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

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 12-16-2018



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with a reading from Zephaniah, one of the so-called "Minor Prophets," largely because their 12 prophecies are shorter than the Major Prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah. Then we move to one of the Epistles of St. Paul, Philippians, a letter likely written from a prison cell in Rome, making its theme of joy even more significant. Finally, we conclude with a reading from Luke's Gospel, which includes some interesting instructions for the people of Jesus' day.

Introduction to the First Reading:

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

First Reading:

> *Zephaniah 3:14-18 NAS95 14 Shout for joy, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! 15 The LORD has taken away His judgments against you, He has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the LORD, is*

> *in your midst; You will fear disaster no more. 16 In that day it will be said to Jerusalem: "Do not be afraid, O Zion; Do not let your hands fall limp. 17 "The LORD your God is in your midst, A victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy. 18 "I will gather those who grieve about the appointed feasts–They came from you, O Zion; The reproach of exile is a burden on them.*

The first two-thirds of the prophecy deal with God's judgment of sin and apostasy. Someone has said that the book is an out-working of the text, "I, the Lord, thy God, am a jealous God" (Exodus 20:5; Deuteronomy 5:9). God's people must worship Him and Him alone. Otherwise, judgment will come, and in this case it is to be the captivity of the nation by Babylonia, which did occur in —.

Today's reading, however, is in a concluding portion of the book that looks forward—beyond the captivity—to a time, yet future, when Israel will rejoice in the promised Kingdom blessing, chapter 3:9-20). Such a blessed future will be occasion to "shout for joy … shout in triumph … rejoice and exult." Why? Because God has "taken away His judgments against you" and "He has cleared away your enemies." What causes for joy and rejoicing? But, even more astounding, the promise is that God Himself will be among them. The phrase is repeated: "The LORD is in your midst" (vv. 15, 17).

As in other Old Testament prophecies, Zephaniah warns his people that judgment is certain; it will come at the Day of the Lord's wrath. But he admonishes them in chapter 2:1-3 to "Seek the Lord … seek righteousness; seek humility." There will be a restoration, as we see in chapter 3; a remnant will be saved.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Zephaniah had promised a time of future joy and rejoicing after severe judgment and captivity. In this epistle, Paul encourages Christians to find their joy and peace in God in the midst of trials and difficult circumstances. He himself had suffered to even get to Philippi some years before (see Acts 16), and he understands how stressful life can be. But, as in Zephaniah, it's the promised presence of God that enables the Christian to live above life's stresses and rejoice in God's goodness.

Second Reading:

> *Philippians 4:4-7 NAS95 4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! 5 Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Chapter four of this power-packed letter emphasizes the power that Jesus provides for the Christian's life. There is strength in unity, vv. 1-3; strength from God's peace, vv. 4-7; strength from God's presence, vv. 8-9; and strength from God's provision, vv. 10-19. We look today at the significant words from verses 4-7.

Paul instructs the Philippians with emphasis, "rejoice." That joy is possible, of course, only because it is "in the Lord." Outside of one's personal trust in the all-sufficient grace and mercy of God, there is no lasting source of joy. He encourages the believer to be gentle. Though translated a variety of ways ("forbearing," "moderation"), its meaning in the original language if "sweet reasonableness." Wouldn't life be so much more pleasant if we lived in a continue environment of sweet reasonableness? How is that possible? Well, believers in Jesus must be constantly aware that "The Lord is near." Not merely that He is watching judgmentally but that He is near to help, to keep us sweet and reasonable. The indwelling Christ does that for us when we cannot by ourselves.

The next admonition is so difficult for many of us. He writes, "Be anxious for nothing." Didn't Paul realize the many anxieties those first-century Christians were facing? How could it tell them not to worry? He is likely saying that Christians should not be distracted by the affairs of life that they forget the real source of life, peace, and joy. It's good to remember that he was living in circumstances that may have been far more difficult than the Philippians at that time. But, more importantly, he provides the antidote for anxiety: prayer and thanksgiving. Nothing in life is beyond the realm of prayer. We may and should take everything to God in prayer; He should be our first resort, not the last. We should approach God with confidence that He is both able and willing to relieve our fears.

The result is the incomprehensible peace that only God can provide. Peace is not just the absence of fear or stress. It is, as the Hebrews say, "Shalom." The term implies wholeness, harmony, completeness. Those attributes can be found only in the God of Peace. Here are Paul's words from another of his epistles: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13)

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The four Gospels all cover the life and ministry of Jesus, each from a different perspective with somewhat different purposes in mind—all, however, to reveal the purposes of His coming to the glory of God. Luke's telling emphasizes Jesus as Savior, a divine man. He stresses the humanity of Jesus Christ and his perfection as a human. His audience probably consisted mostly of Gentile Christians, but he wrote to show his readers that the Gospel is for both Jews and Gentles.

Luke's account is more chronological than the other Gospels. Today's reading is taken from Christ's teaching as He approaches Jerusalem for the climactic final days of his earthly life. In this passage, which could be titled "The Signs of the Times," He speaks of the coming of the Son of Man (the title He frequently uses to speak of Himself).

Gospel Reading:

> *Luke 3:10-18 NAS95 10 And the crowds were questioning him, saying, "Then what shall we do?" 11 And he would answer and say to them, "The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise." 12 And some tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" 13 And he said to them, "Collect no more than what you have been ordered to." 14 Some soldiers were questioning him, saying, "And what about us, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages." 15 Now while the people were in a state of expectation and all were wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he was the Christ, 16 John answered and said to them all, "As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17 "His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." 18 So with many other exhortations he preached the gospel to the people.*

Today's reading reports on the ministry of John the Baptist, the prophesied forerunner of the Messiah. John's words just prior to this reading were rather scathing. "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (v. 7). He had been prophesying that that the Lord would come to straighten the crooked places and make level the rough ways. "All flesh," he said," shall see the salvation of God" (v. 6).

It is in response to that teaching that the crowd asked, "Then what shall we do?" John the Baptist lists a number of practices that his listeners could pursue that would demonstrate a genuine change of heart that he has been calling for. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:1). A man with two coats could show his heart change by giving one to someone who had not. Likewise, with someone who has enough food; he can share.

When the tax collectors (usually men who collected more than the tax due to enlarge their own pockets) indicated they wanted to enter the waters of baptism for repentance, John tells them to collect only what is the proper tax. Soldiers also asked about their responsibility, and John pointed out what, apparently, were the illegal practices of some: taking money by force, falsely accusing people, complaining about their wages. They are to discontinue such practices.

All of this had the people conjecturing about who this prophet really was. Could he be the Messiah? John responds to clarify his role by noting his inferiority to the One he is preparing the way for. John's baptism was with water, the Messiah would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (was was to be fulfilled in Acts 2). It's interesting to note the final words of this reading, "So with many other exhortations he preached the gospel to the people." Yet, the preceding words are words of judgment ("winnowing fork," "burn up the chaff"). You see the gospel has two facets. It offers the free grace of God in response to faith in the work of Jesus, but it promised judgment to those who reject Jesus.

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Reflection Questions

1. In light of the second reading, list the ways in which you daily lay down your anxieties to God. Do I have the unexplainable joy and peace of God because I pray with thanksgiving and give my anxieties to Him?
2. In the Gospel reading the crowd asked John, "Then what shall we do?" to which John responded with a list of practices believers in God exhibited as evidence of their change in heart. List two ways in which your life provides this evidence of turning away from sin (repentance) and a turning to living out your life for God.

Mass-Study-Notes-for-Sunday_12-16-2018.pdfDownload

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 12-02-2018



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with teaching from the Old Testament

prophet Jeremiah then move to one of the Apostle Paul's letters to a young church in the earliest years of Christianity. Finally, we look at a prophetic portion of the Gospel of Luke. These are not easy passages to understand, but we'll take a careful but brief look at each one.

Introduction to the First Reading:

It's helpful to remember that Jeremiah lived during the time of Judah's spiritual downfall and the beginning of her captivity about 500 B.C. Assyria had been the dominant nation of the time, but was tottering on the brink of ruin, while Babylon and Egypt were struggling to take over world control. Jeremiah warned of Babylon's victory, but Judah failed to repent and ignored his warnings. As a result, Judah suffered destruction, but the prophet announced that she would one day be restored and come into worldwide blessing.

Jeremiah's prophecy reveals God in two aspects like the two sides of a single coin. The book demonstrates His demands and judgment, but it also shows the tenderness of His love. He had chosen this particular prophet to give His message, perhaps, because of Jeremiah's sensibilities and tenderness. One writer has suggested that in that way Jeremiah was "the true forerunner of our Lord."

The purpose of this Old Testament book is twofold: to reveal God's attitude toward sin (thus, the punishment of Israel who had sinned against Him) and to reveal the coming restoration of Israel under their coming king.

First Reading:

> *Jeremiah 33:14-16 NAS95 14 'Behold, days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will fulfill the good word which I have spoken concerning the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 15 'In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch of David to spring forth; and He shall execute justice and righteousness on the earth. 16 'In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell in safety; and this is the name by which she will be called: the LORD is our righteousness.'*

Jeremiah 33 is the final chapter in a section, beginning with chapter 30, that has to do with the restoration of Israel. The opening words in this passage are obviously prophetic; that is, they are referring to some events yet in the future. But there is no clear indication of when these events will occur—relatively soon or at some distant point in the future. There are a few inferences, however, that give us some understanding of God's plan for His people. It's evident, for example, that the writer is revealing God's program for "the house of Israel and the house of Judah." These terms identify the two segments of the nation of Israel that had been divided after the reign and death of King Solomon. God's "good word" about His chosen people will be fulfilled. What He has planned and now intimates will be completed in His chosen time.

At some future point in time ("in those days and at that time") a "Branch of David" will appear. This

term takes us back to chapter 22, verses 2 and 4 where the writer makes reference to the "king of Judah, who sits on David's throne" and "kings will enter the gates of this house, sitting in David's place on his throne." Again, we are made to think of God's covenant spoken of in 2 Samuel 7:8-17 where God promised that David and his heirs would rule over Israel. God said, "Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16).

The promises of verses 15 and 16 of today's reading should have been a great encouragement to Israel, who was to suffer certain captivity and removal from her land. In the future, the promised king is to execute justice and righteousness on the earth." As a result, "In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell in safety." That will be a time unlike anything in Israel's previous history. She has always been attacked by godless nations, and, even in our day, persecution continues for today's Jewish people. Praise God, some day that will end!

The final statement of our reading suggests an unusual name for God's people. Jeremiah wrote, "And this is the name by which she will be called: the LORD is our righteousness.'" Perhaps the intention is to remind Jeremiah's audience that righteousness is not the result of anything one can do—offer sacrifices, observe the sacraments, serve others, etc.—but righteousness is found only in Jesus Christ. As the Christian identifies with Jesus and His finished work on the cross, it is the righteousness of Jesus that is conferred upon the believer. "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). "Not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith (Philippians 3:9).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Some scholars think that 1 Thessalonians may have been the earliest book written in the New Testament. The church in the city of Thessalonica (in modern day Greece) was launched on the second of the Apostle Paul's missionary journeys. He was there for about three weeks, teaching about the suffering and resurrection of Jesus, whom he identified as the Messiah (Christ). Some responded well to Paul, but others rejected his message (because of jealousy, Acts 17:5) and forced him to leave town.

Paul wrote this letter to encourage the Thessalonian Christians and to give them further teaching, especially about the return of Christ, which is a common topic in the book, referred to in all five chapters.

In many of his letters to the young churches in the first century Paul offers significant prayers on the readers' behalf, also asking them to pray for him. Today's reading begins with a part of one of those prayers (3:11-13) and concludes with a challenge to the people (4:1-2).

Second Reading:

> *1 Thessalonians 3:12 – 4:2 NAS95 12 and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you; 13 so that He may establish*

> *your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints. 1 Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more. 2 For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.*

Paul's great love and concern for his learners is evident in his frequent mention of wanting to visit with them and his continual prayers for them. Before his prayer, beginning in verse 11, Paul tells them that he prays "earnestly . . . night and day" that he might see them face-to-face. Why? Not only because he loves them, but he also wants to continue his ministry to them, completing "what is lacking in your faith," that is, giving them a full understanding of the truth they have adopted.

In his prayer, Paul makes four requests: 1) that God might clear the way so that he could see the Thessalonians again; 2) that he might be able to supply what was incomplete in their fledgling faith; 3) that their love for one another might increase; and 4) that they would be spiritually strengthened and be found blameless and holy.

Regarding their love, we should note that it begins with one another and then includes "all people." Jesus said that his disciples were to be known by their love for one another (John 13:35). It's truly unfortunate that Christians and churches are sometimes criticized by outsiders because of the divisions and animosity that seem to characterize some groups of professing believers. As the people of the church learn to love one another more fully, their testimony to the world will be enhanced. But, love is not to be limited to within the church family. As God "so loved the world" (John 3:16), so should His people love those who need the Savior. Paul uses himself as an example of love; he says he abounds in love for them. And, of course, the greatest example is Jesus himself, who gave his life for those He loved, the perfect fulfillment of John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."

Somehow Paul relates the fulfilling of the instruction to love with a proper standing before God as "blameless in holiness." It is the clear teaching of Scripture that no one can stand in the presence of God on his own behalf. A holy and perfect God cannot be approached by anyone tainted by sin—and we all are (Romans 3:23). Paul refers to the "coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints," an event to occur when Jesus returns to establish His promised kingdom on earth. The saints who return with Him will have been saved by His grace and clothed in His righteousness (Revelation 19:8). At that point they will be blameless and holy. Perhaps Paul is suggesting that when the Christian demonstrates God-like love toward others, he is giving evidence of his genuine conversion, a born-again experience that, by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, presents him holy and blameless before God.

Paul then moves in chapter 4 to admonish the brethren. He does so "in the Lord Jesus," that is on the authority of Jesus. Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit in the writing of the epistles (see 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:21), so his exhortation can rightly be said to be the Word of God. He encourages them "to walk and please God" as they had been instructed by him (v. 1). He commends

them for doing so, "just as you actually do." It's easy to accept someone's admonition and instruction, when he also commends you for how you are responding. Of course, while they had done well, they could still do better, so he challenges them "that you excel still more." Christians should always seek to excel—not to be better than others, but to improve for the glory of God.

Paul's final statement in this passage is a reminder that he is not speaking for himself or on his own authority. He is speaking "by the authority of the Lord Jesus." The Christian should never read God's Word without the full realization that, whoever the human author, these are the words and instructions that God has given, and they must be obeyed out of love and gratefulness for His having providing the way for us to have an intimate relationship with Him by faith.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The New Testament begins with four Gospels, stories of the good news of Jesus' incarnation, life, ministry, death, resurrection, and return to heaven. Why four Gospels? you might ask. While they all generally cover the same story, they offer a variety of events, stories, and sayings of Jesus. They give them from different perspectives, and together we get a more complete picture of the truth. Luke acknowledges in his opening paragraph that there were many stories about Jesus, but he had a particular story to tell. While the others may present Jesus as king and Messiah (Matthew), or a servant to man (Mark), or as the Son of God (John), Luke emphasizes Jesus as Savior, a divine man. He stresses the humanity of Jesus Christ and his perfection as a human.

Luke's audience probably consisted mostly of Gentile Christians, but he wrote to show his readers that the gospel is for both Jews and Gentles. He affirmed that what those early Christians had been taught was indeed true and trustworthy. Like Matthew, Luke records significant teachings of Jesus regarding end times. He shows that Jesus did not teach that His return would be immediate; rather there was to be an indeterminate time between His resurrection and the second coming. But Jesus is to return in bodily form. The Apostle Paul writes later to clarify certain misunderstandings about end times, also. (See 1 & 2 Thessalonians.)

Luke's account is more chronological than the other Gospels. Today's reading is taken from Christ's teaching as He approaches Jerusalem for the climactic final days of his earthly life. In this passage, which could be titled "The Signs of the Times," He speaks of the coming of the Son of Man (the title He frequently uses to speak of himself).

Gospel Reading:

Note: Verses 29 – 33 which were omitted from the reading have been included below.

> *Luke 21:25-36 NAS95 25 "There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, 26 men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 27 "Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN A CLOUD with power and great glory. 28 "But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and*

lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

29 Then He told them a parable: "Behold the fig tree and all the trees; 30 as soon as they put forth leaves, you see it and know for yourselves that summer is now near. 31 "So you also, when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near. 32 "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all things take place. 33 "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.

34 "Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day will not come on you suddenly like a trap; 35 for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. 36 "But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Immediately preceding the return of Christ, there will be signs and wonders in the heavens. In a parallel passage (Matthew 24:29), quoting from the Old Testament prophets, it is said that "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken." As might be expected, the text tells us that there will be dismay among the nations on the earth and men will faint from fear. That fear is the result not only of the fearsome celestial events but from the expectation of things that are yet to come. It is not difficult to image the rampant terror on the earth when "the powers of the heavens will be shaken."

It is then that the Lord Jesus will return to earth. "The Son of Man coming in a cloud" is a quotation from Daniel 7:13 in which the prophet also writes of the glory and dominion that is to be given Messiah at that time. The careful Bible student may recall that 40 days after His resurrection Jesus ascended to heaven "and a cloud received him" (Acts 1:9). Luke is also the writer of the Book of Acts, and he went on to record the words of the angels at the ascension. They said, "This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

Jesus warns His hearers that they must be prepared for the day of His return, even though that date has not been revealed. When the signs begin to appear, it's a warning to the faithful to look beyond the frightful circumstances and anticipate their final redemption. Redemption is a significant term regarding the believer in Christ. He has been lost in his sin and, as a result, separated from God. But in God's grace and out of His unending love, He has provided a way for the sinner to be redeemed—to be bought with a price and restored to God. That price, of course, is the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross where He paid the infinite penalty of sin.

Jesus broke into the narrative to tell a story about trees. When trees sprout leaves in the spring, you can begin to anticipate the fruit they will produce in the fall. Parables are stories that use the common elements of life to illustrate spiritual truth in language anyone can understand. Jesus makes the application. As buds on trees anticipate a harvest, so the signs of the times anticipate the culmination of God's plan in the return of Jesus and the establishment of His eternal kingdom on

earth. The last statement in the paragraph is the wonderful affirmation that God's Word is eternally true. But the sentence preceding that has been difficult for Christians to understand. What did Jesus mean when He said, "This generation will not pass until all things take place"? Obviously, it cannot mean the generation to which Jesus was speaking. They're gone, and the predicted events have not yet occurred. It may be best to understand that Jesus was likely referring to the generation that would be alive when the predicted signs actually occur.

The passage concludes with additional warnings to the believers who will be alive when the signs of the end times appear. They are to be prepared so the events don't fall on them like an unexpected "trap." These events, Jesus says, will come upon every living person at that time; none can escape. He is specific in his warnings. They must "be on guard," and he names the dangers to avoid: "dissipation" (harmful self-indulgence) and its frequent companion "drunkenness." A third is more subtle, "the worries of life." Elsewhere Jesus had taught that His followers need not be concerned about such things: clothing, food, and so forth. God is faithful to provide for His own when their trust is in Him (Matthew 6:25-34). In those last days, Christ-followers must be giving their attention to spiritual and eternal matters rather than mere physical and temporal concerns.

The final admonition for those living in the end times is to be "on the alert at all times." That includes praying for the strength that only God can give in perilous times. Only He can enable His children to escape all the terrible events of those last days. In doing so, they will one day stand before "the Son of Man," to worship Him and to receive the crown of life that He has promised (James 1:12).

Reflection Questions

1. In what ways are you trusting in your own efforts to please God or in the sacrifice of Jesus and His resurrection for your righteousness?
2. Describe how your life reflects the love of God in the way you act toward other Christians and to the people of the world?
3. In what ways are you heeding the warnings of Jesus so that you are "on guard" and "on the alert," as you anticipate the return of Jesus? List two ways in which you are doing this.

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 11-25-2018



Welcome back to Mass Notes. This week we will see the rulership of Jesus from three different angles in the readings from the Mass. The first reading is an Old Testament prophecy about His dominion and kingdom being an everlasting establishment. The second reading, from the book of Revelation in the New Testament, confirms the eternal dominion and power that Jesus has, but also adds a sense of personal tenderness towards us who believe in Him. The last reading, from the Gospel of John, chronicles the self-revelation of Jesus as King, recognizing that His kingdom was not of this world. Although his kingship was misunderstood and missed by many in His first advent, it will not be misunderstood at His second advent.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Daniel Chapter 7. The first six chapters of the Book record mostly historical events with some prophecy. However, as we move into chapter seven, Daniel records visions given to him from God concerning future events. These prophetic messages were given to Daniel by God during various times during his life. The context of Chapter 7 was a message given to Daniel "In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon" (Daniel 7:1), meaning it was before the overthrow of the Babylonian Empire by the Medo Persian forces under Cyrus the Great. There is some debate as to the identity of Belshazzar, who was most likely an overlord that reigned under the authority of the King. In examining historical sources it is also likely that Belshazzar was either the son or grandson of the famous King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel's visions in the first 12 verses of

chapter 7 are of four successive empires beginning with Babylon depicted by a lion (v 4). The second is Medo / Persia depicted by a bear. The third is the Greek Empire pictured by a leopard, King Alexander, with four wings picturing his four generals to whom his kingdom was divided after his fast and furious life. Finally, the last empire is a "dreadful and terrible beast" depicting both the Roman Empire in the shorter term and in the long term a restored Roman-like empire corresponding to Babylon the Great in the Book of Revelation. Daniel said about this one, "After this I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet; and it was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns" (Daniel 7:7). Another ruler called the "little horn" (v. 8) will arise from among the last empire with a "mouth uttering great boasts" (v. 8f). This "little horn" was prefigured by King Antiochus IV Epiphanes who tormented the Jews in the third century BC as recorded in the book of 1 Maccabees. This "antichrist of the Old Testament" is a type of the person that will exist during the end times. This is the person spoken of in Revelation 13:2 – 10 with language very similar to that of the Prophet Daniel.

This introduction brings us to today's reading in which we see a vision in heaven that pictures the kingdom of Jesus being presented to Him by God the Father. At the end of the age after four world empires have controlled the world with the last one devouring the ones that came before it, God will finally claim the kingdom that is rightfully His after putting down the evil rulers that had come before.

First Reading:

> *Daniel 7:13-14 NAS95 13 "I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. 14 And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and men of every language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed."*

Daniel clearly saw a revelation of the Lord Jesus Who was to come, as Jesus used this same terminology in referring to Himself in Matthew 24:30, "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory." Jesus also called Himself the Son of Man in John 5:27. When Jesus returns to set up His kingdom on earth, "His dominion [will be] everlasting . . . [and] one which will not be destroyed."

From this passage in Daniel we find out a few very important details about the future that should inform us for our lives today. The first detail is the description of Jesus as the Son of Man. This was Jesus' most common way of referring to himself as recorded in the Gospels. Why would He describe Himself as such (and not choose Son of God as His preferred self-reference)? It may be that He knew we would be able to revere Him as the divine Son of God, but realized that we may have trouble picturing Him as a man. Jesus' identity as fully God and fully man is a mystery to us, but is nonetheless important. As the second Adam, He fulfilled (as a man) the righteous requirements of

the law (Romans 8:3-4), what the first Adam could not do. And in that, He provides salvation for us if we unite ourselves with Him. A second key point, is that Jesus is given dominion, glory and a kingdom for all people to serve Him. If this is the case for eternity (and this is good for us in the future), then our servanthood to Jesus the King should be good for us today. Some people agonize over the "sacrifice" it is to be a Christian. Well, really, the sacrifice is only toward the self-ruled life, which is destructive to our soul anyways. In reality, Jesus' is a good King, so when we let Him rule in our life each day, we are living the life we were designed to live. Jesus said that He came to bring life and that more abundantly (John 10:10). Can we trust Him to do this in us even now?

In these days of chaos before Jesus returns, we can look with confident hope that one day Jesus will return to set up His perfect kingdom on earth in fulfillment of this promise in Daniel. Jesus will take the dominion and kingdom back from Satan that was given to him for a short time (2 Corinthians 4:4), in light of eternity. As we encounter disturbing events in our world today, we can live with an eternal perspective which banks on the fact that God wins.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The reading is from the Book of Revelation. The context of the reading is the beginning of the Book, in which John introduces Jesus as the rightful Ruler of the earth in very similar language to what we just read from Daniel.

Second Reading:

> *Revelation 1:5-8 NAS95 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood– 6 and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father–to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 7 BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen. 8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."*

In the reading we see John's testimony about the identity of Jesus as "the faithful witness" (one who tells the truth and who's words are reliable, John 18:37); "firstborn of the dead" (the first and preeminent of all those who will rise from the dead, Romans 8:29); "ruler of the kings of the earth" (the highest power); the One "who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood" (He created a way for us to be made free from the slavery of sin and death by His great love, Romans 6:1-23); and Who "made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father" (His goal is to make His followers into a united people group who serves God the Father with our lives) (vv. 5 – 6). In verse 7 we see the return of the Lord Jesus as we read in Daniel, the One Who will come in the clouds to fulfill the prophecy given by the angels in Acts 1:11 regarding how Jesus would return where they said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven." Furthermore, John quoted from an important prophecy of Zechariah which predicted the ultimate

acceptance of Jesus by His people the Jews. Zechariah predicted the events regarding Jesus return: "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). Finally, John describes Jesus as the first and last, the "Alpha and Omega," a statement which forms a bookend in the Book of Revelation where it is repeated in the closing section in Revelation 21:6 and 22:13. This is a way of saying that Jesus is A to Z and everything in between. He is everything we need.

We can be confident that one day Jesus will return to establish His rightful place on earth as the Ruler of the universe. He released us from our sins by His blood—a great sacrifice on His part. What a wonderful Savior. May we live in the freedom He has granted us, giving our lives back to Him as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1-2).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from Saint John chapter 18. The context is just after Jesus was betrayed by Judas and arrested in the garden across from the Kidron Valley (John 13:1). Jesus was bound and led first to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas the high priest that year (John 18:13). Annas was the one who had prophesied that it would be better for one man to die than for the rest of the nation to perish (John 18:14). Jesus was interrogated by Annas, with Peter following at a distance (vv. 15-17). Next, Jesus was led to Caiaphas the high priest (v. 24), then finally into the Praetorium where He appeared before Pontius Pilate. While Annas and Caiaphas were the Jewish rulers, Pilate was the Roman ruler, who could sentence a prisoner to death.

Gospel Reading:

> *John 18:33-37 NAS95 33 Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" 34 Jesus answered, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?" 35 Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?" 36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." 37 Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."*

In the reading Jesus affirmed His rightful rulership of the world, although He had not yet established His kingdom on earth as it already was so in heaven. Jesus' kingdom was at this time a kingdom not on earth, but rather one in the hearts of the people who believed. Jesus said, "Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice" (v. 37). The subjects of His kingdom are those who come to Him in faith who follow His truth. As we see in 1 John, "We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him" (1 John 3:19). Just as Jesus' rulership and kingdom were mocked and

discarded, we as His followers face similar persecution because of our belief in Him. Jesus said, "In this world you will have tribulation, but take heart, for I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). We must learn how to live in the tension of the now as we wait for the "not yet"—our future with Him. The fact that He endured the mistreatment of those in power gives us hope and strength to endure the mistreatment of the world as it mocks and marginalizes the Gospel message. These are opportunities to walk by faith not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7) and be a citizen of heaven (Phil. 3:20), thus showing the veracity of Christ's rulership in our lives.

What does this mean for us today? The readings today have shown us that Jesus truly is the Alpha and Omega, the rightful ruler of the universe. One day He will return to His rightful place to rule and reign on the earth. Until then we can trust in the promise of His return and look forward to the salvation of our souls. Second, we can trust that once we believe in the Lord Jesus for our salvation and not in any "good" works that we do (Ephesians 2:8-9) we can have assurance that we have eternal life. God tells us that if we believe, then we can presume that we have eternal life. "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). Finally, we as we continue to study and understand the prophecies about Jesus' return, we can begin to see the events of the world taking shape as Jesus' coming becomes more imminent. These events should not cause us alarm but rather give motivation to expand our ministry efforts to reach lost people with the saving message of the Gospel.

Reflection Questions

1. There were several descriptions of Jesus that were shared in the Mass passages this week. Take some time and reflect on one or two from the list below and make a connection between the description and how that can impact your perspective:
    - Ruler of an everlasting Kingdom
    - Son of Man
    - Faithful witness
    - First born of the dead
    - Ruler of the kings of the earth
    - The one who loves us and released us from sin by his blood
    - The one who made us to be a kingdom
    - The one who made us to be priests, to serve God
    - The one who was pierced
    - The Alpha and Omega
    - The one who is and was and is to come
    - The King of the Jews
    - The one who's kingdom is not of this world, but of another realm
2. If Jesus is King, how is His kingship displayed in your life? Are there ways that you are

> intentionally surrendering your self-rule in order to be ruled by Him? What areas does His kingship make sense in your life and motivate you to order your life around His values and priorities? Take time to reaffirm your desire to see Jesus' will override your self-will. What areas of your life need to be surrendered to His kingship? Take time to confess these areas of resistance to His rightful reign and ask Him to help you surrender, even in these war zones.

Mass-Study-Notes-for-Sunday_11-25-2018.pdfDownload

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 11-18-2018



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with a reading from Daniel 12 in which we study the combined event known as the rapture of the church, the return of the Lord, and the resurrection of the dead. Then we examine in the second reading how Jesus died for our sins once and for all, which is so much superior than the sacrificial system described in the Old Testament that had to be repeated twice a day and never took away the people's sins. Finally, we close with another view of the same event described in the first reading from Jesus' message known as the Olivet Discourse.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Prophet Daniel, chapter 12. The context of the message is a prophecy about the end of the world as we know it when the man of sin, known as the Antichrist, rules the world. The Antichrist will be in power when God pours out His final judgments on the earth and Jesus returns to reign on earth. The reading today describes the resurrection of the dead, some of whom go to eternal life with God and others go to eternal damnation. Jesus said, "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS'" (Matthew 7:22-23).

The reading from Daniel promises that the people of God will be "rescued" from this time of unprecedented distress. In the New Testament, we have further corroboration of this, which Saint Paul calls the "rapture," where the Lord Jesus comes to take His church to heaven before God pours the judgments chronicled in the Book of Revelation (see especially Revelation 16:1, the "seven bowls of the wrath of God"). We will read more about this later in the Gospel lesson regarding the "Day of the Lord's judgment" (1 Thessalonians 5:2), a very dark time for those left on the earth after Jesus' return for His church. The "catching up" of the church to heaven was predicted by Saint Paul in response to someone in Thessalonica who had been teaching the false doctrine that the Lord had already returned (2 Thessalonians 2:2). Here Paul introduced the concept that the church would be taken up into the air along with church saints who had already died (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17) as follows. "*15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.*" Paul reassured the believers that the Lord's return will be very obvious and recognizable. No one will "miss it." This corresponds to the teaching in Daniel 12, which is the focus of the first reading.

First Reading:

> *Daniel 12:1-3 NAS95 1 "Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. 2 Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt. 3 Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever."*

The reading opens with the phrase, "Now at that time" (v. 1a). The previous verses in Daniel 11, chronicle a time of wars and violence that will consume the earth. This will bring in a "time of distress" that is referred to later in the verse. Michael, one of only two angels mentioned by name in the Bible who follow God, will somehow superintend the activity during this time. As we said in

previous studies, the time leading up to this event will be a time of increasing and terrible persecution of God's people. Although a small remnant of Jews will be divinely sealed for God's protection throughout this time (Revelation 7:4-8), the Antichrist will pursue Christians with great vengeance just before the Lord returns and "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt" (v. 2). Saint John said in Revelation, "So the dragon was enraged with the woman (Israel), and went off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus (Christians)" (Revelation 12:17 with parenthetical explanations added). Verse two says that "many" will rise, meaning not everyone, but many people have yet to die on the earth. The exception to this is that the believers who are alive at that time will be taken up to be with the Lord. "*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord*" (1Th 4:16-17).

During this time "everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued." What is this book? The book that Daniel refers to is mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. Philippians 4:3 says that people who labored by Paul's side had their names written in the book of life. Revelation 3:5 shares a promise to those who overcome, that their names will not be blotted out of the book of life. Revelation 20:12 describes two books, one that has all the deeds of every person (implying judgment for misdeeds) and another book, the book of life, which if one's name is written there, will cancel out the judgment recorded in the other book. Revelation 20:15 says: "And if anyone's name was not found in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." Revelation 21:27 describes it as the Lamb's book of life and says that only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life will enter the New Jerusalem, God's eternal heaven. The Bible makes it very clear that the book of life is a place that records those who are going to be saved from the eternal lake of fire, the just consequences for those who live contrary to God and apart from His life. How does one know if his or her name is written in the book of life? Another way to ask the same question based on the passage in Daniel: how can we know which group we are in, the ones who will rise to everlasting life or those who rise to disgrace and everlasting contempt? Once we recognize that we are a sinner, "for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), we can turn our hearts to the Lord Jesus as the only remedy. The Bible tells us that "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (1 John 5:1a), and later John said, "He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life" (1 John 5:12). Further it says, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may **know** that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13, emphasis added). Salvation is a free gift that comes about **only** by belief in Jesus Christ, it can never be earned. "For 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). If you have put your faith in Jesus to save you, then you can have assurance that you will be "rescued" from eternal disgrace and contempt.

Daniel also explains that the people "who have insight" and who "lead the many to righteousness" will be prominent in the eternal kingdom of God, shining brightly "like the stars forever and ever" (v.

3c). Being involved in gaining wisdom and pointing others to deeper faith in Christ is a valuable focus for our lives. You may have a ministry of evangelism, introducing people to a relationship with Jesus. Or you may have a ministry of discipleship, helping those who have put their faith in Jesus grow in their new life in Christ. Either way, it is important to continue growing in your own faith to have insight and to be equipped to lead others to righteousness.

Interestingly, God gave us a glimpse into a precursor to the resurrection of the dead which happened at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus in the Gospel of Saint Matthew. He is the only one of the four writers that recorded this event. Matthew said that after Jesus had given up His life on the cross, "The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection, they entered the holy city and appeared to many" (Matthew 27:52-53). This is one example of how powerful God is and is evidence of the deity of Christ.

What does this reading mean for us today? First, if anyone is sitting on the fence regarding Jesus as Lord, today is the day to trust in Him. Saint Paul said, "*AT THE ACCEPTABLE TIME I LISTENED TO YOU, AND ON THE DAY OF SALVATION I HELPED YOU." Behold, now is "THE ACCEPTABLE TIME," behold, now is "THE DAY OF SALVATION*" (2 Corinthians 6:2). As Peter told the people in Jerusalem about Jesus, "*He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, but WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone. 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). Second, although we as Christians should expect increasing persecution leading up to Jesus' return, we can take hope that Jesus will fulfill His promise to return "in the same way in which [they] saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). Finally, we can have confidence in the fact that God's mighty angelic beings are fighting the spiritual battle against the demonic forces allied against us.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

This reading is from Hebrews chapter 10, a treatise on how Jesus died one time for sins forever, which means this sacrifice can never be repeated. At this time, the Hebrew people were still conducting the Old Testament sacrifices required by the Law. Throughout the book of Hebrews, the writer provides a running contrast to the old manner of things compared to Jesus. The verdict is that Jesus is greater than angels, greater than Moses, and greater than the sacrificial system. In this reading, we see a culminating point of the author's conclusion that Jesus is greater than the priestly system of the Old Testament.

Second Reading:

> *Note: Verses 15 – 16 which were omitted from the reading were included below.*
>
> *Hebrews 10:11-18 NAS95 11 Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; 12 but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, 13 waiting from that time onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET. 14 For by one offering He has*

> *perfected for all time those who are sanctified. 15 And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying, 16 "THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART, AND ON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM," He then says, 17 "AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE." 18 Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.*

The author said that by "one offering He has perfected [forever] those who are sanctified" (v. 14). The word once follows a string of uses of this same word that first appears in this context in chapter 7: "For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He died once for all when He offered up Himself" (Hebrews 7:26-27). To make his point that Jesus died once for sins forever, in contrast to the sacrifices offered repeatedly by the Levitical priests, the author continued repeating this word four more times before today's reading, and twice more in the actual reading. The author presented extremely compelling evidence as to the importance of understanding the concept of Jesus' single sacrifice for sins forever. He said, "[H]aving offered one sacrifice for sins for all time," (v. 12) then again he said in verse 14, "For by one offering." Interestingly the phrase indicating Jesus' single sacrifice is repeated seven times between the end of chapter seven and today's reading in chapter 10. Anytime the Bible repeats something we need to pay special attention to it, and especially if the concept is repeated seven times! The reading clearly tells us, "Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin" (v. 18). The only thing that can take away our sin is Jesus willingly sacrificing His life as a Victor on the cross for our sins (see John 10:18).

What does this mean for our life? The value of Jesus' sacrifice for our sins is of inestimable value. Compared with the sacrificial system of the Jews about which God said "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin" (Hebrews 10:4), Jesus' single sacrificial giving of Himself as a Victor on the cross provided the means for believers in Him to be reconciled to God forever. Jesus will never have to offer Himself as a sacrifice again, ever. When we celebrate communion we look back at His finished work on the cross. This was always God's plan, as Jesus was the "Lamb slain since before the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). When we break the bread of communion and drink from the cup, we remember the body that he allowed to be broken for us and His blood poured out as the final offering for sin forever (1 Corinthians 11:26). We do not need to work for our salvation, for Jesus' work on the cross is finished (John 19:30). I'll end this with one last exclamation point, for Jesus has "appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself"(Hebrews 9:26)! What a wonderful savior!

As we move onto the Gospel lesson, we will return to eschatology (pronounced es·ka·tol·a·gee), a word that means the study of the last things. The events in the reading will sound very familiar from your study in the first reading.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson from Mark 13 is from Jesus' message known as the Olivet Discourse. The parallel passage in Matthew 24 goes into some greater details than that of Mark's account. The context of the message is after Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem and His cleansing of the temple from the money changers during the preparation for the Passover. Upon the disciples telling Jesus about the "wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings" (Mark 13:1) of the temple complex, Jesus told them, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down" (verse 2). Afterwards Peter, James, John and Andrew approached Jesus privately and asked Him, "when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled" (v. 4). Jesus then explained to them what was to come, including many deceivers (Matthew 13:6), "wars and rumors of wars" (Matthew 13:7), famines and earthquakes (Matthew 13:8), yet these were just the beginning of the times of the end (v. 8). Then would come persecution (Matthew 13:9, 11), including death (v. 12), and the spread of the Gospel to the extent of the known world (v. 10, with final fulfillment in Revelation 14:6). After the "beginning of the birth pains" (v. 8e), the Antichrist will be revealed and bring an end to the restored sacrificial system in Jerusalem (Matthew 13:14). Although this prophecy was partially fulfilled by the Roman general Titus during the siege of Jerusalem during AD 70, the text is clear that another siege is in sight since Jesus warning is a global one, not just a local one concerning the city of Jerusalem. He said, "if the Lord had not cut short the days no human being would be saved" (v. 20). This and the corresponding testimony in the Book of Revelation make it clear that these events are yet future. This brings us up to today's reading which details events which begin after or during the unveiling of the first six seals in the Book of Revelation. The "gathering of the elect" (v. 27) about which we will read is the same event that we studied in the first reading from Daniel 12.

Gospel Reading:

> *Mark 13:24-32 NAS95 24 "But in those days, after that tribulation, THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, 25 AND THE STARS WILL BE FALLING from heaven, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken. 26 Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN CLOUDS with great power and glory. 27 And then He will send forth the angels, and will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven. 28 Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. 29 Even so, you too, when you see these things happening, recognize that He is near, right at the door. 30 Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. 32 But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone."*

The opening verse of the reading is nearly the same as what John described with the opening of the sixth seal in the Book of Revelation. "*12 I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; 13 and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. 14 The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places*" (Revelation 6:12-14). In the time just prior to the return of the

Lord Jesus, the world will experience miraculous cosmic signs revealing God's power (vv. 24 – 25). At some point during the mid-point of a seven year period counting from a peace treaty made with Jerusalem to settle the worldwide chaos surrounding control over that tiny but religiously important region, Jesus Christ "will send forth the angels, and will gather together His elect from the four winds" (v. 27). While there is much speculation about the sequence of events, this is the event we discussed in the first reading that, in my opinion, includes the rapture of the church (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 and 1 Corinthians 15:50–54), the return of the Lord Jesus (Acts 1:11), and the resurrection of the dead up until that time (Daniel 12:2, John 5:28-29). Beyond this point the period known as the Great Tribulation or the Day of the Lord will commence during which God will bring an end to the Antichrist's religious and commercial systems of mystery Babylon and Babylon the Great (Revelation 18). Although we don't yet understand what form this Babylon will take, we know that it will exalt itself against God much in the same way as the people did with the building of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9).

As the reading continued, Jesus explained to His disciples how to discern the signs of the times by telling them the parable of the fig tree. In the same way that they could discern the ripeness of the fig tree and that the summer was near they would also be able to discern that the end times were at their doorstep when the signs He gave them were at hand. He told them that once people (not necessarily them) saw these signs that the current generation would see the whole process completed during their lifetime (v. 30). Finally, through the mystery of the functions of the Three Persons of the Godhead, Jesus explained that the timing of the events was known only to God the Father (v. 32).

What does all of this talk about the horrible events of the end times mean to us today? Jesus calls us to live with an expectation of His imminent return. We are to be good stewards of the gifts that He has given to us. He said in Matthew's retelling of the Olivet Discourse, "*For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will. Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes*" (Matthew 24:44-46). We too must learn to discern the times by studying the imminent signs that will precede the return of the Lord, as you did today. Although the study of the end times may seem daunting, the Bible lays out a clear pattern of events that people alive during that time should expect to see. As time marches closer and closer to the fulfillment of these events, we should expect to see the "beginning of birth pains" described in Mark 13:8. We must expect to be persecuted on an increasing level for our faith, even to the point of death. The point of Jesus' teaching about His imminent return was to provide us with comfort that He is not far away, and He will return soon in fulfillment of His promises to us and to Israel. Saint Paul said, "Therefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:18) regarding the catching up of the church to heaven.

Reflection Questions

1. What do you find comforting about the words from the first and third readings? How can you

encourage and challenge others with your faith in Jesus' imminent return?

2. When you think about the fact that Jesus has paid fully for your sin debt, what inner response does this evoke? What outer response seems fitting for you to reflect this reality in your life this week? How can you live in light of this reality?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 11-04-2018



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we learn from the Book of Deuteronomy about the nature of God as One and the greatest commandment. We also discover the crucially important truths about God's one time sacrifice He made on our behalf and learn something about the shadowy priest figure known Melchizedek. Finally, in the Gospel we learn more about God's greatest commandment.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading from Deuteronomy, a word meaning "second law," is from chapter 6. This section opens with words fitting for a title of the entire book. "Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the LORD your God has commanded me to teach you, that you might do them in the land where you are going over to possess it" (Deut 6:1). Notice the use of the singular in the first phrase, "the commandment." The Book of the Law, the Pentateuch, contained in the first five Books of the Bible is "the Law" or the commandment together as a whole. However, as we will see in the reading that follows there is one commandment given by God to His people that is the capstone of them all, the calling for God's covenant people to make Him the center of their lives. We will see how this plays out in today's reading.

First Reading:

> *Deuteronomy 6:2-6 NAS95 2 so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. 3 "O Israel, you should listen and be careful to do it, that it may be well with you and that you may multiply greatly, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey. 4 "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! 5 "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart.*

As we saw in the introduction, God called the people to follow His commandments in the land to which they were going, meaning the Promised Land in Israel into which they were preparing to cross after a forty year wait (Joshua 5:6). God called the people to keep His commandments (v. 2a) so that their days would "be prolonged" (v. 2d). The Mosaic Covenant was conditional in nature, and in order to reap the benefits of it the people had to be obedient to the Law as given by Moses through the intercession of angels on the Mountain of God (Galatians 3:19, Exodus 19:3). If they people kept the commandments, they would blessed by God. One of the blessings of God is the honor (and responsibility) granted to Israel to understand the nature of God in order to get to know Him better. Verse 4 contains what is known as the "Shema Yisrael." This is a statement about the nature of God Who is one in contrast to the polytheism that existing in the worship of many gods during that era. The reading closes with perhaps the greatest single commandment, to "love the LORD your God with all [their hearts] and with all [their] soul and might" (v 5).

What does it mean for **us** to follow God's commandments and love Him with all of our heart, mind and soul? Following God means to put God at the center of our lives, to put and keep God in everything that we do. We are enabled in achieving this high calling by God's Holy Spirit Who was given to us the moment we truly understand and trusted in God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9). Jesus said, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28). As Christians we can proclaim that although we are freed from the heavy constraints of the Mosaic Law covered in Deuteronomy, we are free to worship the Lord God in His Oneness through the empowerment that He has given to us through faith in his Son and His indwelling Holy Spirit.

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Introduction to the Second Reading:

Today's reading from Hebrews 7 is very important because it describes how Jesus fulfilled and set aside the Old Testament Law including the bloody sacrificial system. The first part of chapter 7 records the ministry of a mysterious priestly figure known as Melchizedek. Understanding the person of Melchizedek is of crucial importance to us as believers in Jesus Christ. This is because he came not from the line of Aaron which was completed after the cross but instead of a priestly line of Jesus that continues forever (Hebrews 7:3).

Second Reading:

> *Hebrews 7:23-28 NAS95 23 The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, 24 but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. 25 Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. 26 For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; 27 who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. 28 For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever.*

Unlike the Levitical priests whose death prevented them from continuing forever, the Melchizedekian line, consisting only of Melchizedek and Jesus, continues forever since the resurrected Jesus lives forever. Today's reading also reveals the one-time nature of Jesus' sacrifice in contrast to the repeated sacrificed offered by the priest which could never erase the sins of the people. Instead, these sacrifices pointed forward to the ultimate, one-time, willing sacrifice of Jesus Christ Himself for our sins. Jesus gave His life not as a victim, but as a victor, as our High Priest Who lives forever.

As Christians living in the era after the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, we are freed from obedience to the long line of Levitical priests which never took away the remembrance of sins from the people. Instead, we see later in Hebrews what this new, permanent, one and only successor to Priest Melchizedek means for us. "Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD" (Hebrews 10:11-12). We now have only one Priest, and that Priest is Jesus Christ Himself who bore the penalty for our sins on the cross for us once and for all.

In closing, let's read what the author of Hebrews said as a summary statement in this section.

> *Hebrews 10:15-18 NAS95 15 And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying, 16 "THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART, AND ON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM," He*

> *then says, 17 "AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE." 18 Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.*

The moment we believed, God placed His law in our hearts through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit. At that same moment He forgave us of past sins, present sins, and future sins. Finally, He did away with the sacrificial system which required priests to make offerings on our behalf.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Today's reading provides a fitting close to what we read in the first reading from Deuteronomy about the greatest commandment.

Gospel Reading:

> *Mark 12:28-34 NAS95 28 One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" 29 Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD; 30 AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.' 31 "The second is this, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' There is no other commandment greater than these." 32 The scribe said to Him, "Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that HE IS ONE, AND THERE IS NO ONE ELSE BESIDES HIM; 33 AND TO LOVE HIM WITH ALL THE HEART AND WITH ALL THE UNDERSTANDING AND WITH ALL THE STRENGTH, AND TO LOVE ONE'S NEIGHBOR AS HIMSELF, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." 34 When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions.*

A scribe, someone whom we could equate to as a lawyer or legal scholar in our day, approached Jesus with a most important question. "*What commandment is the foremost of all?*" Jesus' answer left this scribe speechless. Jesus repeated the Shema, and then added, "Love one's neighbor as Himself" (v. 33b). Loving one's neighbor was indeed a very high calling in an era when neighbors may include Roman soldiers or even Samaritans since Jerusalem from which Jesus was speaking was such a crossroads of trade and culture. Interestingly, Jesus commended the scribe by telling him that he was "not far from the kingdom of God" (v. 34). This was, it seems, because this particular scribe properly understood that the heavy matters of the Law and it's sacrificial system were greatly outweighed by the spiritual component: loving the Lord God with all of his heart, mind, and soul (Deuteronomy 6:5). The scribes, as representatives of the Law, pointed the people to how they were to observe the Law and through the presentation of various sacrifices through the Levitical Priesthood. We saw in the second reading how the priesthood could never take away the people's sins. Instead, it only pointed the way to the one time, forever sacrifice that Jesus would make to take away people's sins forever. The scribe rightly understood the fuller meaning of the Law, the way in which it pointed people to love God, and not only God but also his neighbor.

The whole of today's readings provides substantial implication for us as Christians living with the knowledge of Jesus' fulfillment and completion of the Old Testament Law. Consider the following points in light of all of today's readings.

- Jesus is our High Priest and the Priest for all, including both Jews and Gentiles, in contrast to the Old Testament sacrificial system which required conversion to Judaism in order to take part in the sacrificial system. However, the old sacrificial system always pointed towards its fulfillment through Jesus Christ which then terminate the sacrifices forever.
- We no longer require priests to stand as a mediator between us and God. "For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).
- The Old Testament sacrificial system repeatedly cost the worshipers money to provide the necessary sacrifices. In contrast, Jesus paid the price for our sins and redeemed us from the curse of the Law (Galatians 3:13). The cost that we pay is in the giving of our lives to Him for our service (Ephesians 2:10).
- In contrast to the repeated offerings of sacrifices in the old system, Jesus died once for our sins forever. Students of the Bible know that the biblical authors use repetition to draw particular focus to a given concept. The author of Hebrews used repetition to show us how Jesus died once for sins and that His sacrifice could never be repeated:
    - *Heb 7:27 who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did **once** for all when He offered up Himself.*
    - *Heb 9:12 and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place **once** for all, having obtained eternal redemption.*
    - *Heb 9:26-27 Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now **once** at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.*
    - *Heb 9:27-28 And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, 28 so Christ also, having been offered **once** to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.*
    - *Heb 10:10 By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ **once** for all.*
    - *Heb 10:12 but He, having offered **one sacrifice** for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD,*
    - *Heb 10:14 For by **one** offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.*

For us, loving God with all of our heart, mind, and soul, and loving our neighbor as ourselves is indeed a high calling. In the Gospel reading Jesus commended the scribe in his recognition of this grandest aspect of the Law, to love God with all our mind, heart, and soul. This is in contrast to the prevailing religious system in that Jewish culture which was predicated upon the works of the people in paying for and offering sacrifices through the priestly system. We can rest in the fact that Jesus set aside the old system and now calls us to a new, fuller understanding of what it means to love God.

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Reflection Questions

1. In light of the increasing secularism of the culture in America and the world, what does it mean for YOU to follow God's commandments and love Him with all of your heart, mind and soul?
2. What is the significance of the single, one-time, forever offering of the Lord Jesus Christ willingly (not as a victim) for our sins in contrast to ongoing, repeated ministry of the Old Testament Priests? In what ways does knowing this change the way you view your worship of God?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 10-28-2018



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with a message of hope from the Prophet Jeremiah. The application is that although we as believers sin God will ultimately fulfill all of His promises to us including restoration and life with Him in a perfect kingdom. In the second

reading from Hebrews, we examine Jesus' intercession for us as our eternal High Priest. We conclude the lesson with Mark's story about Jesus' healing of a blind man named Bartimaeus.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from chapter 31 of the Book of Jeremiah. In Books like Jeremiah that combine history and prophecy, understanding the context is crucial to interpreting the text. In the reading Jeremiah finds himself in the midst of the aftermath of the first two exiles of the people of Judah to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. The third and final deportation and destruction of Jerusalem is on the near horizon at which time Jeremiah will find himself carried to Babylon with an intermediate stop along the way in Egypt. In the first and second deportations in 605 and 597 BC, the prophets Daniel and Ezekiel respectively were carried to Babylon to continue their prophetic writings from that far away country. Two chapters before today's reading Jeremiah brought a message of hope to the two previously exiled groups from Judah (the Southern Kingdom) in Babylon. God's instructions to the people through Jeremiah were to live normally and fruitfully in that distant land. They were to "Build houses and live in them; and plant gardens and eat their produce" and "Take wives and become the fathers of sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there and do not decrease" (Jeremiah 29:5.6). The Jews living as exiles in Babylon were to "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare" (v. 7).

First Reading:

> *Jeremiah 31:7-9 NAS95 7 For thus says the LORD, "Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, And shout among the chief of the nations; Proclaim, give praise and say, 'O LORD, save Your people, The remnant of Israel.' 8 "Behold, I am bringing them from the north country, And I will gather them from the remote parts of the earth, Among them the blind and the lame, The woman with child and she who is in labor with child, together; A great company, they will return here. 9 "With weeping they will come, And by supplication I will lead them; I will make them walk by streams of waters, On a straight path in which they will not stumble; For I am a father to Israel, And Ephraim is My firstborn."*

Jeremiah spoke as God's anointed prophet to the southern tribes of Judah and therefore the reading begins with, "For thus says the LORD" (v. 7a). God had warned the people over and over again that unless they repented He would send them into captivity to atone for their sin. This message of hope was important to the exiles but Jeremiah continued his warnings to Judah that unless they repented God would take the rest of the people captive and destroy the city of Jerusalem along with the temple. The message in today's reading is one of hope to all of the exiles that God would one day restore them back to the land. It also provides hope to the exiles of the Northern Kingdom taken back in 722 BC by the Assyrians, although the message was written to Judah. The reading continues Jeremiah's proclamation about this future restoration. Just prior to this Jeremiah told the people,

"For behold, days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will restore the fortunes of My people Israel and Judah.' The LORD says, 'I will also bring them back to the land that I gave to their forefathers and they shall possess it.'" (Jeremiah 30:3). Although the third and final exile had not yet happened, this message of hope was written to all of the exiles, as it was a foregone conclusion.

Jeremiah's message concerned hope in the future restoration of the people of Judah to the land. He said that the people "gather[ed] from the remote parts of the earth . . . A great company, they will return here" (v. 7). Although King Nebuchadnezzar had already deported two large groups from Judah to Babylon, the final destruction was due to come very soon with the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. Interestingly, God included the Northern Kingdom in this message about the future regathering and restoration of the Israelite people by mentioning "Ephraim is My firstborn" (v. 9). The Prophet Daniel, who was the first to be exiled to Babylon, said concerning the Southern Kingdom that the period of time which they would be held captive after this final event would be seventy years (Daniel 9:24). After these "seventy sevens" of years, Daniel said that a decree would be issued and that Jerusalem would be rebuilt and restored (Daniel 9:25). Jeremiah said the same thing just two chapters before the reading. "When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place" (Jeremiah 29:10). Ultimately, with the mention of Ephraim and a universal regathering of the Jews we must look to the future restoration of the entire kingdom of Israel under the reign of Jesus Christ that will happen upon His return. The big idea is that although the people had sinned, God would forgive their sin and complete the promises that He had made to them to inherit all of the Promised Land. The terms of His promises to them were confirmed in the various covenants. Although many of God's promises to Israel were tied to their inheritance of material blessings such as the land, the Bible is full of spiritual promises to them including salvation through their future Savior.

The application of Jeremiah's message for us today is that although "all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23)," "if confess our sins God is faithful and just to forgive our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). We, like the Jews, continually miss the mark. We share in the message of hope that God will complete all of the promises that He has made to us. We cannot make the mistake as some have done by claiming the church has replaced Israel and that since God has forsaken Israel the church will inherit the promises that God made to them. Instead, God will make good both on His promises to Israel and on the promises He made to the church. *For more about God's promises to the church refer to the first study question.*

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Chapter 5 of the Book of Hebrews. The overall message of the Book is the contrast between the Old and New Covenants. The Old Covenant was incomplete and imperfect in the sense that it came through the Levitical priesthood that was passing away because of its connection to mortal high priests. In contrast, the New Covenant is proffered through the eternal priesthood of Jesus Christ who is in the line of Melchizedek. This theme comes out very clearly in today's reading.

Second Reading:

> *Hebrews 5:1-6 NAS95 1 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; 2 he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; 3 and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself. 4 And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was. 5 So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, "YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU"; 6 just as He says also in another passage, "YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK."*

The author explained how God in the Old Testament appointed the mortal, weak and misguided high priests of the Levitical line (Aaron) in order not only to offer sacrifices for other people but also for themselves (v. 3). In contrast, God the Father appointed Christ as our eternal High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, not Aaron (v. 6). It's important to understand the man named Melchizedek mentioned in verse 5. The first time we find Melchizedek in the Bible is in Genesis 14:17-20 where we find him bringing out bread and wine to greet Abraham who was returning from battle with the forces that kidnapped his nephew Lot. Hebrews 7:1 says about this, "Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him." Looking at the book of Hebrews as a whole you can see that it's grounded in an explanation of Christ through the perspective of the Levitical Old Testament priesthood, thus the title given to the book "Hebrews" meaning Jews (see Genesis 14:3 where Abram, later called Abraham, the father of the Jews, is called a Hebrew). We see there in Hebrews 7:1 that Melchizedek is three things: 1. the king of Salem, the area we now identify as Jerusalem, 2. A priest of the "Most High God," meaning a priest of the *only* true God, and 3. one to whom Abraham the father of the Jews gave tribute. Today's reading said that Christ is of the "order of Melchizedek (v. 5), which is a quote from Psalms 110:4. According to the Book of Leviticus, all of the Old Testament Priests had to come from the tribe of Levi, but Melchizedek was a priest before the Law even existed! Yet Abraham gave a tenth portion (or tithe) to Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:4) as required under the later Law for all priests (verse 5). What is being explained here is that Melchizedek was one of a class of priests that foreshadowed the coming final, eternal High Priest, Jesus. Melchizedek, whose name means King of righteousness, could not have come from the line of Aaron (Levi) or Judah, because these did not exist during his lifetime. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrificial system, the final sacrifice was Jesus' own death on the cross which did away with the Levitical priesthood (Hebrews 10:11-14). Jesus was from the "order of Melchizedek" (Ps 110:4, Hebrews 7:17), not the line of Aaron. This is new order is made even more clear by reading beyond the quoted section of Psalm 110 to verse 7, "Therefore He will lift up his head." This eternal priest Jesus of the non-priestly line of Judah is and will be exalted by God. Melchizedek was the first biblical personality to picture the reality of a priest/king.

There are numerous implications for our lives relative to Jesus as The High Priest according to the line of Melchizedek. Jesus' ministry to us as the only intercessor between us and the Father (1 Timothy 2:5) is eternal. Second, we will never be subject to the frailties of a human priesthood

because Jesus replaced the Levitical Priesthood forever. Since Jesus lived as a Man on earth, He can identify with the things that trouble us in this life. "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus provides all who believe in Him with hope that one day our human weakness will be removed and we will be restored to a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson is from Mark 10 and follows James and John's request to "Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory" (Mark 10:37). Jesus taught them that they would suffer for Him, but it was not for them to choose their position as this was up to the will of His Father (Matthew 10:38-40). This discussion caused the other ten disciples to "feel indignant with James and John" (v. 41). Next, on their way to Jerusalem they stopped along the way in Jericho.

Gospel Reading:

> *Mark 10:46-52 NAS95 46 Then they came to Jericho. And as He was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a large crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road. 47 When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 48 Many were sternly telling him to be quiet, but he kept crying out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 49 And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him here." So they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take courage, stand up! He is calling for you." 50 Throwing aside his cloak, he jumped up and came to Jesus. 51 And answering him, Jesus said, "What do you want Me to do for you?" And the blind man said to Him, "Rabboni, I want to regain my sight!" 52 And Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him on the road.*

The beggar named Bartimaeus is a name that means son of Timaeus, because "bar" means "son of." Blind people in this culture had few resources and were without any sort of social support systems so they frequently had to resort to begging. Bartimaeus took great initiative and jumped up on his own, the text doesn't say that someone else led him there. Twice he called to Jesus using the messianic title "Son of David." This indicated that he had some knowledge about who Jesus was. He recognized that Jesus was the only One that could open the eyes of the blind both in the physical sense but also spiritually as well through his use of the messianic title for Him. The blind man then heard the people calling to him and then threw away his cloak, possibly the only valuable possession that he owned. Bartimaeus not only received his sight but the text says that "his faith made him well" (v. 52), meaning that he also received the forgiveness of his sins as well. Afterwards he became a follower of Jesus, both literally and spiritually (v. 52).

What does this mean for us today? We too have to be willing to talk a bold step of faith and throw away our valuable possessions in order to find spiritual healing through Jesus. As former unbelievers, we too are blind to the reality of sin in our lives. Saint Paul says, "And even if our gospel

is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). There are many reasons that Jesus calls Himself the Light of the World (John 8:12) because as the Light He shines truth upon the spiritual darkness of our hearts. It is only through faith in Jesus that we receive spiritual life (Ephesians 2:8-9). Finally, we can praise God for this tremendous miracle of healing that he provided Bartimaeus in a culture where blind people were on the lowest rung of society. We can praise Him for all of the times that He has healed us and others around us, even if we were not aware of His intervention on our behalf.

Reflection Questions

1. In the first reading we said that God would make good on both His promises to Israel and His promises to the church. Reflect upon the following promises that God has made to you and how this provides you with hope during the troubled and shorts days of your earthly lifetime.

- Salvation to all who believe in His Son Jesus. "Romans 1:16-17 NAS95 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.'"
- God will work out all things for the our good as a believer. "Romans 8:28 NAS95 28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."
- As believers we receive a new life in Christ. "2 Corinthians 5:17 NAS95 17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."
- God promises believers peace when they persist in calling upon Him in prayer. "Philippians 4:6-7 NAS95 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

2. The Book of Hebrews begins with, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe" (Hebrews 1:1-2). In what ways is Jesus as the truly eternal high priest / king (that fulfilled the requirements of the Law) the only possible One who can make intercession for us (1 Timothy 2:5)?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 10-14-2018



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. I remember the time when I came home from the office and I saw an ambulance in my neighbor's driveway. Harvey was a man that had retired from the assembly line at General Motors. He was a rough-around-the-edges kind of guy, not someone that you would find going to church each Sunday although his wife did regularly attend. Harvey had struggled with sepsis and had been very close to dying. I had wondered about his spiritual beliefs, and I was sad that I had never shared with him the faith that I had in Jesus Christ. He pulled through this episode, but had horrible ongoing issues including kidney failure and the need for dialysis three times a week. After Harvey returned home, I finally got up the courage to send him a letter explaining the facts of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Even though I could not break through to him face to face, I figured that he would at least read the letter. I explained that his continuing life was evidence of a miracle from God. Later I moved to a far-away state, but I kept in frequent touch with Harvey by cell phone. I never saw any signs of spiritual life in him, but I maintained the relationship, and we developed a closer relationship than we had had when he was living across the street.

This week we will examine two very deep readings dealing with the important subject of eternal life. We will see in the first reading that the author used the Old Testament as a means of providing an important spiritual lesson for his readers. Then we will learn how Jesus answered a bold question about how to obtain eternal life. If you stick with us, you will also learn about what happened to my friend Harvey.

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Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Apocrypha. This body of work provides important historical insights into the 400-year silent period just prior to the birth of Jesus. We encourage our readers to become familiar with the cultural and historical context leading up to the publishing of the New Testament. Due to copyright restrictions we are not able to include that reading in our notes.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from the Book of Hebrews, which we also studied last week. This week's reading follows the author's warning in chapter 4 about falling short of true salvation. The writer is providing a clear warning about the sin of unbelief by using the story about what had happened to the unbelieving Jews wandering in the desert. Saint Paul explained the use of the Old Testament Scriptures this way. "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4). The writer of Hebrews expects his readers to be aware of the Old Testament writings and to take them to heart!

Hebrews 4 begins with the conjunction "therefore," connecting what he is about to say with the previous section. The author had explained the danger of the sin of unbelief. Those that don't believe, he said, would not enter God's rest, meaning the Promised Land. "And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief" (Hebrews 3:18-19). He is referring to the report of the spies after they had checked out the land they were to enter. "So they gave out to the sons of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, 'The land through which we have gone, in spying it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great size'" (Numbers 13:32). The unbelievers were those who had accepted the majority report given by the spies after they had surveyed the Land. Moses said that the people wouldn't enter their physical rest through entrance into the Promised Land because of their unbelief, but the writer uses this Old Testament story as a metaphor to teach a much more significant application.

Unbelievers then and now will also not enter into God's eternal rest, since the only unforgivable sin in the Bible is the sin of unbelief (Mark 3:28-30). This explanation provides clarity to chapter 4:1, "Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it." The author is drawing a metaphor from the Old Testament experience. There the people's physical rest was gained through entrance into the Promised Land. This is compared with his contemporary readers' finding eternal rest by entrance into a relationship with God through faith. Everyone throughout history gains eternal life the same way—through faith in the One True God and his Savior, so the author used the illustration of the unbelieving Jews in the exodus as a warning to his readers about the danger of this unforgivable sin.

As we move toward verse 12, where today's reading begins, we see the author's summary statement about the heart of the matter, belief in God's written Word. "For indeed we have had good news

preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard" (Hebrews 4:2). The writer goes on to explain that entrance into God's rest comes through faith, not works. "For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His" (Hebrews 4:10). Saint Paul, also, emphasized that faith is the basis for salvation: "For 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). With this extensive introduction, which we included because of its direct connection to the Gospel lesson, let us now study the text from today's reading. As you read, keep in mind the key concept of the saving value of faith.

Second Reading:

> *Hebrews 4:11-13 NAS95 11 Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience. 12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.*

The author warns his readers not to follow the example of disobedience set by the unbelieving Jews in the exodus. The wandering Jews in the wilderness had God's direct testimony to them in many ways, including revelation of His Law to Moses and His presence with them through the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night (Exodus 13:21-22). Yet, the Hebrew people still didn't believe God's promises about finding rest in the Promised Land. When Moses sent out spies to survey the Promised Land, only Joshua and Caleb came back bearing the good news about what they saw in the land, and that they were confident about God's promises to them about taking control of it (Numbers 14:6-9). Instead of following this "minority report," the Hebrews believed the majority's view that it would be better to return to Egypt than to attempt to enter the Land. And they then began making plans to do just that (Numbers 14:1-4).

The author uses this spiritual metaphor to warn us not to follow their example of gross disobedience, not believing God, the only unforgivable sin in the Bible. Interestingly, verse 12 opens with the preposition "for," which provides a natural linkage with the immediate preceding context. The opening verse, then, could be read this way, "[With] these previous things in mind, the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword . . . ." In the case of the Hebrews in the exodus the Word of God came to them directly through Moses and the priests. In the case of the New Testament context the Word of God comes through God's written Word. It is this written Word that is "living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword (v. 12a). The author says that the Word is "able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (v. 12d). The Word of God convicts us of our sin through the illumination provided by God's Holy Spirit. "Illumination," in the spiritual sense, is the turning on of the light bulb in the mind of a person regarding the things of God. There are levels of illumination, and the knowledge of sin is the very first and most basic level. This is what the author of Hebrews is getting at in the reading, where he later criticizes his readers because they

are spiritual babies able only to partake of spiritual milk and not solid food (Hebrews 5:12). He cautions his readers in the closing verse to remember that they cannot fool God about all of this because "all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him" (v. 13b).

There is one primary application of the reading for us today. The testimony of God given through the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Bible must not be neglected by anyone. We must not follow the example of the disobedient Jews in the exodus who did not believe God's promises. Rather we should believe and follow the only way to God which is through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus has made this perfectly clear. He said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). Peter warned the unbelievers in the Book of Acts about rejecting Jesus, when he said, "He (Jesus) is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, but WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone. 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 4:11-12). As believers we follow the minority report given by the godly patriarchs of the faith like Joshua and Caleb. We don't follow the majority view of the unbelieving world, and we work to fulfill the Great Commission in leading others who are on this broad road to the narrow way of life through faith in Jesus Christ (Matthew 7:13-14)

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading continues with the study in Mark. This week's story occurs just after Jesus was confronted by the Pharisees who attempted to trap Him with a question about divorce (Mark 10:2). Jesus referred them to biblical truths from the Old Testament and then privately explained them in further detail to His disciples. Afterwards the crowds brought children to Jesus, and the disciples tried o turn them away, which caused Jesus' rebuke of them (Mark 10:13). As Jesus was preparing to leave this area, He was confronted by a man who asked Him a very important question.

Gospel Reading:

> *Mark 10:17-30 NAS95 17 As He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 18 And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. 19 You know the commandments, 'DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, Do not defraud, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.'" 20 And he said to Him, "Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up." 21 Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." 22 But at these words he was saddened, and he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property. 23 And Jesus, looking around, said to His disciples, "How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!" 24 The disciples were amazed at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." 26 They were even more astonished and said to Him, "Then who can be saved?" 27 Looking at*

> *them, Jesus said, "With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God." 28 Peter began to say to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You." 29 Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, 30 but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life."*

In the reading we see a man who just asked Jesus the most important question in the universe, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (v. 17). Yet in the man's question there is an inherent fallacy. As the crowd was fresh from Jesus' confrontation with the Pharisees who were committed "doers" of the Law, the man asked Jesus what he should do to inherit eternal life. Jesus, knowing the man's heart, knew that this man had kept the Ten Commandments, and so He recited the ones dealing with things to do and not to do (v. 19). However, although Jesus didn't question his observance of the Law, He cut to the heart of the matter for him, his stumbling stone, which was the worship of his personal treasures over the worship of God. Jesus knew that, although the inquirer was following most of the commandments, it was the first one over which he was stumbling: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:2-3). Saint Paul said that it wasn't riches itself that created evil, but that the love of money was the root of all evil (1 Timothy 6:10).

Jesus then went on to explain the quandary using an illustration of a needle and camel (v. 25). Some have thought that Jesus was referring to a certain very low gate in Jerusalem which required the rider and camel to duck down in order to enter. No such gate has ever been located in Jerusalem, and if there were such a gate, it wouldn't prove that a man can enter the kingdom of heaven through his good works. Instead, what Jesus was teaching was it is impossible to gain eternal life through any good works, but that it is offered only by God's gracious provision alone. Even rich people, Jesus explained, can enter the kingdom through faith because "all things are possible with God" (v. 27). Entrance into this kingdom does require sacrifice though, because one must give up the things he trusts in in order to trust fully and only in God's grace. In the case of the rich man this would mean giving up the "worship" of his riches and turning only to the worship of God. Remember that Jesus had just told the people to take drastic actions regarding the things which were keeping them from following Him: "If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire" (Mark 9:43 On one occasion Peter told Jesus that he had given up everything to follow Him, to which Jesus replied that he, and anyone who gave up something for Jesus, would receive a hundred times what was given up (v. 30). In other words, the investment in Jesus would be worth it, with a ten thousand percent return on investment in the present age, with eternal life thrown in, to boot.

What does this mean for us today? We cannot overstate the importance of the application of Jesus' teaching in these few verses. First, we cannot earn eternal life by doing anything; that comes only through belief in Jesus Christ alone. Saint Paul said, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). We are all sinners and cannot change that without the outside intervention of God, no matter how hard we try. The rich man in the story tried very hard, yet even he was unable

to cleanse his heart through keeping the commandments. When measured against God's perfect standard, he fell far short, and Jesus revealed to him that he had disobeyed the first and most important commandment, loving God above everything else. If we think we can be saved by our good works, or that our good works are meritorious towards salvation, Paul explains the relationship between faith and works. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10, emphasis added). Paul said, "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5, emphasis added). Our good works flow out of our faith in Jesus Christ as the result of a heart that has been changed by God, or "born from above (or again)." Jesus told Nicodemus, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3b). Nicodemus didn't understand Jesus until later in his life, but God saw to it that his story was recorded in the Bible so that we could identify with this "Nick at Night."

What about us, are we relying upon something other than God to earn our way into heaven? Are we like the rich man, who was likely very generous in giving, withholding our true worship for God alone? Are we believing the minority report offered up by men of faith, or following the majority view of those who shrink back from following God, or who try to purchase their way into heaven through their supposed good works, no matter how valid they may be? Do we think that we can duck low enough to ride our camel through some super-secret entrance gate into heaven? These are powerful things for us to ponder, and we can be overjoyed that God has given us clear answers from His Holy Word. "Our good works are the true riches that we will be able to present to God as evidence of salvation. Jesus called it our "bearing of fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matthew 3:8).

I introduced my former neighbor Harvey in the introduction to this week's lesson. After I moved away I kept in touch with Harvey and also developed a closer relationship with his wife who kept me up to date on the various emergencies that developed concerning my friend. One weekend I travelled back to my former town to visit some friends who just happened to live down the street from my former home and my friend Harvey. One night I had a strange sense that something was going on with Harvey and I planned to visit him the following morning. After I awoke the next morning, I received a call from his daughter who told me that Harvey had passed away early that morning. She explained that the local pastor was with Harvey, and that he had requested to be baptized before he died. Harvey evidently gave testimony regarding his faith in Jesus. Harvey proceeded with this bold testimony of faith by submitting to baptism and died a short time later. A few days later I had the opportunity to meet the pastor at the funeral luncheon. I explained to him how Harvey had been deeply moved by the frequent visits of his church's members during years as he suffered from declining health. As his eyes began to well up with tears, along with my own, I told him that his faithful service and that of his church were the reasons that Harvey trusted in the Lord Jesus. I told him that Harvey often spoke about their visits and how thankful I was that they had served him in this way.

As I reflect upon what Harvey meant to me, I remember that at some point God had prompted me to begin praying for Harvey. God gave me a sense that salvation was possible even for Harvey, no

matter what my feelings told me about the matter. Just to check, I plugged his name into a Google search and was greeted with his smiling face from his memorial page. That reminded me that Harvey is alive forever in heaven, and one day I will visit him again. I have asked God to make this man one of the first people that I meet when I get to heaven. The evidence of his changed life just before he died has been a life-changing event for me. His testimony provides me with hope that God can reach even those we think are too hard to reach.

What about you, is there someone in your life who you feel is would never believe but yet God seems to keep having you bump into them? Will you pray to begin reaching out to them in even the smallest ways, and that God would embolden you to share the story of how Jesus has changed your life?

Reflection Questions

1. We saw in the opening verse of the passage from Hebrews (which was omitted from the reading) this key sentence: "11 Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience" (Hebrews 4:11). Later we provided this verse from Saint Paul. "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Corinthians 10:11).

> List and discuss how you have benefited from studying the lives of two specific biblical characters in the Old Testament. In what ways have you learned from their obedience or disobedience?

2. What you understand about the relationship between faith and works in terms of gaining eternal life? Second, how does your position correspond to what James said, "Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself" (James 2:17).

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 10-07-2018

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open this week with a reading from Genesis, the first and foundation Book of the Bible. This is one of the Books that I read once a year, along with the two other Books that I consider foundational for any student of the Bible. The other two that I read (and sometimes the entire Book in one sitting) are the Gospel of John and the Book of Acts. When I speak with new believers, I frequently tell them to proceed in the following order. Begin with Genesis, then with John, and finally conclude with Acts. In this way, the reader picks up many very important names and biblical constructs in a very short time. In addition, when reading in this order a person will quickly recognize the connections between the Old and New Testaments. This week as we begin with a reading from Genesis, we will see how Jesus connected this first Book of the Bible to His contemporary teaching on divorce as well as the Mosaic Law which His nemesis the Pharisees were trying to twist for their own advantage. We will also study in the second reading how the Old Testament proves that Jesus is the Christ as we look at the Book of Hebrews. The author of Hebrews was a star student of the Old Testament and understood extremely well the themes and theology of the Old Testament and how it connected with the New as revealed through the Person of Jesus Christ.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Moses Chapter 2. This reading is from Moses' retelling of the creation story that added additional details to the summary account he provided in Chapter 1. Beginning in verse 4 of this chapter, Moses adds additional details to his account. Although God had already created man (Genesis 1:26, 2:7) he was placed in the garden to work it alone (2:18). God knew that Adam needed a mate who was like himself, and provide a means to fulfil the commandment to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28). In today's reading, we will find out the remedy to Adam's loneliness.

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First Reading:

> *Genesis 2:18-24 NAS95 18 Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." 19 Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. 21 So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. 22 The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. 23 The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." 24 For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.*

After God created the animals, He brought them to Adam who completed the task of giving names to each one (2:20). Adam's naming process may have taken a long time, and the absence of any helper in the process reinforced his need for a spouse. Early in the reading we see the phrase it was "not good" in reference to Adam being alone. This contrasted with the closing of chapter one at the conclusion of the creation account in which God said it was "very good" after everything, and everybody including Adam and Eve, had been created (Genesis 1:31). During Adam's naming process the text says that "there was not found a suitable helper for him" (v. 20d) among the animal kingdom. Although Adam had close fellowship with the animals, as any pet owner can attest, these very special bonds still didn't satisfy his need for **human** companionship. Remember that during this time before the Fall the Lord God walked with Adam in fellowship with him (Genesis 3:8), however even this relationship left Adam desiring a mate because God had designed him for it. God then remedied Adam's need by creating the woman we know as Eve (Genesis 3:20) from out of Adam. In the Hebrew the word transliterated "woman" is "ish-shah" which sounds much like the word for man which is "aw-saw." In the original the word for rib also means side, so the woman was literally from Adam's side and named a word with the same root sound. In the English the idea of her name is similar, with "man" being the root and "wo-man" being the person taken from the man's side. In verse 18, the text says that a suitable "helper" was not found for Adam. The word there in the original is "ezer" pronounced "ay zer" which means aid. This word brings with it an association with another word found later in the Bible, "Ebenezer," which by interpretation is the "stone of help" and is used of God in the Old Testament. Ebenezer reminded the Jewish people of God's presence, and Eve created by God as a helper should do the same for us. Adam was created as a relational being, and God is a relational being consisting of three Persons in the Godhead. After the Fall we know that Adam and Eve's relationship was shattered, in contrast that which exists among the Persons of the Godhead is eternally in perfect relationship. Although Eve is literally the helper person drawn from Adam's side, the inevitable conflicts would begin between Adam and Eve after her creation, not matter how lonely he was before. These two had a mission, as the woman joined Adam in the work that God had given to him as the leader of the effort to maintain the garden that had been entrusted to him (Genesis 2:8, 15). Second, they were to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:28).

Later in the Gospel reading, we see how Jesus used the last verse of this reading to show how it was God's original plan that man and woman be united in the relationship of marriage during their lifetimes. Verse 24 explains that "for this reason" the man and woman shall leave their parents and become one in marriage, both in the spiritual sense and through the sexual union. The phrase "for this reason" points back to the previous verse where God explained that woman was formed from the man, and since this is so, the two are now one in marriage. Jesus will explain this essential truth to the Pharisees who were trying to twist the Law to hold their followers in the same bondage that they placed upon themselves.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from the Book of Hebrews, a Book about the superiority of Jesus Christ over angels and everyone else. This Book teaches us how Jesus was in the line of the Melchizedekian priesthood, which is eternal, rather than the Levitical priesthood which is tied to the human lifespan of the high priests. We know that one of the heresies that plagued the early church was the worship of angels, and the author of Hebrews attacked this headlong in showing Jesus' superiority over them. Saint Paul talked about this in the Book of Colossians when he said, "Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the **worship of the angels**, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind" (Colossians 2:18). In the first chapter of the Book the author explained how angels are "ministering spirits sent to those who will inherit salvation" (Hebrews 1:14). Angels are God's agents who do His business for Him. They are never to be worshiped in any manner, since there is only one mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5). The author's teaching on Jesus' position relative to the angels continues into chapter 2, which is the reading for today.

Second Reading:

> *Hebrews 2:9-11 NAS95 9 But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. 10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. 11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,*

In today's reading, the author explains how Jesus submitted to God the Father's plan for Him by allowing Himself to be born as a man in order to serve the world. The theological term for the process by which Jesus emptied Himself of His independent use of His divine attributes during the ministry of His First Advent is "kenosis." This concept is explained most clearly by Saint Paul in the Book of Philippians in the reading below. We are including this because of the great importance of this subject and for the fact that the author of Hebrews assumes the reader's familiarity with this concept. Saint Paul explains this in the verses below.

> *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" (Philippians 2:5-10).*

With Paul's teaching in mind, the meaning of the reading from Hebrews becomes clear. Jesus voluntarily became human during His earthly lifetime, making Himself "for a little while lower than the angels" (v. 2a). Jesus died for everyone according to God's rich grace by humbling Himself on the cross not as a victim, but as a victor. Nowhere in Scripture is Jesus ever called a victim, rather Jesus gave His life willingly for us in order to suffer the penalty for the sins of the entire world. The purpose of Jesus' work is explained in verses 10 – 11. Jesus is "bringing many sons to glory," and sanctifies (meaning makes perfect" those whom He calls brethren. At the first moment we believe we are given a new Spirit, the old one is gone and replaced with something new who knows God (Ezekiel 36:26, 2 Peter 1:3). In this new relationship, we are united in fellowship with the Holy Spirit, Jesus, and the Father. The author stated in the reading, "For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father" (v. 11a). This relationship is never something from which we can become divorced, as it was given to us by God. "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" (Romans 8:35). As we transition to the Gospel lesson, we will see how Jesus taught about the relationship of marriage as created by God for the purpose of a lifetime of fellowship between two followers of Him.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is a continuation of the study from Saint Mark. Before we continue let's take a step back and look at the big picture of this Gospel. Mark's writing was one of the earliest of the four Gospels. In this important Book of the Bible, the author emphasizes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. John Mark is held by tradition to be the author and there is strong evidence to regarding this. He was very likely influenced by ministry of Saint Peter, whom the Lord Jesus called the Rock of the church. Remember that this Rock of the church wrote about how as believers we become the heirs of God's great gifts through an eternal relationship with Him, something which the Pharisees did not understand. Peter said that as believers we are born again to a living hope "to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:3). Throughout Mark there are three primary groups of people, and in the reading this week each them appear. The first is Jesus' primary nemesis, the religious leaders including the Pharisees. The second is the crowds who follow Jesus and continually misunderstand Him. The third group is Jesus' disciples who also suffer from no small amount of misunderstanding even up until Jesus had risen from the dead when He had to explain everything to them regarding Himself from the Old Testament (Luke 24:13-32).

In today's reading, Jesus responds to a question from the religious leaders who came at Him not to

learn but rather to test Him (Mark 10:2). Jesus responded with a question, something that He often did when questioned. Do we know anyone who when we ask them a question responds with a question, and afterwards we learn something from them? Jesus used this inductive approach when He was addressing the crowds, as contrasted with a deductive method in which He would have plainly given them the answer to their question. He uses those two different approaches consistently when He was addressing those two different groups of people. With the inductive method, He spoke mostly with questions and parables, but then later explained His public address privately to His disciples. In this case, the religious leaders didn't really desire to learn from Jesus by understanding the true answer to their question, instead they were trying to test or trap Jesus by asking Him a question about some obscure or difficult subject dealing with Jewish Law. In the reading, we see Jesus following a familiar pattern. Someone from one of the first two groups asks Him a question, and Jesus responds with a question, which if answered properly could have led them to the answer themselves. Then once He is away from them, He plainly explains to His disciples the answer to both questions. As you read, ask yourself how you would answer the question from the Pharisees, and then the question posed by Jesus.

Gospel Reading:

> *Mark 10:2-16 NAS95 2 Some Pharisees came up to Jesus, testing Him, and began to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife. 3 And He answered and said to them, "What did Moses command you?" 4 They said, "Moses permitted a man TO WRITE A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY." 5 But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. 6 But from the beginning of creation, God MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE. 7 FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, 8 AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH; so they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9 What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." 10 In the house the disciples began questioning Him about this again. 11 And He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; 12 and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery." 13 And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them. 14 But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 15 Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all." 16 And He took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands on them.*

The context of the reading is following Jesus' teaching on the seriousness and spiritually harmful nature of sin. Jesus had taught them, "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea" (Mark 9:42). Afterwards, He left Capernaum and came to the region of "Judea beyond the Jordan," meaning the largely Gentile land to the east of this important watery landmark (Mark 10:1). Here the crowds met up with Him again and were joined by the Pharisees who led with a question to test Him (v. 2).

The Pharisees asked Jesus whether it was lawful (according to Jewish Law) for a man to divorce his wife (v. 2). They didn't of course mean whether it was lawful according to Roman Law, but rather according to their strict, literal and often wrong interpretation of the Mosaic Law. Jesus responded with a question, asking them to locate the answer from what Moses had written in the Law (v. 3). Jesus explained to them following a method that would have been very familiar to the Pharisees from the Old Testament. In the Book of Nehemiah, the people after they had been held in captivity in Babylon for seventy years had lost track of the Scriptures. Once Ezra had located a copy, he gathered the people around him to teach them, and Ezra and the priests read the lost biblical text. We see there that is said that "They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading" (Nehemiah 8:8). This is what Jesus did by reading from the text and at the same time providing the interpretation of it. Moses didn't write in Deuteronomy Chapter 24 saying that God in any way favored divorce, but rather that God **authorized** divorce. Jesus explained this very crucial difference. Moses said that it was an abomination before the LORD for a man to remarry a woman whom he had previously divorced and had remarried, and taught the people through the Law not to do this because it would bring "sin upon the land" by doing so (Deuteronomy 24:4). Jesus continued the biblical teaching on the matter of divorce by drawing the people back to the Scriptures, a behavior which all of us would do well to follow. In responding to the question from the Pharisees, who didn't really care to hear the true answer, Jesus simply pointed them back to God's original teaching on the matter.

The closing of the reading was the second instance where the crowds were bringing children to Jesus (v. 13). Once again, Jesus rebuked His disciples for not allowing or even encouraging this. "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these," He said (v. 14). As true followers of Jesus, all of us must approach him humbly, and He was teaching His disciples this very important lesson.

This week we saw how Jesus turned to the Scriptures to answer a question by the Pharisees. Even though this group of religious legalists didn't desire to listen to His answer, Jesus still explained to them the sanctity of marriage and how this flowed from the relationship of the first man and woman God created during Creation about which we read in the first reading. In the closing of verses of the Gospel, reading Jesus had to remind His disciples to be humble and receive Him just like the children. In the second reading, we learned how Jesus humbled Himself in order to accomplish the will of His Father. As followers of Jesus He calls us to humble ourselves and receive Him as little children.

Reflection Questions

1. In the first reading we read how God created the first woman out of Adam as a helper and companion for him to accomplish the purposes that He had previously assigned to him. Later in the Gospel reading, we saw how Jesus used these same verses to explain the lifetime relationship of marriage as arising from God through this same creation account. Read the following verses and then discuss in what ways a husband and wife model the more perfect relationship that exists

between the Persons of the Godhead.

> *John 14:16-20 NAS95 16 "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; 17 that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. 18 "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19 "After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also. 20 "In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.*

2. How does knowing that God exists eternally in a perfect relationship help you in your own relationship, regardless if you are single or married?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 09-30-2018



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. Over the years, I began to keep in my computer a folder in which I filed obituaries and death notices. As I am getting a bit "long in the tooth" myself, this folder

has been growing larger and larger. From time to time, I look through this folder and contemplate the lives of all the people who have passed away that I have known. To be truthful the ones I really think about are the people who I am not sure trusted in the Lord Jesus as their savior. Some of the people listed in this folder are ones who I prayed for over the course of a decade or more. As I think about these people I remember all that Jesus said about hell, and how anyone that does not trust in Him will spend eternity in that awful place. I am very glad for those precious few people listed in my folder whom I knew had trusted in the Lord Jesus. This week we will learn some things that Jesus said about hell. We will see how even Jesus' own disciples got distracted through their own spiritual pride which kept them from proclaiming the message that Jesus gave them, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17).

This week we start with some history and context about the first reading from the Book of Numbers. Then we continue with the study from James and conclude with the Gospel lesson in which Jesus addresses spiritual pride and the danger of sin.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The context of the first reading from Numbers is that Moses' father in-law Jethro had earlier approached Moses about setting up judges to help with the administration of disputes just after the Hebrews had fled from Egypt (Exodus 18:22). Next, Moses received the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai and the Hebrews left Mt. Sinai to begin their first (and unsuccessful) approach into the Promised Land. They complained to Moses about their food as they became very tired of eating manna day after day (Numbers 10:12-13, 11:1). Moses was so overwhelmed that he cried out to God for help (Numbers 11:10-15). The LORD's solution was twofold. First, He promised to send them meat, and second He told Moses to appoint seventy elders who would help him carry his responsibilities (Numbers 11:16-18). Our reading today picks up with the consecration ceremony of the elders. Be careful to note the use of capitalization of the pronouns in verse 25 as referring either to God or to Moses.

First Reading:

Numbers 11:25-29 NAS95 25 Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him; and He took of the Spirit who was upon him and placed Him upon the seventy elders. And when the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do it again. 26 But two men had remained in the camp; the name of one was Eldad and the name of the other Medad. And the Spirit rested upon them (now they were among those who had been registered, but had not gone out to the tent), and they prophesied in the camp. 27 So a young man ran and told Moses and said, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." 28 Then Joshua the son of Nun, the attendant of Moses from his youth, said, "Moses, my lord, restrain them." 29 But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD'S people were prophets, that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!"

This passage tells the story of the empowerment by the Holy Spirit of the elders to speak the Words of God (prophecy). Even though two of them (Eldad and Medad) were not at the Tent of Meeting

during the commissioning ceremony, they still received the Spirit which enabled them to prophecy in the camp among the Hebrew people. Instead of restraining them after it was discovered that they were prophesying although they had not been at the formal ceremony, Moses taught them a valuable lesson. Moses said in essence, "I wish everyone was so filled with the Spirit that each person would prophecy like this" (v. 29b).

There are two lessons from this passage for us today. First, we learned from Moses what humility and leadership look like. Instead of hoarding God's power, Moses celebrated the distribution of God's power to others. Second, in spite of the disobedience of the two elders, God still used them to minister to the people. Note that the text never mentioned the works of the sixty-eight faithful elders. God's first choice is to use His faithful people to accomplish His works, but he will use others as well. God can use sinful people to accomplish His greater purposes, and this reveals His grace.

Later in the Gospel lesson, we will see how Jesus taught His disciples a very similar lesson as to what Moses told Joshua. In the meantime, we will move to the second reading from James in which he discusses the reality of judgment and hell for nonbelievers. This is also something that Jesus will also discuss in the Gospel reading.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is a continuation of the study from James but skips ahead to chapter 5 from where we left off last week at James 4:3. The intervening verses covered a variety of subjects but were primarily about pride. This week's reading is a brief departure from the instructions to believers and is instead a warning to the unbelieving rich. In biblical times, there was no such thing as a middle class. A possible exception to this was the few shopkeepers the existed in the cities and even they owned very little property making them subservient to the rich property owners. Wealth in those days was distributed mostly to the super rich and the rest of the people struggled for survival. It wasn't until the 19'th century that these wage gaps began to slowly disappear. James would have written just two decades before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans who saw to it that the possessions of the rich were stolen, the rest reduced to rubble, and all the Jews were evicted from the city. James, as the leader of the Jerusalem church, would have known the Lord's prediction about the coming destruction of the temple in Jerusalem (Matthew 24:2). Perhaps the tenor of the people's relationship to the Roman government was moving in that direction. It is evident from the reading that James also had a telescopic view in mind like how Isaiah writes with near and far term fulfillments stacked on top of one another. Although the near term fulfillment of James' warning to the rich would have happened with the destruction of Jerusalem, the ultimate fulfillment was as in Jesus story of Lazarus and the rich man, when the wealthy man died and stood before the Lord in judgment. As you read, keep in mind both of these upcoming judgments.

Second Reading:

James 5:1-6 NAS95 1 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. 2 Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and your

silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure! 4 Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. 5 You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you.

James' focus in the reading is upon the eternal judgment coming from God after the unbelieving rich person dies. He says that the rust of their golden and silver treasures bear witness against them. Also crying out against them during this terrible day of judgment is the laborers whom they exploited during their lifetimes and whom they "condemned and put to death" (v. 6a). Even those in what we may consider the middle class, people like the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick makers were being taken advantage of by the rich in this polar society with two social classes – the very rich and everyone else. Yet we know that around two decades later there was also an earthly judgment that happened to everyone in Jerusalem, not just the rich. This was a judgment in the sense that it was against the Jews for rebelling against Roman authority, and God says that no authority exists unless He ordains it (Romans 13:1).

The unbelieving rich people to whom James addressed this writing would have done well to listen to his warning. The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus described in grim detail the conditions in Jerusalem during the Roman siege in the days leading up to the destruction of the temple and city in AD 70. During the three-year blockade, the distinctions between the social classes were obliterated and all of the people were reduced to plundering and stealing to find food. Josephus wrote that cannibalism was commonplace, and "Tufts of withered grass were devoured, and sold in little bundles for four drachmas" (Josephus, *Wars of the Jews Book II*). Yet although we could say that James' prophecy about the "miseries which [were] coming upon [them]" (v. 1) was fulfilled in the physical sense in AD 70, the ultimate terror was yet to come when the non-believing people died and stood in judgment before the Lord when they died.

We can be profoundly happy that although we will stand to account before the Lord for what we did with what He gave us, we will not suffer with any miseries that will come upon us when we die (v. 1). This doesn't mean that since we are relatively rich compared to people in the early church that we don't have to be good stewards of the things that God has entrusted to us. We must recognize the great responsibility that God has entrusted us since we are comparatively rich compared to the early readers of James' Letter. In contrast to the rich person who will have nothing when they die, we have now and will possess even greater riches from God after we die. Saint John said, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may **know** that you have eternal life" 1 John 5:13, emphasis added. It is not a sin to know that we have eternal life with our Lord Jesus. Saint Paul said, "but just as it is written, 'THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM'" (1 Corinthians 2:9). So even if we are poor, we can trust that we are rich in spirit.

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Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is a continuation of the study from Saint Mark. The context is just after the disciples were arguing about whom among them was the greatest (Mark 9:34). Afterwards Jesus taught them that the way to be great was to become a servant (Mark 9:35), and provided an object lesson to them by setting a child before them and saying, "Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me" (Mark 9:37). This illustration revealed someone (the child) who needed to be served, but was unable to serve in return. In the same way, Jesus calls us to serve even if we are unable to pay him or her back. As you read, keep this context in mind of Jesus' call to achieve greatness by being a servant.

Gospel Reading:

Note: Verses 44 and 46 which were omitted from the reading have been included below.

Mark 9:38-48 NAS95 38 John said to Him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to prevent him because he was not following us." 39 But Jesus said, "Do not hinder him, for there is no one who will perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me. 40 For he who is not against us is for us. 41 For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward. 42 Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea. 43 If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, 44 where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED. 45 If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than, having your two feet, to be cast into hell, 46 where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED. 47 If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell, 48 where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.

In the opening of the reading Jesus answered the objection of His disciples about someone they saw casing out demons in His name. From the context, it is clear that Jesus was continuing His teaching on the matter of spiritual pride as He had just finished teaching them about this through His illustration with the child. Jesus told His disciples that they should humble themselves and in essence be glad that others were serving Him and accomplishing good works in His name. Next, Jesus taught His disciples about how great a sin it was to cause another person to sin as well as the reality of hell. There are degrees of punishment in hell and Jesus is warning them that any nonbeliever who leads others deeper into their nonbelieving, sinful state will suffer the worst eternal punishment in hell. Jesus used a hyperbole of the hand, foot and eye to illustrate the danger of sin in the life of a believer. The hand refers to the things we do (v. 43a). The foot refers to the places we go (v. 45a). The eye refers to the things we see (v. 47a). Jesus is using exaggeration to say that

believers should take radical actions to deal with the sin in their lives. Some people have taken literal actions against themselves, including the church Father Origen of Alexandria who emasculated himself in order to deal with his problem of lust. He doesn't mean that we should physically cut off the body part which brought the sin about, but rather take drastic actions to see that we don't continue in the sinful pattern.

What are some practical applications we can take away from the lesson today? First, one of the primary ministries that we have as believers is to tell the world about the danger of sin and the need to turn from their sin and place their faith in the Lord Jesus for forgiveness of their sin. God calls us to remember that the first message that Jesus brought when He began His ministry was the call to repent. Jesus picked up where John the Baptist left off who said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). This could mean coming alongside someone who you know is leading others into sin as there is a multiplying effect that their sinful actions are bringing upon the world. The greatest sinners in the world tend to become the greatest evangelists after they come to faith in Christ. Jesus said, "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32). Sin when left unchecked in the life of a nonbeliever will eventually lead them to an eternity in hell, and they need to be told about this fact.

Second, all of us need to keep an eye on our spiritual pride. Jesus went to great lengths to caution people about the danger of sin in the life of a believer, the foremost of which is pride. Just after the disciples finished arguing about who was the greatest among them, Jesus had to calm their objections about someone who was doing good works in His name. Pride is hard to see in ourselves, but oftentimes easy to see in others.

We can develop many practical ways to safeguard ourselves from runaway sin. One way that I have found it helpful is to develop a relationship with a believer of the same gender to share prayer requests and to hold each other accountable for the things going on in their lives. A realistic schedule could be to agree to meet for one hour a month to meet face-to-face, talk to each other at least once a week by phone or email, and pray for each other each day. In this way, it is harder for sinful patterns to develop unchecked without any feedback from another believer.

Reflection Questions

1. In biblical times, the rich were the primary nemesis of the working poor. James comforted the believers by reminding them of the judgment that was to come upon the rich and that their abusers were actually **spiritually** poor. In our day, we are relatively rich compared to the first century Christians and have to refine how we view the "rich" as discussed by James. Who are the "rich" people who oppress you? How does knowing that you are spiritually rich help you to mentally overcome these oppressors in your life?

2. Ask yourself the following question. Have you ever developed a relationship with another believer in which you have been able to share personal and spiritual matters? If your answer is no, or if you

are no longer meeting with this person, pray that God would place someone in your life with whom you could meet and know that someone was praying for you each day.

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 09-23-2018



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. Recently I watched the movie *War Room* that featured a man who was engaged in a struggle between the wisdom of God and the "wisdom" of his carnal fleshly desires. We will read about what James said about this struggle in the second reading. Later I will provide some additional insights I gleaned from the movie. Then we will learn about servant leadership in the Gospel lesson from Saint Mark where we see the disciples arguing about whom among them was the greatest.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Apocrypha. This body of work provides some important historical insights into the 400-year silent period just prior to the birth of Jesus. We encourage our readers to

become familiar with the cultural and historical context leading up to the publishing of the New Testament.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is a continuation of the study from James but picking up in Chapter 3. The context is just after James' treatise on the power of and danger of the tongue. He calls the tongue a fire (James 3:6), a "restless evil full of deadly poison" (James 3:8). He says, "From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so" (James 3:10). The main theme of today's reading is the contrast between human wisdom and godly wisdom. As you read, take particular notes of the words and phrases that constitute each side of this spiritual battle. Especially take note of repeated words and phrases.

Note: Although the reading omitted verses 14 – 15, we included them below. This was because although verse 14 forms a conclusion to his teaching on the dangers of our speech it also provides a natural linkage to his subsequent teaching below.

Second Reading:

> *James 3:14 – 4:3 NAS95 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. 18 And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. 1 What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.*

In the reading, James contrasts the "wisdom from above" (v. 17a) with that which arise from within the human heart and results in the ungodly speech about which he just finished speaking (James 3:1-12). James calls this outpouring of sinful thought patterns of the heart "bitter jealousy and selfish ambition" and repeats it twice (vv. 14a, 16a). These sinful patterns of the heart result in "arrogance and [lying] against the truth "v. 14b-ff). They are not from God (v. 15a), but are instead of non-divine "earthly, natural, demonic" sources (v. 15b-ff). They result in "disorder and every evil thing" (v. 16). In contrast, wisdom originating from God as described verse 17 is 1. Pure, 2. Peaceable, 3. Gentle, 4. Reasonable, 5. "Full of mercy" and results in good works, 6. "Unwavering," and 7. "Without hypocrisy." It's like there are two freight trains pulling against one another in our hearts. The first is that of sinful patterns originating from within the fallen condition of our hearts with input from Satan our enemy feeding the coal into the steam heading pulling away from God. Opposing that train is another engine that is God's "wisdom from above" Who opposes all of these sinful seeds implanted into our lives. The planting of God's seed in our hearts, meaning the Word of God from the Bible,

results in the fruits of righteousness and peace "v. 18).

As James continues his teaching in chapter 4 with the source of the troubles already clearly in our minds, he asks the hypothetical question, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you" (v. 1a). He answers his own question with a summary statement of the things that came before. The source of the "quarrels and conflicts among [us]" is our "pleasures that wage war in [our] members" (v. 1b). These "pleasures that wage war against our body parts" form Satan's tools to lead us to "commit murder" (v. 2b) because of following the lust in our heart (v. 2a). The war between our spirit and bodies continue and when we are "envious and cannot obtain," meaning we covet the things from others which we cannot have; we "fight and quarrel." James says that even when we pray because we want something we don't have, we "ask with wrong motives, so that [we] may spend it on [our] pleasures" (v. 3). Hidden within James teaching upon the contrasts between our fallen human condition and godly wisdom is a principle to ask God in prayer for the things that we desire (v. 3a). We will speak more about this later.

How many of us can identify with the ongoing struggle between our flesh and the devil's ways that rage in our hearts? In this section, James closely links our speech with the revelation of the secret battles that rages within us. Our ungodly speech provides an insight into the ways in which we are walking in opposition to the plan that God has for our lives. God said, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). I remember once I was talking to a friend of mine and as men have a habit of doing the subject moved to women. He made a statement about engaging in a certain specific form of carnal behavior with a woman. In my heart, I knew immediately that because of his current life situation he had been engaging in viewing pornography. Pornography is one of Satan's key ways in which he pours ungodly wisdom into the lives of people, be they unbelievers like my friend, or believers who know better. Engaging in the viewing of pornography is a channel through which flows the "wisdom" of our enemy. God stands ready to deliver us from our temptations, and as James said, all we have to do is to ask Him (v. 3a).

I mentioned in the introduction that I had just returned from watching the movie *War Room*. This Christian movie providing a powerful illustration to the power of and necessity of prayer for couples as they engage in the unseen spiritual battle surrounding their lives. The movie told the story of a young mother met an older woman who mentored her about the power of prayer. Once this young woman began honestly seeking God by honoring Him in prayer huge things began to her in her life as well as that of her husband. James said in verse 3 of the reading, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures." We need to ask the question, do we even ask? Regardless of our motives, we need to regularly assess whether we are honestly praying for the important things in our lives, such as our mate, children, and the lost people whom God has brought into our lives.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson continues from Saint Mark but moves ahead from 8:35 where we ended last week

and picks up with Chapter 9 just after the story of Jesus' transfiguration with His chosen subset of disciples consisting of Peter, James, and John. In between, Jesus had healed a demon possessed boy (Mark 9:16-27). This miracle was unique because someone in the crowd had presented the boy to Jesus after the disciples could not heal him (Mark 9:18). Afterwards, when the disciples had asked Jesus about why they could not heal him, Jesus told them, "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer" (Mark 8:29). Interestingly this followed the father of the boy's request to Jesus when he said, "I do believe; help my unbelief" (Mark 8:24). It was as if Mark expressed a teaching moment with the disciples that the boy's father had the courage to ask Jesus to help his unbelief, yet the disciples were unable to heal the boy "by anything but prayer." As we saw in James, God calls us to ask Him in prayer for the things we desire (James 4:2e), yet at this stage the disciples did not yet understand the power of prayer in freeing the boy from him enslavement to the demon. Obviously, this was because Jesus was still with them, and they would understand later the powerful ministry of prayer.

Gospel Reading:

> *Mark 9:30-37 NAS95 30 From there they went out and began to go through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know about it. 31 For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, "The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later." 32 But they did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask Him. 33 They came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He began to question them, "What were you discussing on the way?" 34 But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest. 35 Sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all." 36 Taking a child, He set him before them, and taking him in His arms, He said to them, 37 "Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me."*

Jesus and disciples left "from there" (v. 30), meaning the event of the last healing. This would have been at the base of the mountain on which Jesus was transfigured before His disciples. The two traditional sites of this event are Mt. Tabor and Mt. Hermon. After they left "there," Jesus wanted to be alone with His disciples as we see in verse 30b, "He did not want anyone to know about it." Along the way on their journey to Galilee, after they got to Capernaum Jesus asked the disciples what they had been arguing about (v. 33c), but they refused to answer Him (v. 34). Mark tells us that they had been debating which among them was the greatest disciple (v. 34b). It's not coincidental that this argument arose after the chosen three (Peter, James, and John) experienced seeing Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. It is also possible that these three were still radiating some of God's glory after coming down from the mountain as happened with Moses. (Exodus 34:29). Perhaps this created in these disciples' minds a sense of superiority, and the others maybe wondered why they weren't chosen for the trip up the mountain. Jesus quickly corrected their misunderstanding concerning the pecking order by telling them, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all" (v. 35c). Next, Jesus proceeded to provide them with an object lesson by placing a child in front of them to illustrate this principle (v. 36). Jesus used this illustration of the child to

show them greatness does not consist of one's position. Even the lowest "child of the kingdom" can act as an ambassador for Jesus, and an ambassador for Jesus is one for God the Father. Therefore, the disciples shouldn't be arguing about their relative positions of greatness but should purse the kingdom with a childlike faith and humility as servants of Jesus in pointing people to God the Father.

In summary, Jesus illustrated in the story today the principle of servant leadership. Even though He told the disciples that He was going to be "delivered into the hands of men" and killed (v. 31), they persisted in arguing about whom among them was the greatest. The presence of children provided Jesus with a means of using these young people as an example of how the disciples should view themselves.

What does this mean for our lives? Regardless of our social position in society, God calls us to view ourselves as servants of the Lord Jesus. This Lord of the Universe is the same One Who washed the feet of the disciples (John 13:12-17). Saint Paul emulated these principles of servant leadership in his ministry. He said, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (Philippians 2:3-4). God empowers us through His Holy Spirit to carry out the work that He has started within us (Philippians 1:6). As we go about the week, let's keep these principles in mind when we are tempted to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think (Romans 12:3).

God continues to teach me about my sinful pride and how I have often viewed myself as superior to others. This week I was mowing my lawn using my large zero turn lawn mower while my neighbor was mowing his using an older riding type mower with a missing hood and various Band-Aids holding it together. The background of this particular neighbor is that he is some two decades younger than his wife who moved in a few years ago with her first husband and two kids. However, something happened between them and she later married the much younger "boy" who was not out mowing her lawn. As I was contemplating the matter as I zoomed past him on my tiger-striped racing machine I admit that I felt superior to him as he mowed with the broken down junk that was handed down to him from the neighbor's former husband. In an attempt to get a handle on my pride I actually found myself saying, "When I was his age (i.e. riding a bike with training wheels), I would have been glad to have had a mower as nice as that." How's that for getting a handle on my pride! In reality, God calls me to be the servant even of my boyish neighbor who also needs to hear the message of the Gospel. In retrospect, what I can do in the future is to pray for him as I see him mowing his lawn, and even pray for an opportunity to build a bridge to him in order to be able to share the hope that I have through faith in Jesus Christ.

Reflection Questions

1. All of us have heard the expression, "put your foot in your mouth." Jesus said in Luke's Gospel, "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart"

(Luke 6:45). From what you learned from the second reading today, reflect upon the last time which you put your foot in your mouth. What was the underlying condition that brought about this action? Through God's wisdom in the Bible, what are one or two ways that you can avoid this in the future?

2. The super disciples including Peter, James, and John had every right to view themselves as being in a privileged position since they were the only ones invited to the travel up the mountain with Jesus and subsequently experienced His transfiguration. In what ways are you tempted to view yourself as being in an exalted position either in society or in the church? Using what you learned from the Gospel lesson how does what you know about Jesus' view of leadership change your view?

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