of Jesus' teaching is that belief in Him is the only way to obtain eternal life through the Father God. Even though some of the people were familiar with Jesus, this shouldn't have stopped them from seeing the miraculous signs that He was doing and how His work confirmed the teaching of the Old Testament (John 6:45).

The reading is the third of many misunderstandings that the people had about Jesus and the nature of the promised Messiah. In each case Jesus uses a common symbol to describe a spiritual reality. The first time this happened was back in Chapter 3 during His discussion with Nicodemus who misunderstood Jesus' reference to spiritual birth. Jesus explained the need to be born again or from above (John 3:3). The second case was Jesus' interaction with a Samaritan woman where Jesus equated trusting Him with "living water" that would satisfy the unquenchable thirst of the human soul (John 4:6-29). The symbolism that Jesus was using here with the Samaritan woman and the water was an illustration of the eternal life that can only come through faith in Him. Like Nicodemus (and to the Jews in today's reading), this connection between a concrete substance (birth, bread, water) and a spiritual reality wasn't obvious to the woman because she asked him to give her the water so she wouldn't have to keep coming to the well (John 4:15). Jesus gave a clue to His disciples about what was to come shortly after this interaction when they urged Him to eat something (John 4:31). Jesus answered them by saying, "I have food to eat that you do not know about," and "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work" (John 4:32, 34).This is very similar to what happened in the story today but instead of water Jesus used the symbolism of bread. This opens the next chapter in which Jesus feeds the people with physical food to provide for their temporal needs but unveils their greater need of eternal life through faith in God's only spiritual provision: Jesus, the heavenly manna.

Paul sheds light on these allusions from Israel's past for those of us who are reading this as Gentiles, without the history of the Jewish people as our backdrop. He gave the following explanation about the water, manna, and the people's unbelief in Exodus about which we read in the first reading:

1 Corinthians 10:1-5 NAS95 1 For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; 3 and all ate the same spiritual food; 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.

Paul wanted New Testament believers to understand the spiritual heritage and to learn from the mistakes that led to disbelief and rejection of God's provision for their lives. Therefore, it is important to understand this passage in light of the broader context of Jewish history. Jesus claimed to be the promised Messiah, God's special and chosen servant to deliver people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). What they expected of the Messiah and what Jesus portrayed were two very different things. The people had a hard time accepting that God's unexpected ways (faith in the suffering servant as explained in Isaiah 53) was better than their visions of Messiah (a political ruler

who would take care of their physical and material needs).

In today's story, people from among the five thousand whom Jesus fed earlier were searching for him (v. 24) Their reaction to finding Jesus miraculously on the other side of the lake was not what we would expect. They did not ask Him **how** He got there but rather **when** He got there, trying to piece together a plausible explanation (v. 25). Jesus didn't bother to answer their impertinent question, but rather cut to the heart of the matter of their deep spiritual need. They were overcome by their desire for physical bread, but Jesus saw their more critical need, spiritual food that would lead to eternal restoration and life. They followed Jesus there because they desired to eat their fill of the bread that He gave them last time, so Jesus explained to them that their physical need for bread was minor compared to their need for spiritual restoration with their Heavenly Father that came only from God. Jesus told them that although they saw the signs He did they still didn't believe in Him as the Messiah from God, but rather approached Him as their physical provider, a sort of genie on demand (v. 26). Remember that Jesus had to flee from them right after the feeding of the five thousand because He knew that they were going to try and make Him their civil King because they saw Him as their provider. Instead of going along with their folly, Jesus instead told them, "Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you" (v. 27).

Looking back to the manna in the desert, had the people not been so hard hearted they could have better understood God's provision. In the case of the manna it was collected for the first five days of the week and went bad overnight. But on the sixth day God provided a double amount of a special type which was preserved for a two day period in order to provide for a sabbath rest day. In the spiritual sense Jesus is our special manna, the one who provides our eternal Sabbath rest (Hebrews 4). The people in this story then bullheadedly asked Jesus for another sign, an attitude about which Jesus said later, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet" (Matthew 12:39). Jesus answered their request for a sign with an explanation of how God's provision of manna was similar to the spiritual nourishment that He desired to give them, if they would ask God to change their hearts so they could listen and receive God's provision to them through Christ as Messiah. We will see next week in verse 44 that Jesus continues to explain the way to God through Him by saying, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day." Jesus addresses their need for restoration in their relationship with the Father by referring back to Israel's history and said, "He gave them bread out of heaven to eat" (v. 31).

The people responded to Jesus' illustration of Himself as their spiritual bread in a similar way as did the Samaritan woman saying, "Lord, always give us this bread." Jesus answered them by using language which included the information about His interaction with the Samaritan woman and the sign of the living water. This he most likely did for the benefit of His disciples who had still not understood the sign of the feeding of the five thousand (Mark 8:17 – 21). Jesus used an "I am" statement which strongly indicated His divinity, saying "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst" (v. 34). Jesus was the double provision of the special manna that didn't perish on the sixth day that nourished the people into their Sabbath

rest. The work of God is not "works", for Jesus clarified this in verse 29: "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." Jesus explained that the way to God was uniquely through faith in Him.

We will see this claim better next week as we study the continuation of Jesus' teaching on this matter where Jesus said, "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and **believes** in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day" (v. 40). The heart of the matter was **belief** in Jesus as the one and only Son of the Father, the only One through Whom came eternal life. Though the people sought physical bread to satisfy their physical needs, Jesus cut to their greater need of spiritual healing which came only through belief in Him as the only way to God.

What does this mean for our lives? The main point of the reading was Jesus' profound statement that belief in Him as a type of spiritual manna was the only means of finding peace and eternal life with God. Unlike Nicodemus who seemingly believed Jesus later in his life (John 19:39), and the Samaritan woman who believed in Jesus immediately after listening to Him, many of the people in this story didn't believe and separated themselves from Him. This is evident in the infamous John 6-6-6- verse: "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore." After this statement Saint Peter boldly identified Jesus as the Christ, saying, "To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68c – 69).

To whom will you go? Will you seek eternal life through the machinations of being a good person and observing religious activities? Will you be like the Samaritan woman and Nicodemus who surrendered their lives to the person of Jesus Christ, or will you respond like many in the crowd that separated themselves from Jesus because their Messiah didn't measure up to their expectations? Later in this discourse Jesus said, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life" (John 6:63). May we be convinced from this passage to seek eternal life through faith in the One and Only means, Jesus Christ.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. What parallels do you see between the people of our day who want God on their own terms and the hard-hearted people of Israel in the Old and New Testament readings? What does the Ephesian's passage say about this way of thinking?

2. How can you be part of bringing a message of hope and light to people who are approaching God with an expectation of God being a genie on demand (and often being disillusioned with God's unexpected ways of interacting with them)? Are there areas of your own life that you need to work through disillusionment with the Lord's unexpected ways so that you can be freed up to minister to others authentically in their own struggles with surrendering to God?

Readings for the Week

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Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site:

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/080215.cfm

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 7-26-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **7-26-2015**. This week we see in the first reading a miracle by the Prophet Elisha in multiplying of the loaves to feed a large crowd. Later in the Gospel lesson we see Jesus doing something similar but on a larger scale in the feeding of the five thousand. We also study Paul's Letter to the Ephesians and see some godly behaviors to which God calls us to walk as His true followers.

This past week I was blessed to take a week away from my hectic work life and journey to the seacoast to spend a week with my wife and some of her extended family. During the week I had a chance to reflect upon the blessings which God has bestowed upon me and my family. I am thankful for His provision in my life and the luxuries that He has granted me. During the week I read the

story of "God's Double Agent" Bob Fu and all of the sacrifices he made in preaching the Gospel in China. His story makes me even more thankful for the things which God has given to me especially as I enjoyed a full week away from the normal struggles of the work week.

The first reading is from the Book of Acts. The context is just after the conversion of Saul of Tarsus to Christianity, now called Paul.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Second Kings in the section where Elijah's replacement Elisha ministered during the time of a great famine. Elisha was a great prophet who provided for the people in a similar way in which Jesus did in the feeding of the five thousand which we will read later in the Gospel lesson. Elisha performed this miracle right after he raised the son of the Shunammite woman and the rendering of a poison pot of stew into healthy food.

First Reading:

2 Kings 4:42-44 NAS95 42 Now a man came from Baal-shalishah, and brought the man of God bread of the first fruits, twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. And he said, "Give them to the people that they may eat." 43 His attendant said, "What, will I set this before a hundred men?" But he said, "Give them to the people that they may eat, for thus says the LORD, 'They shall eat and have some left over.'" 44 So he set it before them, and they ate and had some left over, according to the word of the LORD.

Here Elisha multiplied through God's power some twenty barley loaves into a quantity sufficient to feed one hundred men and most likely their women and children. God used Elisha in many such ways to reveal His power and to call the people to follow the One True God. In a similar way, Jesus used signs to reveal the source of His true power and to point the people to faith in Him (=God). Elisha was different though because he rightly didn't claim to be God or the Messiah but rather pointed the way to Him through the revelation of His power through signs and miracles.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The first reading is from Ephesians 4. The context is following Paul's stating of the revelation of the mystery of God that the Gentiles were fellow heirs with the Jews in the kingdom of God (Ephesians 4:6). Paul explained that he was a minister to the Gentiles (Ephesians 3:8) and how he prayed that the Ephesians would understand the riches of God's glory and to "know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge" (3:19).

Second Reading:

Ephesians 4:1-6 NAS95 1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with

patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

God calls us to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called" (v. 1). What is this calling? The key lies in the adverb "therefore." As we have seen in previous editions of Mass Notes we have to ask "what is it there for"? In this case it links this passage to the previous doctrine described in chapter 3: "8 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; 10 so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 3:8-10). God is making a point to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places (the supernatural realm) about Who He is through the church (you and me and fellow believers). It's not just about me and what I get out of my church experience. Instead, my life becomes about walking in a way that reflects God's glory to the observant supernatural realm. What does this look like? Paul said it includes attitudes of humility, gentleness, having patience, "showing tolerance for one another in love," and working to preserve unity "in the bond of peace."

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson is Jesus' feeding of the five thousand along the shores of the Sea of Galilee. This chapter of John marks the beginning of a series of turning points and especially the one we will study in future weeks in an easy to remember chapter and verse: 6:66. These turning points come about as the people begin to determine in their hearts whether they are true followers of Jesus. One of these turning points occurred in the previous chapter. "For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God" (John 5:18). This is where the rubber meets the road; the true followers of God are those that recognize Jesus as God in the flesh, the Messiah, rather than just a miracle doer who they though would deliver them from their Roman oppressors.

Gospel Reading:

John 6:1-15 NAS95 1 After these things Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias). 2 A large crowd followed Him, because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick. 3 Then Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat down with His disciples. 4 Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was near. 5 Therefore Jesus, lifting up His eyes and seeing that a large crowd was coming to Him, said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?" 6 This He was saying to test him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do. 7 Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little." 8 One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, 9 "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?" 10 Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat

down, in number about five thousand. 11 Jesus then took the loaves, and having given thanks, He distributed to those who were seated; likewise also of the fish as much as they wanted. 12 When they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments so that nothing will be lost." 13 So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. 14 Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world." 15 So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.

As the story progressed, Jesus asked Philip (who was from this region) to provide for the crowd. Philip responded to Jesus showing that he had resources in the amount of 200 days wages, a significant amount but worthless that far away from the city and in light of the huge size of the crowd. Evidently, the disciples two by two ministry in the preceding weeks had been fruitful in terms of donations. Nevertheless the people had followed Jesus some distance away from the city and saw Him as One Who would provide for them, so it was natural for Jesus to accommodate their needs through His disciples. In this case, the people found out that God was the true multiplier of things. The people did indeed recognize Jesus as a Prophet, seemingly the One prophesied about in Deuteronomy 18:15. However, they misunderstood the role of the Messiah (vv. 14 – 15). The people saw in Jesus a political ruler Who could free them from their poverty and Roman oppression. In the end, twelve baskets were left over corresponding exactly to the count of Jesus' disciples. Each disciple was left with one basket to highlight Jesus' ability to provide in the midst of impossible circumstances. God provided the food regardless of the people's faith and used this sign to point to the True Messiah Jesus.

We too may have misunderstandings about how Jesus' power should be used in the world. Though we should ask God to provide for our circumstances we have to recognize that like the people of the biblical era we often want God to use His power for our comfort, security, and advancement. We need to careful to let God be God and not expect Him to be our personal "Genie in the bottle" performing miracles on demand. Nobody stands above for His is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords and His purposes are beyond understanding. Even though the people in this story wanted Jesus to become their civil King, instead Jesus ministered to them to meet their spiritual needs. One day Jesus will return to rule and reign on the earth and fulfil the expectations of a perfect ruler.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the second reading we read God's calling for us to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called" (Ephesians 4:1). List some ways in which you may walk in a manner worthy of a heavenly calling. What are some specifics things to which God may be calling you to change in your life?

2. In the Gospel lesson Jesus called upon God's miraculous power to perform a miracle to provide for people's basic needs and at the same time to confirm Himself as the Messiah. It is evident from reading the synoptic Gospels that His disciples didn't understand the miracle until Jesus explained it

to them some time later after feeding a second large crowd. What ways have you missed understanding the miracles of God in your own life? List two or three ways in which God has recently provided for you that you may have taken for granted. Tell God your thankfulness for His provision and ask Him to point out to you ways in which He continues to do so.

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/072615.cfm

Source(s):

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Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 7-19-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **7-19-2015**. 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."

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 were 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 are now provided 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 separate 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 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 removed 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.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. One of the things with which I have struggled is with the strong sense of separation I felt after leaving my job at one of the Big Three automakers 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 engineer 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 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?

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/071915.cfm

First Reading JER 23:1-6

Second Reading EPH 2:13-18

Gospel Reading MK 6:30-34

Source(s):

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

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Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 7-5-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **7-5-2015**. This week we learn about the commission of the prophet Ezekiel. Then we study the value of weakness in the life of Paul and by application how God uses it for our good. We close with a study of Mark's Gospel in which we see the rejection of Jesus' message by those close to him from His own home town.

The first reading is from the Prophet Ezekiel. The context is the opening of his prophecy and would have been written after he had been carried off captive to Babylon in 597 BC. Ezekiel said in 1:1 that he was 30 years old when he began his ministry, the same age as when the priests begin working in their position. Ezekiel was unique in that he held both offices, that of prophet and priest (see Ezekiel 1:3). The young man Ezekiel wrote of the visions he received from God while he "by the river Chebar among the exiles" (1:1). Today's reading is God's commissioning of Ezekiel to speak to the Nation of Israel that was in the process of being judged by Him for their sin.

First Reading

Ezekiel 2:1-5 NAS95 1 Then He said to me, "Son of man, stand on your feet that I may speak with you!" 2 As He spoke to me the Spirit entered me and set me on my feet; and I heard Him speaking to me. 3 Then He said to me, "Son of man, I am sending you to the sons of Israel, to a rebellious people

who have rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day. 4 I am sending you to them who are stubborn and obstinate children, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD.' 5 As for them, whether they listen or not–for they are a rebellious house–they will know that a prophet has been among them."

Since Ezekiel was far removed from the temple his ministry duties as a priest would have been practically eliminated. However, God called Ezekiel to a new ministry as a prophet and empowered him through the sending of the Holy Spirit specially to him. The Spirit of God was the One that "set [him] on [his] feet" and only after this event did Ezekiel begin hearing God speak directly to him in contrast to the visions he recorded in the opening of the book. Now that Ezekiel was commissioned as God's prophet, the oracles began pouring out to him. First, God told him to whom he was sent: the "sons of Israel" (v. 3b). Next, as if Ezekiel didn't already know, God told him about the rebellious nature of the people. God used multiple harsh phrases to describe them including rebellious (3 times), transgressors, stubborn, obstinate, as well as implied that they would not listen (v. 5).

What can we learn from this commissioning passage from Ezekiel's life? While we may not be a prophet or a priest, we can see some principles about how God works and what our response to Him should be. First, when God calls a servant He empowers them through His Spirit. As church age believers we are guaranteed that the Holy Spirit lives within us (Ephesians 1:14) to empower us to do works of service that He has prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). Second, we are to carry out God's commission regardless of the response of those who we are serving. We should not be complexly oblivious to receiving constructive feedback in how to improve in serving people. However, this passage is teaching that sometimes our service will go unappreciated. When that is the case God is calling us to remain faithful, regardless of the response.

I know of a missionary who worked in Germany for a dozen years without seeing even a single faith convert to the Lord. It would have been very easy to be discouraged and to evaluate his work as a failure. But in God's value system this man, like Ezekiel, was faithful even though there wasn't a lot on the outside to show for it. In Ezekiel's case, rabbinical tradition says that he was eventually killed by someone who resisted his message. Both of these examples serve to encourage us to persevere under adverse circumstance when we are trying to do God's will in our own lives.

The second reading is from Saint Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians. In this passage, Paul is explaining the importance of weakness for our spiritual growth.

Second Reading

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 NAS95 7 Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me–to keep me from exalting myself! 8 Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. 9 And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. 10 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.

When is weakness ever a good thing? In our culture the answer is never, but in God's economy it serves a valuable purpose. Paul, because of his unique position as one who had direct revelation from God, could have tried to do ministry in his own strength. Dependence upon God is our life source. Unfortunately we can be deceived into thinking that we don't need God, even as a Christian. So God in His kindness and wisdom allowed the "thorn in the flesh" to come upon Paul. The "thorn in the flesh" is a messenger of Satan, which is obviously something bad, something we wouldn't want for ourselves. Even though Paul pleaded and thought that he would be more productive without it, God reassured him that this bad thing could be used for his own good. The good that God used it for was to break Paul's of the dangerous and self-destructive nature of self-reliance and instead develop a spirit of dependence upon God which was his lifeline.

Like Paul, we are often deluded into believing that real life is found in exerting our independence and power over our circumstances. Self-reliance though, does not lead us to eternal life. Instead, abiding in Christ and dependence upon God is where real life is found (John 15:1-5). These character qualities of abiding and dependence upon God do not come naturally to us. God, in His infinite wisdom, knows how to keep us close to Himself and He will use even bad circumstances, i.e. a thorn in the flesh, to carry out His purpose in our life.

In the next passage, we will see a fatal response to Jesus' display of supernatural power in his home town of Nazareth.

Gospel Reading

Mark 6:1-6 NAS95 1 Jesus went out from there and came into His hometown; and His disciples followed Him. 2 When the Sabbath came, He began to teach in the synagogue; and the many listeners were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get these things, and what is this wisdom given to Him, and such miracles as these performed by His hands? 3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?" And they took offense at Him. 4 Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own household." 5 And He could do no miracle there except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. 6 And He wondered at their unbelief. And He was going around the villages teaching.

In this vignette we see people discrediting Jesus' ministry because of their own short sightedness and resentment. In other passages, we see people being humbled by Jesus' display of power. Here the people of Jesus' hometown list the names of specific family members in an attempt to invalidate His miraculous signs. This would seemingly let them off the hook for being accountable to recognize the Messiah among them. The proper response to the Messiah would be to follow Him but they choose to disdain Him. As we saw in the first reading the people of Israel are a rebellious lot, obstinate, and refuse to listen even when miraculous signs are manifested in their presence. As a

result of their great lack of faith Jesus' miraculous signs were withheld because God shows up when we exercise faith in Him (Hebrews 11:6).

This passage teaches us that there are two responses to Jesus' rightful claim as Messiah. One response is to believe and place our trust in Jesus even when it feels kind of awkward or it costs us dearly. The second response is to push away the overwhelming evidence by discrediting the messengers of the Gospel and His message. These people could see the signs because they were coming from Jesus who was to them just a regular human being. Instead of shifting their lives to be open to Jesus' claim of divinity and messiahship they rejected Him. We can learn from their fatal response.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. I have been struggling with some health issues that are chronic in nature and undiagnosed. The daily frustration and concern over this causes me to live my life in a way much closer to God's kingdom than the world. Without this constant struggle I would not be as conscious of my need for the Lord and his daily sustenance.
List one weakness with which you are suffering from which you have asked God to deliver you. Talk to Him in prayer about how He might be using this to develop your dependence upon Him.

2. During the Fourth of July holiday I frequently travel back to my hometown to celebrate. I encounter people who are aware of the spiritual transformation that happened in my life when I surrendered my life to Jesus. Sometimes they respond to me in a similar way as the people in Jesus' hometown who resented the fact that He was holy.
How can the passages from this week's study encourage you to persist in your own holiness and personal service of the Lord even when others disparage or scoff at your spiritual development?

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/070515.cfm

First Reading EZ 2:2-5

Second Reading 2 COR 12:7-10

Gospel Reading MK 6:1-6

Source(s):

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

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Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 6-28-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **6-28-2015**. This week we open with Saint Paul's letter to the Corinthian believers, encouraging them to be generous with their suffering brothers and sisters in Christ. The Gospel lesson tells the story of Jesus healing two marginalized people: a little girl who died and a woman who suffered with bleeding for many years. In both passages, we see that the heart of God is tender toward those who are suffering.

The first reading is from the Apocrypha. Our study will begin with the second reading, which is from Saint Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians.

Second Reading

On his third missionary journey, Saint Paul encouraged Gentile Christians to help their struggling brothers and sisters in Christ who were impacted by a severe famine in Jerusalem (see Acts 24:17). In this part of his letter to the believers in Corinth, he is urging them to excel at being financially generous and to complete their pledge of support to those who are in physical need. In the first part of this section, he commends them for leading the way in their faith and conduct. He then asks them to become leaders in the area of generosity. So it is not only important to want to give, but to follow through and actually sacrifice on behalf of others. He calls the act of giving a "gracious work" (v. 7).

He then ties in this "gracious work" with the sacrifice that Christ made on our behalf, which is the motivating force behind the compassionate giving that should characterize Christians.

(Verses 8, 10, and 11 which were omitted from the reading were included in order to provide the full context and meaning).

2 Corinthians 8:7-15 NAS95 7 "But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also. 8 I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also. 9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich. 10 I give my opinion in this matter, for this is to your advantage, who were the first to begin a year ago not only to do this, but also to desire to do it. 11 But now finish doing it also, so that just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it by your ability. 12 For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. 13 For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality– 14 at this present time your abundance being a supply for their need, so that their abundance also may become a supply for your need, that there may be equality; 15 as it is written, "HE WHO gathered MUCH DID NOT HAVE TOO MUCH, AND HE WHO gathered LITTLE HAD NO LACK."

Saint Paul points out a few key principles to encourage the Corinthian believers to follow through on their pledge to provide financial relief to the starving Christians in Jerusalem. Paul challenged the Corinthians to be generous in giving the things that God had so generously provided, saying that they "abound in everything" else (v. 7), so why would generosity not be part of their reputation as well? This calling to give was not a command but rather a challenge that Paul provided to reveal the true "sincerity of [their] love" (v. 8b). He is clear that this calling to gracious giving is his opinion, but from what we know about the other times that Paul has given his personal views it is a sound biblical principle if not an outright command.

Paul went on to explain how Jesus was the example of sacrificial giving by saying, "though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich" (v. 9b –ff). Paul's reasoning is twofold. One, if the Corinthians give during their times of prosperity they can count upon other Christians to give to them during their own time of need. The most basic decency of a human citizen of the world is in giving to others in need out of one's abundance. Second, sacrificial giving is evidence of their true calling to serve God. Although a seed must of course be initially planted, it doesn't go far without proper watering and continued nurturing. Paul admonished the Corinthians not to just begin the good work of giving, but to carry it to completion (v. 11). He closed with a quote from Exodus 16:18, a passage in which Moses explained how through God's sovereign control everyone gathered manna in the exact amount that they required. In the

new economy of God after the Exodus God called the Hebrews and all people subsequent to them to act as His agent in distributing goods evenly from each person's excess to fill other people's needs.

What was happening back then historically can be a lesson to us in our own day and age. First, he calls them to recognize the connectedness of the universal church. He challenged them to step up to the plate and become an example for the other churches, who were already contributing generously to the cause of helping their brothers and sisters. Paul wrote to this group of believers in a previous letter about the connectedness of the church by calling Christians the "body of Christ". In explaining how each believer is interdependent, he said, "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26). What happens to one believer (good or bad) impacts the rest of the body. This interconnectedness with the universal church should awaken our sensitivity to others around us; those we know and even those we do not know. Being others-oriented can release us from the tyranny of self-absorption, which is more oppressive than we often recognize. God's structure of connecting us to the larger body of Christ and giving us an awareness of others in need is a blessing to our spiritual growth and maturity.

The second main point that Paul makes about giving in this passage is that the motive behind the giving is more important than the actual amount of the gift. He emphasizes that generous giving can be an outward display of sincerity of heart and love for others. The supreme example of generous giving is Jesus Christ Himself. Though Christ had all of the privileges of heaven, He gave up His rightful place of authority and riches to submit Himself to the poverty of this world. One of the early hymns of the church focused on Christ's humility for our sake and reinforces the theme of why we should be generous to others. It is a way that we can show the world who Jesus is.

Philippians 2:5-11 NAS95 5 "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 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. 9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

The end result is that through Christ's lowering of Himself to our poverty level, He could bring us to a place of richness beyond what this world could offer. Being motivated by Christ's great sacrifice for us is a sign of really understanding the immensity of grace that has been given to us.

Another important and encouraging principle that Saint Paul gives in regard to giving is that God entrusts us with different amounts of financial means so that we might steward resources in a way that promotes equality and unity in the body of Christ. Some parts of our world have very little in regard to material resources. These ones who are not rich in the world's eyes are often rich in other resources, such as faith, relationships and having an eternal perspective. Paul says that their richness can supply what a materially wealthy community of believers might not have. And a

materially wealthy community can benefit those who are impoverished by giving sacrificially and providing a sense of unity among the believers (see also 1 Timothy 6:11-19). So while God could magically provide for all of the needs in the world, He does not override the will of believers, but instead, trusts us to live in the power of Christ so that we participate in this "gracious work". We have received grace and so we give graciously to others out of the abundance of what Christ has given to us. This passage encourages all believers to consider our part in being the hands and feet of Christ.

Gospel Reading

Mark 5:21-43 NAS95 21 When Jesus had crossed over again in the boat to the other side, a large crowd gathered around Him; and so He stayed by the seashore. 22 One of the synagogue officials named Jairus came up, and on seeing Him, fell at His feet 23 and implored Him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter is at the point of death; please come and lay Your hands on her, so that she will get well and live." 24 And He went off with him; and a large crowd was following Him and pressing in on Him. 25 A woman who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years, 26 and had endured much at the hands of many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was not helped at all, but rather had grown worse– 27 after hearing about Jesus, she came up in the crowd behind Him and touched His cloak. 28 For she thought, "If I just touch His garments, I will get well." 29 Immediately the flow of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction. 30 Immediately Jesus, perceiving in Himself that the power proceeding from Him had gone forth, turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched My garments?" 31 And His disciples said to Him, "You see the crowd pressing in on You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?'" 32 And He looked around to see the woman who had done this. 33 But the woman fearing and trembling, aware of what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth. 34 And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your affliction." 35 While He was still speaking, they came from the house of the synagogue official, saying, "Your daughter has died; why trouble the Teacher anymore?" 36 But Jesus, overhearing what was being spoken, said to the synagogue official, "Do not be afraid any longer, only believe." 37 And He allowed no one to accompany Him, except Peter and James and John the brother of James. 38 They came to the house of the synagogue official; and He saw a commotion, and people loudly weeping and wailing. 39 And entering in, He said to them, "Why make a commotion and weep? The child has not died, but is asleep." 40 They began laughing at Him. But putting them all out, He took along the child's father and mother and His own companions, and entered the room where the child was. 41 Taking the child by the hand, He said to her, "Talitha kum!" (which translated means, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"). 42 Immediately the girl got up and began to walk, for she was twelve years old. And immediately they were completely astounded. 43 And He gave them strict orders that no one should know about this, and He said that something should be given her to eat.

This is a powerful story of Jesus' healing power and His compassion for marginalized people. The two females in this story ran parallel lives until the day that Jesus came to town. The day the little girl was born must have brought great joy to Jairus and his family twelve years earlier. Jairus was a religious man, obviously respected in the community, which is shown by his upfront request to have

Jesus come to his home to heal his daughter. At the time when this little girl came into the world, the woman with the hemorrhage began her long journey on her desperate reach toward her last hope, Jesus. Twelve years was a long time to be struggling with a bleeding issue, which would have marginalized her in the ceremonial world of the Jews as "unclean" in everyday social settings. After twelve long years of seeking help in every possible form, it is understandable how desperate she would have been. She was so desperate that she was willing to go against the social taboo of being in a crowd of people even though she was "unclean" in order to reach out and touch Jesus' garment in hopes of being healed.

In the end, Jesus did heal her, but not without correcting her theology. While she placed all her hope in touching his garment, as if his clothes held some special force that could be invoked by her grasping reach, He helped her to see that it was her faith that so moved the heart of God to heal her. This is an important point for all of us to recognize. Faith is living as if something unseen and unrealized is actually at work. When your faith is put in God, it means to lean your full weight on Him, as if there is no other lifeline. The Bible describes it this way: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). It also says that without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Jesus thought that is was important for her to understand that she was healed by reaching out to the right Person, not because of her superstitious beliefs.

Now that the woman was healed and made clean, it was time for Jesus to turn his attention to the original request that brought Him on the journey to begin with, Jairus' daughter. She was sick when Jairus went to implore Jesus to come heal her. But in this delay, she died, and the report came to Jairus that all hope for healing was gone. Jesus, though, encouraged Jairus to have faith and believe that He could not only heal a sick daughter, but that He could also bring her back to life. The Gospel records other incidents where Jesus raised people back to life: the widow's son (Luke 7:13-15) and Lazarus (John 11:43-44). These important accounts were recorded so that we could believe and have life that is truly life in Jesus. Saint John put it this way: "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:30-31).

How does this story contribute to our understanding of Jesus and the role of humans as we seek to have relationship with Him? We learn that Jesus is God because He has power to heal and to raise the dead. While magicians and charlatans could conjure up evil powers to perform signs and wonders, no one but God has the authority to bring people back from the dead. It is clear from this account that the Gospel writer is making a case for Jesus' divinity and authority. Our response, then, is will we believe and surrender to His divinity and authority in our own lives? Will we come to Him as the One who said that He is the way, the truth and the LIFE (John 14:6)? Or will we try to find life on our own terms, pursuing a little bit of religion to satisfy our guilty conscience? Obviously, the Gospel writers went to great lengths to provide enough information about Jesus to convince us of His rightful place as King and Lord of our lives. May our search for His leadership in our lives be as desperate and as focused as that of Jairus and the woman with the bleeding issue.

As I type, I am reminded of a recent incident that has left me desperate for Jesus to be in control of my life and to experience His lordship over my knee-jerk reaction to defend myself. I was criticized for not doing part of my job well. At first I wanted to defend myself and prove my worth to others. But after taking a deep breath, I turned to Jesus and silently asked Him what He wanted me to learn in this situation. I still don't know what that is, but I trust that He will help me to let Him be Lord of my life so that I don't have to rely on my accomplishments or my self-defense to prop up my ego. Instead of taking matters into my own hands and trying to find life in my own sense of self-righteousness, I can rely on Him, leaning my full weight on His perfection. I can learn from people's criticism and solicit feedback so that I can learn and grow. We are all a work in progress!

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. How do you feel when you consider the great compassion that Jesus had for the two women who were in need? What needs do you have that you can talk to Him about today? How does knowing His compassion for you encourage your approach to Him?

2. In both passages, Jesus was highlighted as One who has ultimate power. In the New Testament lesson, He became poor to bring us to His heavenly riches and in the Gospel lesson, He was able to heal and raise the dead. When you look at your life and the obstacles that seem to get you down, how does knowing that Christ has ultimate power influence your walk of faith? Sometimes, we are discouraged because we do not see Him using His power to do what we think He should do on our behalf. But take a few moments and ask Him to help you to see where He wants to exercise His authority in your life. See if in this next week your heart might be willing to desperately seek out His lordship in your life as you come up against obstacles and discouragement.

3. The Bible says to pray without ceasing (1 Thess 5:17) regardless of the circumstances. How hard do you think the woman in this story prayed for help? Since she had nowhere else to turn it's easy to imagine that she was very persistent in her calling upon God for help. Certainly, God allowed these dire circumstances in the woman's life in order to bring her to faith in the Lord Jesus for the forgiveness of her sins. Perhaps the woman was always faithful to pray, even before she became afflicted with the disease. Jairus, too, was a religious man, yet he lost his little daughter to a terrible illness. He knew where to turn when life got out of control. He desperately searched for Jesus, the Son of God and the rightful Lord of the universe. These two individuals are pictures of desperate hearts seeking God's help.

How bad do things have to get before we pray? Regardless of our circumstances**, God has called us not to wait until troubles come our way, but to be faithful and pray in order to obey.** This includes praying not only about our needs but also for the needs of others.

What are some practical ways that we may improve our level of persistence in prayer? Here are some methods that have worked for me, although they may not be suitable for everyone.

1.Write your prayer requests down on a 3×5 card. Carry this with you and as you find time pray throughout the day. It's helpful to categorize your requests, such as "Healing" or "Come to Faith in

Jesus."

2.Consider the concept of constructing a kind of "prayer maze" in your head by assigning the people for whom you are praying to a geographical map of where they are located. For example, you could begin with praying for people in your home town, then move on to prayers for those located in the western part of your state, then to the north, east, and so on. This has proven very helpful to me since many times I pray for people during my daily exercise where I would not have access to cards on which I had listed prayer requests.

3.Finally, pray! Ask God to show you ways to improve your prayer life. In a previous edition of Mass Notes we discussed several weeks ago in the section on Luke 16:1-13. The application of this text was that God has called us to use our talents and ingenuity in order to lead people to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Pray and ask God to energize your prayer life through the use of your time, talents, and materials possessions. This includes using our technological devices like smart phones and computers.

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/062815.cfm

First Reading WIS 1:13-15; 2:23-24

Second Reading 2 COR 8:7, 9, 13-15

Gospel Reading MK 5:21-43

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 6-14-2015

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



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **6-14-2015**. This week we open with Ezekiel 17: 22-24. The prophet uses a metaphor to show how God sets up kings and takes them down and will eventually establish a King who will reign over all. Then we move to St. Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5: 6-10, encouraging the use of our earthly bodies for eternal purposes. Finally we conclude with St. Mark 4: 26-34, as Jesus uses parables to teach about the kingdom of God.

Introduction to the First Reading:

When an F5 tornado struck Joplin, Missouri, on May 22, 2011, 158 people died and countless others were injured. Tornado warnings had been issued and the sirens activated, but many did not seek shelter soon enough. One study found that only 10 percent of the population respond immediately when a tornado warning is given. The others respond with what the researcher called, "denial." * Lives are lost when people don't believe and heed the warnings.

Ezekiel was a prophet of God sent out to warn God's people of impending destruction. God had always been their shelter in a time of storm, but they had strayed far from Him. If they didn't turn back to Him destruction would surely overtake them. Ezekiel and many of the other prophets were sent to sound the alarm, but sadly, many did not heed the prophets' warning.

The people of God were composed of twelve tribes descended from Abraham's grandson Jacob, (renamed Israel in Genesis 35:10). These descendants and the land God gave them for a home were called Israel. From them, the Messiah Jesus would come, and through the salvation He would bring, all the nations of the world would be blessed.

Despite their privileged position in God's plan for the nations, Israel rebelled against God and went after the false gods of the surrounding nations. They forgot the Lord's commands and worshiped

idols. This was the fate of King Solomon when he ruled in Israel after his father David's reign. At first he followed God, and God gave him great wisdom to rule justly. But when Solomon married foreign women, he began to follow after their gods. Because of his idolatry, God would take ten of the tribes from his rule and leave his posterity the tribes of Benjamin and Judah only. The ten tribes became known as the Northern Kingdom and were called Israel. The remaining two tribes formed the Southern Kingdom and were called Judah. It was to Judah that God sent Ezekiel with His warnings.

God had already sent an invading army from Babylon to take Judah into captivity. Ezekiel was with the first wave of captives taken to Babylon. Some of God's people, however, still remained in Jerusalem, Judah's capital. If they didn't repent and turn back to God, they would face a similar fate as their brothers. They ignored the warning, and instead of seeking God, they sought an alliance with Egypt. That failed, and Babylon conquered Jerusalem taking most of the people who resided there into captivity.

In the First Reading, Ezekiel uses trees as a metaphor for rulers God sets up and takes down. When kings abandoned God and led the people far away from Him, God sent prophets like Ezekiel to call them back to God and warn them of impending destruction. When the king and his people persisted in their rebellion, God sent conquerors to come and take them captive.

Ezekiel looked forward to the time when God will set up another king. God will take a twig from the lofty top of the cedar and plant it on the mountain of Israel, and it will bear fruit and birds of all kinds will come and prosper there. This tree is a reference to Jesus who will be established in Israel and will bring salvation to all who come to Him. And someday He will reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords in a heavenly kingdom that has no end.

Another prophet sounds the warning for us. St. John tells us:

16 "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. 17 For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. 18 He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (Gospel of St. John 3: 16-18)

Those who believe in Jesus have eternal life. Those that don't, stand judged already. Are you going to heed the warning and believe?

* http://www.mprnews.org/story/2012/05/09/storm-ready-human-reaction#gallery accessed 5/18/15

First Reading:

Ezekiel 17:22-24 NAS95 22 Thus says the Lord GOD, "I will also take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and set it out; I will pluck from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one and I will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. 23 "On the high mountain of Israel I will plant it, that it may bring forth boughs and bear fruit and become a stately cedar. And birds of every kind will nest under it; they will nest in the shade of its branches. 24 "All the trees of the field will know that I am the LORD; I bring down the high tree, exalt the low tree, dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will perform it."

Introduction to the Second Reading:

1 and 2 Corinthians were written by St. Paul the Apostle to the church in Corinth. There were sin issues in the church, and Paul had addressed them frankly in 1 Corinthians. Now in his second letter, he wanted to reassure the Corinthians that he did this, not out of anger, but out of love. In 2 Corinthians 2, Paul encourages the Corinthian church to forgive and restore the one who had caused the problems. He goes on to discuss practical matters of Christian living such as financial giving and caution regarding relationships with unbelievers. But often his thoughts turn from earthly matters to eternal blessings.

In the proclamation of the gospel, St. Paul had undergone extreme persecution which he recounts in 2 Corinthians 4. He testified, *"We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; [9] persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed."* Encouragement came from knowing that these "light troubles," as he called them, were producing eternal results—people were hearing about and believing in Jesus. His focus was not on the temporary suffering but on eternal rewards. He continued this focus in chapter 5.

In the first five verses, St. Paul compares our bodies with an earthly tent. Tents are fragile and temporary and subject to destruction. So are our earthly bodies. While we are in this "tent" we groan and are burdened, Paul tells us. We long for a heavenly body, which is like an eternal house not a fragile tent.

In the Second Reading (v. 6-10), Paul acknowledges that it would be much better to be away from this body and home with the Lord in heaven. But until then, Paul tells us to do what is pleasing to the Lord. God has ministry for us to do, and it would be pointless to waste this time by wishing we were in heaven. But on the other hand, knowing that we are going to heaven someday will give us courage and perseverance when we face persecution and hardship in this life.

In addition, St. Paul reminds us we will someday have to give an account to Christ for what we have done in this life as Christians. Did we serve Him well? Did we tell others about Christ? Will He someday be able to say to you and me, "*Well done, good and faithful servant*"? He will if we

faithfully use these earthly bodies to accomplish his eternal purposes.

Second Reading:

2 Corinthians 5:6-10 NAS95 6 Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord– 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight– 8 we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. 9 Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Wherever Jesus went, a crowd of the curious gathered. Often He spoke to them in parables. A parable is a simple, everyday story that represents a spiritual truth or moral principle. It usually compares a spiritual concept with an earthly object or event.

In the Gospel Reading, two parables are given. The first one begins, "*The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil.*" Stories like these are often told to illustrate or illuminate a truth. But Jesus spoke in parables not to clarify the truth but to obscure it. It was a judgment on those whose hearts were hard. To the unbelieving, the parables were incomprehensible riddles, but to those who wanted to understand the truth, Jesus would give them understanding. He said to His disciples and His true followers, "*To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables, [12] so that while seeing, they may see and not perceive, and while hearing, they may hear and not understand….*"*

In the first parable, the kingdom of God is compared to a man who plants seeds. While he goes about his daily routine and without any further help from the man, the seed sprouts and matures. So it is with us. We plant the seed of the gospel in people's hearts when we teach or preach or proclaim the truth of the Bible to our friends, neighbors, and relatives. Then God causes the implanted truth to take root and grow. A mature Christian is the result.

The second parable says that the kingdom of God is like a tiny mustard seed which grows into a large plant with branches capable of providing shade for birds of the air. The church was small in the beginning–just a little band of disciples. But when those men were empowered by the Holy Spirit to be witnesses of the Gospel to the whole world, the church grew rapidly. Many have found comfort and salvation there. If we plant the seed of the Word of God in people's hearts, God will cause that seed to spout and the church to flourish.

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*Information gleaned from a sermon by John MacArthur accessed 5/20/15.
http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/90-464/the-purpose-for-parables

Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson is from Mark 4: 26-34:

Mark 4:26-34 NAS95 26 And He was saying, "The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; 27 and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows–how, he himself does not know. 28 The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. 29 But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come." 30 And He said, "How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it? 31 It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the soil, 32 yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches; so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR can NEST UNDER ITS SHADE." 33 With many such parables He was speaking the word to them, so far as they were able to hear it; 34 and He did not speak to them without a parable; but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. What would you need to do differently in order to live your life for eternal purposes? List two areas in which you will write down on a card or in your personal journal.

2. If we plant the seed of the Word of God in people's hearts, God will cause it to grow. What are some ways you can plant more "seeds" this week? Give at least two ways in which this could be done.

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/061415.cfm

First Reading EZ 17:22-24

Second Reading 2 COR 5:6-10

Gospel Reading MK 4:26-34

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Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Keywords: tree, body, judgment, seeds, plant, kingdom, parable

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Mass Study Notes for Sunday 5-24-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **5-24-2015**, Pentecost Sunday. We open with the first reading from Acts that chronicled the Day of Pentecost when God sent the Holy Spirit to indwell the believers in the early church. Then we move onto the second reading from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians and discuss the gifts of the Spirit. We conclude with the Gospel lesson from Saint John where we will examine what it means when Jesus said, "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained" (John 20:23).

The theme of the readings this week goes like this: In the first reading, we see God's sending of the Holy Spirit to the church. In the second reading, we see the revelation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Finally, in the Gospel lesson we find the commissioning by the Holy Spirit for all believers to spread the Gospel message. Let's begin with the first reading from the Book of Acts. This is the record of the momentous day on which God sent the Holy Spirit to indwell the believers in fulfillment of Jesus'

promise (John 14:17). This event occurred fifty days after Jesus had risen from the dead and ten days after Jesus returned to heaven.

First Reading

1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance. 5 Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. 6 And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language. 7 They were amazed and astonished, saying, "Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? 9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs–we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God." (Acts 2:1-11)

God's sending of the Holy Spirit fulfilled what Jesus had predicted when He said that he wouldn't leave the believers as orphans (John 14:18). The Holy Spirit is the Person who empowered the disciples to turn from hiding in the upper room to being bold speakers in the name of Jesus. Notice how the first ministry of the Holy Spirit was to cause the disciples to speak in various languages in such a way that the Jews from around the world heard them in their own language (v. 6). It's not known whether each of the disciples spoke a different foreign language or if they spoke some sort of holy tongue that the foreigners were able to understand. Jesus had earlier told the disciples, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you" (John 14:26). This first ministry of the Spirit was to spread the Gospel to the foreign Jews gathered for Pentecost by allowing them to hear the Gospel message in their own language. Their testimony was that "we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God" (v. 11).

We cannot overstate the importance of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. His ministry through the believers in whom He dwells is important not only for spreading the Gospel around the world but also for empowering us to accomplish all of the purposes of God in our lives. As we move to the second reading from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians we see some of the gifts sent to us by the Holy Spirit.

Second Reading

3 Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. 4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. 6 There are varieties of

effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. 7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. 12 For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:3-13)

In this reading, Paul cataloged some of the gifts of the Spirit and said that the purpose of the gifts was "for the common good" (v.7). Although this was not an exhaustive list of the gifts (see also Ephesians 4:7-13 and Romans 12:3-8) they included wisdom and knowledge (v.8), faith (v.9a), healing (v.9b), miracles (v.10a), prophecy (v.10b), discernment of spirits (v.10c), speaking in tongues (v.10d), and interpretation of those speaking in tongues (v.10e). Later in the reading, Paul stated that although the gifts of the Spirit were diverse with everyone having a different gift, they were delivered by God in such a way as to work perfectly together in the whole body of the church (vv. 11-13). Even though not everyone would have the same gift, the diversity of gifts among the believers would accomplish God's purposes through the unity of the believers (v.13). For example, only certain people were given the gift of prophecy, meaning either the ability to foretell future events or more prominently in the New Testament context to forth tell through the preaching of the Scriptures. In today's age, some of the gifts that Paul listed are more prevalent than other ones. During the early church immediately after God sent the Holy Spirit certain gifts such as tongues and healing were very important as "sign gifts" that greatly increased the spread of the Gospel to a culture thoroughly immersed in the worship of idols. God used these sign gifts in a powerful way as we can see in the first reading with the empowerment of the disciples to speak in various languages.

As we move onto the Gospel lesson we will see how God the Holy Spirit commission the believers in the early church to spread the Gospel. The context of the reading from John Chapter 20 is the evening of the first Easter Sunday when Jesus' first appeared to the disciples who were gathered together in the upper room with the doors locked. This didn't stop Jesus, who was able to walk right through the wall or door by exercising His divine power with His new glorified body. Only ten of the disciples were present as Thomas "The Twin" didn't see Jesus until the next time the whole group was gathered together (John 20:26) and Judas had already given up hope and killed himself.

Before we read the text, since the central focus of the lesson will be on the concept of the forgiveness of sin let's review what God's Holy Word says about this crucially important subject. First, God says that everyone, except for Jesus, is a sinner. Paul said in Romans, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Second, God says that because of our sin, we deserve the penalty of death; having sinned against a Holy God Who is completely separate from sin. Paul said, "for the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a). We can never enter into the presence of our Holy God because we are sinful. The only way that we can enter into a relationship with God and

be in His presence when we die is to have our sin forgiven by God. Third, there is good news. Paul continued in Romans 6:23, "but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23b-ff). Finally, only God can forgive sin. In Luke's Gospel Jesus was confronted by the Pharisees after he proclaimed the forgiveness of a paralyzed man's sins and they challenged Jesus authority to forgive sin. In response Jesus said, "Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins have been forgiven you,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But, so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, –He said to the paralytic—'I say to you, get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home'" (Luke 5:23-24). Though Scripture tells us to "confess our sins one to another" (James 5:16), only God can forgive sin. Jesus came to the earth as God in the flesh for the express purpose of dying on the cross for our sin (Romans 4:25). "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Paul explained later in Romans Chapter 10 how to receive the free gift of eternal life through the forgiveness of our sin:

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; 10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. 11 For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." 12 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; 13 for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED." Romans 10:9-13

We see that the forgiveness of our sin is free gift of God that comes by believing the good news of the Gospel. Jesus gave the disciples, and by application every Christian, what is called the Great Commission to preach this message about the forgiveness of sin. Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20). This is the Gospel, meaning good news, that Jesus instructed his believers to preach to the world for the forgiveness of sin.

Now, with these things in mind let's read what happened that Sunday evening when Jesus made a surprise visit to the disciples gathered in the upper room.

Gospel Reading

19 So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." 22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained." (John 20:19-23)

What did Jesus mean when he said in verse 23, "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been

forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained"? The key to understanding Jesus' teaching in verse 23 is found in the previous two verses. Jesus said "as the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (v.21b). Next in verse 22 He promised that God would send the Holy Spirit. This "sending" or "commissioning" of the disciples (and all believers) is one of the main purposes of the church as expounded in the Great Commission. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20). The binding and unbinding of sin is found in the gift of faith (Ephesians 2:8-9) when a person comes to the knowledge of Jesus Christ as their Savior. Jesus said, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" (John 3:36). Jesus instructed these ten men that anyone who believes in Him through the preaching of the Gospel will be saved, just as we saw in Romans Chapter 10. The interpretation of Scripture must always be consistent with the whole counsel of God's Word.

What do the three themes we discovered in the readings today mean in our lives? First, God sent the Holy Spirit to indwell His believers in order to accomplish His purposes. He sent a diversity of gifts to a diversity of people in such a way that it forces the Church to work together as the Body of Christ. Second, God commissioned all believers, not just the ten disciples that were gathered in the room at Pentecost, to fulfil His Great Commission. This means that everyone that believes is to work to spread the Gospel message and to disciple believers, recognizing that not everyone will be gifted in either of these two particular areas. Some will be called to teach, and some to evangelize. You can rest assured that if you truly commit your heart to the Lord that you won't automatically be called by Him as a missionary in Africa. But you can be assured that God will call you to use whatever spiritual gift(s) that He has given you to your fullest ability.

Earlier this week I was driving home from the local lake after spending three hours windsurfing, which is one of my favorite pastimes. As I turned the corner on the road leading up to our house at around 7:00 pm, I recognized my neighbor as he drove by me on the way back to work at our local Christian college. Although he goes into work at 8:00 in the morning with his wife and returns with her sometime after 5:00 pm, he usually returns after dinner. Although God has gifted this man in a variety of ways, through it all is one of his preeminent qualities: faithfulness. This really inspired me to be faithful as well. Although God doesn't call everyone to work 10 plus hours each day on a fixed salary as my neighbor does, He does call us to be faithful in using the gifts that He has given us.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. The full list of spiritual gifts can be found in three passages: Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:8-10; 28-30, and Ephesians 4:11. We looked at part of the list from First Corinthians today. Read each of the other passages and see if you can locate the full list of spiritual gifts: Administration, Knowledge, Apostleship, Leadership, Discernment, Mercy, Evangelism, Miracles, Exhortation, Pastor/Shepherd, Faith, Prophecy, Giving, Serving/Ministering, Healing, Teaching, Interpretation of Tongues, Tongues, Wisdom

Romans 12:6-8 NAS95 6 Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; 7 if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; 8 or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

1 Corinthians 12:28-30 NAS95 28 And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. 29 All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? 30 All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?

Ephesians 4:11 NAS95 11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,

2. What is your spiritual gift? One of the best ways to understand your gifting is to ask other believers. Another way it to use one of the variety of spiritual gift tests available online. See for example:

http://www.churchgrowth.org/cgi-cg/gifts.cgi?intro=1

In what ways are you using your particular gift to serve God?

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/052415-pentecost-day.cfm

First Reading ACTS 2:1-11

Second Reading 1 COR 12:3B-7, 12-13 or GAL 5:16-25

Gospel Reading JN 20:19-23 or JN 15:26-27; 16:12-15

Source(s):

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

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 5-10-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **5-10-2015**. This week discuss the concept of abiding in Christ during the Gospel lesson. What does it means to abide in Christ?

First Reading

The first reading is from the Book of Acts. The context is just after God had shown Peter in a vision that all food was good for him to eat; he no longer had to obey the kosher laws observed by the Jews. As we will see, the meaning of Peter's vision went far beyond just the food laws. At about this same time, a God fearing centurion from Caesarea saw a vision of an angel who commanded him to send for Peter who was in Joppa. This man named Cornelius sent some servants to Peter who then traveled back to Caesarea. The reading opens with Peter entering Cornelius' house.

Note: We have included the verses that were omitted in the reading and bolded the ones that were covered in the Mass.

Acts 10:25-48 NAS95

25 When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped him. 26 But Peter raised him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am just a man."

Omitted:

27 As he talked with him, he entered and found many people assembled. 28 And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean. 29 That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for. So I ask for what reason you have sent for me." 30 Cornelius said, "Four days ago to this hour, I was praying in my house during the ninth hour; and behold, a man stood before me in shining garments, 31 and he said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. 32 'Therefore send to Joppa and invite Simon, who is also called Peter, to come to you; he is staying at the house of Simon the tanner by the sea.' 33 "So I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. Now then, we are all here present before God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord."

34 Opening his mouth, Peter said: "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, 35 but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.

Omitted:

36 The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all) — 37 you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. 38 You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. 39 We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. 40 God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, 41 not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. 42 And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. 43 Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins."

44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. 45 All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. 46 For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered,

47 "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?" 48 And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.

Cornelius' immediate response to seeing Peter is to worship him, an action that Peter immediately forbid because "I too am just a man," he said. This is similar to what happened when John bowed down to worship the angel in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 19:10, and again in Revelation 22:9). In the latter case, the angel sternly warned John saying, "Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God" (Revelation 19:10). In any case, Cornelius was obviously overcome by Peter, either because of his sincere expectation of finding a great man, or perhaps because of some spiritual aura that emanated from him. Remember, Cornelius had just seen a vision of an angel telling him to locate Peter. As the story continues, Peter explained how God revealed to him the deeper meaning behind the vision he had seen. In verse 34, Peter explained how the Prophet Isaiah foresaw that God's plan of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ wasn't limited just to the Jews but extended to anyone who believed (v. 34, Isaiah 42:6). Peter's speech came after he had seen a vision of a great sheet descending from the sky and filled with animals that were ceremonially unclean to the Jews (Acts 10:9-16). In this vision, God commanded Peter to "kill and eat," and said that these animals were not to be regarded as clean because they had been cleansed by God (v. 15). In order to further emphasize the importance of this vision God repeated it three times. Therefore, when Peter met with Cornelius and heard about the miraculous events that had happened with him too seeing a vision from God (in the form of an angel) Peter understood that the plan of salvation had been extended to the Gentiles. In the New Testament era the church has stepped in where Peter left off, proclaiming the message of salvation to everyone, not just to the Jews, as was Peter's primary ministry.

At the conclusion of the reading, an amazing thing happened which was the pouring out of the Holy Spirit of God on the Gentiles who were present in the room and came to believe in Jesus Christ through Peter's preaching. Peter's immediate response to this marvelous event was to command the new believers to be baptized (vv. 47 – 48). These events confirmed Peter's testimony that the plan of salvation extended to both Jews and Gentiles alike (vv. 34 – 35), and opened the door for the explosive growth of the new church throughout the Roman world. As Gentile believers we may be tempted to take it for granted that the plan of salvation extended to anyone who believed. However, we must remember that God chose the Jews for the unveiling of His divine plan and the ultimate revelation of Jesus Christ. Saint Paul taught us that after the Jewish Jesus was martyred for His faith and rose from the dead, God allowed "a partial hardening [to happen] to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" (Romans 11:25).

Second Reading

I remember a conversation that I had many years ago with a woman who claimed she was "spiritual" but wasn't a Christian. Although I was a faithful attender of Sunday Mass, I didn't know how to debate the meaning of what she called "spirituality" versus what constituted Christianity. I have

remembered our interaction over the years, to the extent that I can even recall where we were when she told me this. In recent years, I have come to the understanding that much of what purports to be spiritual is decidedly un-Christian. In the introduction to the second reading, we will look at the nature of beliefs that are opposed to Jesus Christ. Then with this understanding of the context, we will learn about love in the context of the true believers.

The second reading continues from First John, which we studied last week. This week we move to chapter four in which John explains in the opening verses before today's reading the nature of false spirits including the Antichrist. False spirits are those that "[do] not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world" (1 John 4:3). True spirits are those "that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" (1 John 4:2). Next, John comforts the believers by telling them, "You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world" (v. 4). There is a sense that a spirit of Antichrist inhabits anyone who doesn't believe in Jesus Christ, and therefore opposes God, while believers are much different. There is no middle ground, either you are for Jesus or you are against Him. John continues, "We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error" (v. 6). There is great dichotomy between believers who confess that Jesus is the Messiah from God, and those that deny this. The first group is called the children of God (1 John 3:1), the latter group is of the spirit of the Antichrist. With this dichotomy in mind, let's proceed to the reading.

1 John 4:7-10 NAS95 7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

In the reading, we see why the context is so important in understanding the meaning. John further expanded upon the theme that he began in chapter 4, the differences and nature of unbelievers as contrasted with believers. Believers "love one another," are "born of God" (see John 3:3), and "know God" (v. 7). In contrast, anyone "who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (v. 8). Next, John explains that "the love of God was manifested in us," that through Jesus "we might live through Him" (v. 9), meaning the love and power that flows to us through His Holy Spirit Who was given to us the moment we believed. We saw this happen in the first reading when the group was assembled in Cornelius' house. When they believed after hearing Peter's preaching, they were given power from on high, in fulfillment of the promise Jesus made to His disciples (Luke 24:49). Finally, John reminded his readers that the greatest expression of love wasn't that the believers loved God, but that God loved them by giving His one and only Son for their sins (vv. 9 – 10).

Gospel Reading

The first two readings logically connect with the Gospel lesson in which we see Jesus' teaching on the nature of a believer's love of God. The context of the reading is Jesus' parting words to His disciples during the Last Supper.

John 15:9-17 NAS95 9 "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. 10 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. 11 These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full. 12 This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are My friends if you do what I command you. 15 No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. 17 This I command you, that you love one another."

Several important points can be drawn from the reading. First, notice how Jesus opened this section with the conditional phrase, "If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love" (v. 10a). The word "love" that appears multiple times throughout the reading beginning in verse 9 is a form of the word "agape" which refers to love that exists between Jesus and God. Jesus said rhetorically that if you love Him then you would follow His commandments. In the Jewish mind, the "commandments" would have referred to the whole of the Jewish Law including the Ten Commandments. However, later Jesus summed up the whole of the Law by the following statement, "This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you" (John 15:12). Jesus expressed the greatest love of all by giving His life for our sin. He said in verse 13, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." We are to express our keeping of the law by loving one another with Jesus sacrificial love as our example.

Second, notice the number of repetitions of the word "abide" in the reading, which gives us the main point of this Gospel lesson. Jesus uses the word "abide" three times in verses 9 through 10. Anytime we see a repeated word, it means we must give it special attention, as Jesus was intentional in using this word so many times in such a short span. The word "abide" in the original text primarily means to dwell, but also to stay, remain, be true to, or persevere. Read verse 9 again, but when you do substitute some of these alternative words. "*Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; **abide** in My love. 10 If you keep My commandments, you will **abide** in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and **abide** in His love" (emphasis added).* God calls us to stay in Christ, in submission to Him, and not to stray. This means to follow His commands with Him as the Master and center of our lives. Through having this focus we will experience the love of God that He desires for our lives.

Finally, notice the number of times that Jesus referred to Himself by using the pattern of words "My," "Me" or "I" followed by "you." Here are the first two:

- "Just as the Father has loved **Me**, I have also loved **you**" (v. 9)
- "If you keep **My** commandments, **you** will abide in **My** love" (v. 10)

From this, it is evident that in His farewell discourse Jesus is telling His disciples (and us) that He is the one and only true pattern of love. "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you" (v. 9). As the Father loved the most worthy Jesus He then loved His most unworthy disciples. In the same way, Jesus loves us even though we too are unworthy of Him. For it is "by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The famous spiritual author Henri Nouwen had perhaps the firmest grasp of the concept of abiding of anyone this side of heaven. He said about Jesus' invitation to abide in Jesus verse 10 that it was "an invitation to total belonging, to full intimacy, to an unlimited being with." As true disciples of Jesus, we don't approach Him only to experience His love. Instead, we remain (abide) as a branch connected to the vine in order to bear much fruit (v. 16). Unless we abide we cannot bear fruit, in the same way that a branch cannot bear fruit unless it remains completely attached the vine. It is through this intimate connection that we may experience the fullness of Christ's love for us.

If you haven't read any of Henri Nouwen, I would encourage you to read *The Way of the Heart*: Henri J. M. Nouwen (Ballantine, 2003). In this short book, he has helped many Christians to better understand the concept of abiding in Christ.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. As you journey through life this week, ponder Jesus' invitation to abide in Him. What does that look like in your life? What small changes could you make this week to begin a closer journey with abiding in Jesus? Is there anything that is standing between you and abiding in Jesus?

2. In the Gospel lesson we saw how Jesus referred to Himself by using the pattern of words "My," "Me" or "I" followed by "you." Make a list of all of the times that Jesus said that in the reading. Read over your list several times. What can you learn from Jesus in this list in terms of both the proofs and results of His love?

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/051015.cfm

First Reading ACTS 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48

Second Reading 1 JN 4:7-10

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Gospel Reading JN 15:9-17

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 5-3-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **5-3-2015**. This week we open with the first reading from the Book of Acts in which we see the newly converted Saul of Tarsus testifying to the Jews in Jerusalem who then try to kill him. Then we cover the second reading from First John in which we learn about the heart of the child of God. Then we conclude with the Gospel lesson from John 15 in which Jesus shares an analogy of the believer being a branch of the true vine of Jesus with God as the vinedresser.

The first reading is from the Book of Acts. The context is just after the conversion of Saul of Tarsus to Christianity, who is now called Paul. The chapter opened with Saul viciously attacking the church and after visiting the high priest, "asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem" (Acts 9:2). As Saul was on the way to Damascus, he experienced the Lord Jesus in a voice

from heaven (v. 5) as well as a light flashing from heaven (v. 3). Next, Saul found himself to be blind and was led by the hand into Damascus (v. 8) to await further instruction from the Lord (v. 6). Once in Damascus he was still blind and didn't eat or drink for three days (v. 9). At this point God directed a disciple of Jesus named Ananias to go meet with Saul even though he had heard about his treachery against the followers of Jesus (vv. 10 – 16). Ananias did as God directed and laid his hands upon his "enemy" Saul for healing.

It is instructive for us to include the verses in Acts 9 leading up to today's reading in order to better understand the full context. Here we encounter a humbled and blind Saul fresh from his encounter with the Lord Jesus on the Damascus Road.

Acts 9:18-21 NAS95 18 And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized; 19 and he took food and was strengthened. Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus, 20 and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." 21 All those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, "Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?"

As we move to the reading for today, Saul had continued staying in Damascus and testifying about the truth of the Lord Jesus as the Messiah (v. 22). This provoked the Jews to hatch a plot to kill him, so the believers snuck him out by lowering him down from the city wall in a basket (v.25).

First Reading

Acts 9:26-31 NAS95 26 When he came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus. 28 And he was with them, moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord. 29 And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews; but they were attempting to put him to death. 30 But when the brethren learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus. 31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.

This was the first occasion that the Jerusalem church met the newly converted Saul. In spite of their fear of him, the disciples listened to Barnabas' testimony about him. Saul then went on with his business of ministering to the Jews. They didn't receive his message very well since they began to attempt to kill him (v. 29). Thankfully, the disciples heard about it and moved him to Caesarea, then sent him back to his home town of Tarsus. Interestingly, once Saul departed from the region the church enjoyed a time of peace and continued to grow (v. 31).

What can we take away from the reading? Imagine how Saul must have felt when, just a short time

before he would have been openly received by the Hellenistic Jews, yet now they tried to kill him. This was all because of his newfound relationship with Jesus Christ Whom he encountered on the Damascus Road. As believers, we should expect that those people who we knew us before we came to believe in the Lord Jesus may not warmly receive our new beliefs. This certainly shouldn't keep us from sharing it with them, to the extent that they are open to it. Jesus warned that "in this world we will have trouble" (John 16:33).

The second reading is from the Letter of First John. The context is John's teaching on the characteristics of the child of God, meaning true believers in Jesus Christ. John opened the chapter by saying, "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him" (v. 1). The world is at odds with the children of God, because unbelievers are by nature children of the father of this world, the devil (John 8:44).

Second Reading

1 John 3:18-24 NAS95 18 Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. 19 We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him 20 in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things. 21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; 22 and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. 23 This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. 24 The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

In this reading, John is describing the nature of godly love of a believer. This type of love results in action motivated by the truth of the Gospel message (v. 18, "in deed and truth"). The clear conscience of a believer testifies that they are walking in the truth because God, who knows all things, testifies through their conscience (v. 21). The true child of God is in good standing with Him such that when they pray God hears and answers them (v. 22a). The author of Hebrews said about this, "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" Hebrews 4:16). Finally, John said, "The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him" (v. 24a). This means that God hears our prayers because of our special relationship with Jesus Who gave us a new spiritual heart at the moment we believed (John 3:3, "born from above"). God doesn't hear us just because we keep His commandments, but because of this special relationship that is founded upon abiding love. The love that believers express is something that God modeled when He sent Jesus Christ to die on our behalf. The believer benefits from what is called the "double imputation." This means that our sins were imputed to Christ (the first imputation), and the righteousness of Christ was then imputed to us (the second imputation).

The application of John's message is that godly people act like it by expressions of deeds motivated by the truth of God. They model the love of God that was imputed to them through Jesus' death and

resurrection. They do so with a clear conscience since God testifies in their heart that they are indeed a child of God. On the other hand the person that is not yet in right standing with God through the only way possible, belief in the Lord Jesus, will have their conscience pricked by the testimony of the Gospel. Others who are unresponsive to the Gospel have had their conscience's seared, and turn away from the good news (1 Timothy 4:2). If our conscience is grounded in the truth, it can tell us a lot about our heart's true status with God.

The Gospel reading is from John 15. The context is Jesus' parting instructions to His disciples before the events that happened during the last week of His earthly ministry. The reading today includes several uses of the phrase "I am" which Jesus' disciples would have understood as a strong statement of His divinity. In chapter 8 Jesus had told the Pharisees, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am" (John 8:58). They rejected His claim of being equal with God (John 10:30, "I and the Father are One"). In this reading, the disciples are privileged hearers of Jesus' instruction into some deeper truths about God.

Gospel Reading

John 15:1-8 NAS95 1 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples."

There are several key points that Jesus is making in this reading. First, Jesus is the true vine. A vine is the life-giving conduit to the branches. Jesus makes this parallel to emphasize that life is only found through a relationship with Him. Second, He states that the Father is the "vinedresser" (v. 1), meaning that He is the person Who planted and cultivated the vineyard. The Father is the Person who sovereignly nurtures the growth and productivity of each person who is connected to the vine. Third, the Father takes an active rule in the pruning process in the lives of believers. This is done through His love with the goal of producing more fruit. A key word that is repeated throughout this passage is the word "abide." We don't tend to use that word very much in English, but in this context it means to remain, dwell, or live in Jesus. Fruit bearing is evidence of our right relationship with Jesus, and this glorifies the Father. We tend to think of fruit as good deeds or proper choices, but Scripture actually gives us an indication of the type of fruit that should be the evidence of God at work in our lives. Paul said, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23). Bearing this type of fruit definitely takes a work of God's Spirit in us, which goes beyond

the outward appearance of good deeds and requires a changed heart.

How does one abide in Christ's love? Jesus actually answers that later in verse 10. "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." Jesus summed up the commandments in Matthew's Gospel when he answered the question about the greatest commandment. He said, "'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40). Therefore, we find out that we can't keep the law just by keeping the law, because the law is to love. One reason Jesus correlates keeping God's commandments and loving Him is because it takes a trusting relationship to obey God and to keep His commands from the heart. To do things God's way does not come naturally to us. The only way we can truly keep His commandments is by being deeply connected and dependent upon Jesus.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. How have you experienced rejection or hardship as a result of your faith in Jesus Christ? How does reading about Paul's opposition encourage you to persist in your pursuit of spiritual things?

2. The second and third readings dealt with abiding in Christ and keeping His commandments. Is there a way to be "obedient" without abiding in Christ? Why do you think Jesus made such a strong connection between abiding, obedience, and bearing much fruit?

3. Why it is important for the vinedresser to prune the branches? Have you or are you experiencing any type of pruning that this passage can help you to understand God's ways and love for you during this time?

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/050315.cfm

First Reading ACTS 9:26-31

Second Reading 1 JN 3:18-24

Gospel Reading JN 15:1-8

Source(s):

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

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 4-26-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **4-26-2015**. This week we open with the first reading from Acts 4 in which we see Jesus as the Chief Cornerstone, the One whom the builders rejected. Then we cover the second reading from First John on which we learn more about the nature of a believer whose heart has been changed by God. We conclude with the Gospel lesson from John 10 where we see an illustration that Jesus gave of Himself as our Good Shepherd.

The first reading is from the Book of Acts. The context is just after Peter's sermon given to the people gathered at the portico of Solomon (Acts 3:11-26) and following the miraculous healing of the man lame from birth (Acts 3:2-11). These events greatly disturbed "the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees" (Acts 4:1) "because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (4:2). At this point, Peter and some of the disciples were taken into custody, most likely protective custody (4:3). The church continued to grow as a result of the preaching and reached a total size of four thousand people (4:4). The next morning Peter and the disciples were presented to a group including the high priest and two others of priestly descent (4:4-6) at which point they asked them, "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?" (4:7). This led to Peter's response which is covered in the first reading.

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First Reading

Acts 4:8-12 NAS95 8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people, 9 if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, 10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead–by this name this man stands here before you in good health. 11 He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, but WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone. 12 And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

Peter explained to the Jewish rulers that the lame man was healed by the miraculous power of Jesus Christ whom they crucified (v. 9). He went on to explain that this Jesus is the Messiah, then quoted from the Bible evidence showing that their rejection of Him was prophesied to occur. Peter quoted from Psalm 118:22 which said, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone." In the context of the audience, the builders who rejected the cornerstone can be seen as the unbelieving Jewish leaders. Finally, Peter combined the teaching from Isaiah 28:16 that said something similar about the cornerstone but added the element of belief in Jesus for salvation. Isaiah, speaking on behalf of God said, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, a costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed. He who **believes in it** will not be disturbed" (Isaiah 28:16b, emphasis added). Peter's teaching wasn't new to the disciples because Jesus had Himself taught that the belief in Him was the only way to get to heaven. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). Jesus used the expression "I am" in this passage as a strong statement of His divinity. We will see Jesus' use of this term again in the Gospel lesson.

Peter's bold speech contains some crucially important truths. Faith in Jesus as the Messiah, which fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy of the Chief Cornerstone, is the only way to get to heaven. There is no other Person through whom we can gain forgiveness of our sin; this can come through faith in Jesus Christ alone. These truths are just as applicable to the "rulers and elders of the people" (v. 8) as they are to "all the people of Israel" (v. 10) and by application to everyone in the universe.

The free gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9) comes about, as we will see in the second reading, as a result of God's great love for us. The context of this reading from First John is the apostle's teaching on the evidences and nature of true salvation of a believer. John opened Chapter 2 by saying, "By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:3-4). Keeping the commandments of God is evidence of a heart that has been changed by God. Today's reading opens in Chapter 3 by expanding this teaching to include the special relationship that exists between God and the believer.

Second Reading

1 John 3:1-2 NAS95 1 See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

John said that believers in Jesus Christ are bestowed with a special relationship with God, that of "children of God" (v. 1). This was in contrast to those who don't know God, whom Jesus called children of their father the devil (John 8:44), something that he said to the very religious Pharisees. Faith in Christ bestows a special relationship on the believer with God, that of sonship (John 1:12; Romans 8:14-17). The person whose heart has been changed by God stands in contrast to the values of the worldly people around us (v. 1d). This was John's point in the previous chapter and one of the main ideas that he continues to bring out in the entirety of this letter.

Besides our present status as children of God, John tells of an additional blessing from God in how as a believer in some future time we will become like Jesus because we will see Jesus with eyes opened and will be freed from our sinful flesh (v. 2). Perhaps we will have some of the same powers that Jesus had, Who was able to walk through walls (John 20:19). Whatever the case, we will possess supernatural powers and freedom in our glorified bodies (Romans 8:18). Paul describes our current bodies as perishable, dishonorable, and weak, all due to sin (1 Corinthians 15:42-53). However, our imperishable bodies will be perfect, like Jesus, and unhindered by sin. For this we have only God to thank. "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are" (v. 1).

John's teaching here brings out the reality of our redeemed standing in God. We do not have to perform to get Him to love us. Instead, because we belong to Him as a child of God, we learn how to walk in a way that is consistent with our new identity. The world will not know what to do with us, for we will exhibit the fruit of God's Spirit within us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Opposition, persecution, and being looked down on for our faith is just an opportunity for God to display His nature in us. If these things do not fully characterize our daily lives, we can pray for God to continue His work in us as His children to help us to live in light of our true identity.

As we transition to the Gospel reading, we must remember the raucous caused by Peter as he healed the man lame from birth that we learned about in the first reading. In the Gospel, we see Jesus teaching just after He healed a blind man and afterwards confronted the Pharisees (John 9). The message today alludes to Ezekiel 34, where God condemned the shepherds of Israel, meaning the spiritual leaders (Ezekiel 34:1-10). Ezekiel announced God's strong judgment on the kings, priests, and prophets who ruled before the exile of the Jews to Babylon. God said, "Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will demand My sheep from them and make them cease from feeding sheep. So the shepherds will not feed themselves anymore, but I will deliver My flock from their mouth, so that they will not be food for them" (Ezekiel 34:10). It's not coincidental that Jesus' message came just after He told a group of Pharisees that they were spiritually blind (John 9:41).

This section of Scripture is profound in that throughout the Chapter Jesus uses a metaphor of Himself as the Shepherd and the Door, with us (the children of God) as the sheep. Other characters come into play in the lesson including a hired hand, owner, and wolf. As you read, think about the contemporary application of these characters as Jesus' illustration unfolds. In the world today, who are the hired hands and wolves to whom Jesus was pointing?

Gospel Reading

John 10:11-18 NAS95 11 "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. 12 He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, 15 even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd. 17 For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. 18 No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father."

It's evident that Jesus' message was pointed squarely at the Pharisees, a group of selfishly motivated "lay ministers" (shepherds) of Israel identified as the wolves and hired hands in this story (v. 12). Clearly, the owner of the sheep is God the Father, and Jesus stated outright that He is the Good Shepherd. He even added extra emphasis by using the Greek term transliterated "ego eimi," translated "I Am" (v. 11), a term which Jesus had repeated multiple times about Himself beginning in John 6:35. This phrase was something that the First Century Jews would have recognized as a strong statement of divinity. In Jesus' earlier use of this phrase in this Gospel He said, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35), and "I am the light of the world" (John 8:35). In today's reading Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd" (v. 11a). Jesus is our protector, the one who provides us with spiritual sustenance, and protects us from our enemies. He is the Light of truth from God, the Light that leads us to the single door to obtain eternal life, the only way to God.

Jesus went on to explain, with the context of the Pharisees in mind, that the plan of salvation would be extended to the "other sheep" (v. 16), meaning the Gentiles, and they would join with the flock of the believing Jews. He foreshadowed His death by telling how the shepherd would lay down His life for the combined Jewish and Gentile flock. Finally, Jesus made a very important point that He was not a victim. He said that He was given the power by His Father to lay down His life for His sheep. Nowhere in the Bible is Jesus ever portrayed as a victim. On the night He was betrayed Jesus said, "Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:53). Jesus gave up His life in voluntary submission to the Father. This teaching has important implications for our daily walk as believers. As we contemplate Jesus' voluntary sacrifice for us, would we not want to voluntarily reciprocate and sacrifice our misguided desires for Him? The call of the Gospel is one of invitation, not coercion and manipulation. Jesus' voluntary death on the cross built a bridge of trust to us in our desperate

situation. May we cross the bridge of trust and learn to walk with Him on a daily basis.

Finally, Jesus is our protector from the wolves. Though Jesus directed His message to the Pharisees, these ungodly forces are alive and well in the present day. All one has to do is click through the television dial on any given day to find spiritual charlatans peddling their wares all across the airwaves. False spiritual cults and belief systems abound, as do global religious movements that enthrone the false god of the moon and objects in temples. Peter said about the false teachers, "But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed" (2 Peter 2:12). Though we live in a fallen age where spiritual darkness is present across the world, we are called as the ones that God knows by name to continue to plead with the lost and dying generation to repent of their sins and be baptized, trusting only in the Lord Jesus for spiritual life.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Jesus is referred to as our Good Shepherd and the Guardian of our soul. In what areas are you struggling on your own and need to let Him into your life to shepherd you? How does this guardianship of your soul change how you view life and your decisions?

2. In all three passages, we see a variety of angles to identify the greatness of Jesus:

He is the Chief Cornerstone of the faith

He is the One who will appear and make us like Him when He returns for believers

He is the Good Shepherd

Write out your response to these descriptions of Jesus and what difference this should make in your life. Pray this back to the Lord and ask Him to help you to internalize these realities in your soul.

Readings for the Week

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http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/042615.cfm

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Second Reading 1 JN 3:1-2

Gospel Reading JN 10:11-18

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