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, 8-28-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **8-28-2016**. This week we examine the Book of Hebrews where we see the difference between the Old and New Covenants. We close with Jesus' teaching the Pharisees about humility, a message that all of us need to hear.

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 continues the study from last week in the Book of Hebrews. The context of the reading is following the author's teaching on the necessity of a believer to pursue peace and sanctification, "without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14b). The writer provided the counter example of ungodly Esau, "who sold his own birthright for a single meal" (v. 16b). Today's reading moves to the subject of the ways in which God deals with believers in the Old versus New Covenants.

Second Reading:

Note: The text below includes verses 20-21 and 24b-ff that were omitted from the reading.

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Hebrews 12:18-24 NAS95 18 For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, 19 and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them. 20 For they could not bear the command, "IF EVEN A BEAST TOUCHES THE MOUNTAIN, IT WILL BE STONED." 21 And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I AM FULL OF FEAR and trembling." 22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

The author expressed the great contrast that exists between God's covenantal relationship with believers in the Old and New Covenants. The idea expressed is the difference between the terrors of God revealed on Mount Sinai versus the peace found on Mount Zion. Believers in the Lord Jesus as a part of the New Covenant can approach the throne of God with boldness in contrast to the fearful manner in which the Jews experienced God at Mount Sinai in the Old (see also Hebrews 4:16). The writer expressed how as New Testament believers we come not to a mountain burning with fire but rather Mount Zion, the holy city of God (v. 22a). This spiritual city consists of "myriads of angels" (v. 22c), "the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven" (v. 23a), God the Judge of all (v. 23b), "the spirits of the righteous made perfect" (v. 23d), and "Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant" (v. 24a). The New Covenant provides a qualitatively different relationship between God and man through the "mediatorship" of Jesus Christ. This covenant is much better than the old one because through the blood of Jesus Christ believers are made perfect without the consciousness of sin that perpetually existed in the Old Covenant. We find this stated earlier in the Book. "For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins?" (Hebrews 10:1-2).

The reading shows us how our changeless God revealed Himself through two different covenants. The Mosaic Covenant was delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai through "blazing fire, "darkness," "gloom," a "whirlwind," "trumpet and the sounds of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them" (v. 18). This contrast is nowhere more evident in that of the blood of Abel versus the blood of Jesus in verse 24. Although God accepted Abel's sacrifice because it was offered by faith, the blood of Jesus Christ is infinitely greater than that of Abel because Christ's blood atoned for the sins of the whole world. As New Testament believers, we look forward to seeing Mount Zion, the holy city.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

This week we return to Hebrews and the Gospel of Luke that we saw last week. And again we see some more about the group called the Pharisees in the Gospel teaching, just like the last week.

Perhaps what may be helpful here is a bit of background about this group of Jewish people. The Pharisees were middle-class common men that were not necessarily educated like the other group known as the Sadducees. The Pharisees differed in their beliefs from the Sadducees in that they believed in life after death, in miracles, and also in angelic beings. They believed that the word of God was inspired and sought to hold very strictly to the tradition of the Law as given by Moses in the first five books of the Bible, known as the Pentateuch. However, they taught falsely that their oral traditions held equal authority to Scripture. Jesus warned the Pharisees about these and other false teachings in His message of the seven woes found in Matthew 23:1-36. In our day, we must endeavor to always measure and test our own religious traditions and beliefs against the unchanging Scriptures.

Now we will examine the context of today's reading from Saint Luke. Here we find Jesus dining at the home of a certain famous Pharisee, likely a member of the ruling council called the Sanhedrin. Could it have been someone like Saint Paul, who was a Pharisee himself? Anyway the Scripture says that the "people" were observing him carefully. It would seem that they were trying to find some fault in Jesus, to trip him up, to find a reason for which they could bring him to trial. It would also seem that other Pharisees were present. So as Jesus often did he told a parable. When you hear the word "parable" I suggest you think of it this way. The word means quite literally "to throw alongside." So think of a parable as a story is thrown alongside to show you some certain spiritual truth. Be careful not to try and make a parable walk on all fours, but just try to get out of it the single spiritual truth. Also, be careful to not take it literally if it isn't meant to be taken that way, and we can determine if that is the case by looking at the context.

Consider this parable that Jesus gave directly to the Pharisees and also the context as you read it. Imagine yourself sitting with the Jesus among the Pharisees, a group who strived to please God through their observance of the Law and holding to *their* oral traditions. We need to also carefully consider that the reading for this week omitted verses 2-6 in Luke chapter 14. This is unfortunate because these verses very clearly describe the context of Jesus' teaching. Looking at the missing five verses, we find that the audience also included a man suffering from some abnormal swelling of his body. The Pharisees proceed to ask Jesus whether it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath which was the day all of this took place, Saturday (the Jews' Sabbath was always the last day of the week not on Sunday as is celebrated by Christians). Jesus responded to their question with a question (as Jesus' often did!). He asked the Pharisees what would they do if their child or ox fell into a hole on the Sabbath, would they pull them out immediately? The implied answer is of course **yes**. Anyone knows through pure common sense that you would pull your child or ox out of hole on the Sabbath Day. Jesus then took a hold of the man and healed him on the spot, something which no doubt caused great anger to the Pharisees. They were likely thinking something like, "You just broke the Sabbath Law, and for this lowly scum of a man with a bloated face and who is ceremonially unclean." The question is, what was this man with dropsy even doing there at the prominent Pharisee's house? According to the Law he would be ruled unclean and unable to enter the temple, but here he was at the home of the prominent Pharisee. Were the Pharisees not already bending their rules to allow this unclean man to be there at the meal? Or were they being hypocritical, or was the man able to wander in because of the typically open configuration of the ancient near

eastern home? The text does not say. Now with this context in mind let's look at the parable.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 14:1 NAS95 1 It happened that when He went into the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees on the Sabbath to eat bread, they were watching Him closely.

Omitted Verses:

Luke 14:2-6 NAS95 2 And there in front of Him was a man suffering from dropsy. 3 And Jesus answered and spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" 4 But they kept silent. And He took hold of him and healed him, and sent him away. 5 And He said to them, "Which one of you will have a son or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?" 6 And they could make no reply to this.

Luke 14:7-14 NAS95 7 And He began speaking a parable to the invited guests when He noticed how they had been picking out the places of honor at the table, saying to them, 8 "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, 9 and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this man,' and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place. 10 But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you. 11 For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. 12 And He also went on to say to the one who had invited Him, 'When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and that will be your repayment. 13 But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.'"

Jesus' parable was a frontal attack upon the Pharisees who "love[d] the chief seats in the synagogues and the respectful greetings in the market places" (Luke 11:43). Because the Pharisees were exalting themselves over everyone else, their problem was one of pride. The central taught by Jesus in this passage was God's calling to be humble. By humbling yourself to help those that cannot help themselves you will be repaid in heaven, but the reward may not be obvious in this life. Jesus was upsetting the apple cart of the Pharisees' world by suggesting that the lowly people in this world, like the man with the terrible dropsy, would be exalted in the coming kingdom of heaven. Jesus demonstrated His own humility through the healing of the man with dropsy (Luke 14:3) in spite of the fact that He knew it would anger the Pharisees with whom He would soon be dining. He then went on to give them teaching about why being humble was so important.

Read again the section in the reading regarding this upside down world that Jesus is teaching regarding His kingdom. "For every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted" (v. 11). God is the only one we may exalt any of us, although the Pharisees exalted themselves above everyone else, even above their sick brother.

To apply today's reading in our lives we can pray to God to help us to see ourselves as servants to those people that don't believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. We can ask God to show us how to see ourselves "washing their dirty feet," helping to heal their sickness, and serving them by praying for them. We can ask God to give us the courage to speak to them about the forgiveness of sins that is given only through believing that Jesus Christ died one single time on the cross for their sins, through a sacrifice than can never be repeated.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Can you think of a time this past week when I considered myself as better than someone else? What was the circumstance? In what ways does Jesus speak to you from what you learned in the Gospel message?

2. What is one thing that you can change in regards to this teaching of Jesus on the necessity of being humble?

Readings for the Week

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

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/082816.cfm

Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 126

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 8-21-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **8-21-2016**. This week our first reading is from the final chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah. The passage is prophetic in nature, that is, it touches on events in the last days of God's plan for redemption. The second reading from the Epistle to the Hebrews deals with the very difficult subject of discipline and how God uses it in the lives of His children. Finally, we read more about Jesus' teaching ministry as He traveled through Israel. In this passage He includes some very hard lessons that are important for us to understand.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The book of Isaiah is like a small Bible. Chapters 1-39 speak of Israel in the midst of the nations (like the Old Testament, consisting of 39 books in many versions). Chapters 40-66 speak of comfort in the revelation of Christ (like the New Testament's 26 books). This last section begins with John the Baptist, climaxes in chapter 53 about the sacrifice of Christ, and ends with the Millennial Kingdom. Today's portion was written, perhaps, to educate Israel concerning the distant future with respect to the Messianic Kingdom of God and ultimate restoration of the nation.

First Reading:

Isaiah 66:18-21 NAS95 18 "For I know their works and their thoughts; the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and see My glory. 19 I will set a sign among them and will send survivors from them to the nations: Tarshish, Put, Lud, Meshech, Rosh, Tubal and Javan, to the distant coastlands that have neither heard My fame nor seen My glory. And they will declare My glory among the nations. 20 Then they shall bring all your brethren from all the nations as a grain offering to the LORD, on horses, in chariots, in litters, on mules and on camels, to My holy mountain Jerusalem," says the LORD, "just as the sons of Israel bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD. 21 I will also take some of them for priests and for Levites," says the LORD.

In these verses Isaiah moves from speaking of God's judgment upon those who are unfaithful to Him to announce a future gathering of all nations. Representatives will come into God's presence and be introduced to His great glory. Then, they will be sent out to the nations of the world who have not known God. Someone has called this the Great Commission for Israel (similar to the Great Commission to the Church in Matthew 28). These "missionaries" will declare the glory of God to the nations.

The result will be a great migration, multitudes coming to Jerusalem, described as "My holy mountain." The text tells us that they will come in a variety of ways: "on horses, in chariots, in litters, on mules and on camels." Notably, God will choose some of these new believers to be priests and to be used in serving capacities for God.

One might well ask, "When will these things come to pass?" The answer would require a very careful study of prophetic Scriptures—both Old and New Testament texts—to be definitive. The Bible often speaks of a great tribulation in the end times, and many believe it is the saints (believers) who come out of that tribulation period who will be the messengers to bring to God those who had not yet heard of His love and grace and who, as a result of this witness, come into a relationship of faith in God.

No matter the timing of this prophecy, the recurring theme in this passage is God's glory. What is God's glory? "Glory" is a very difficult word to define because it does not represent a concrete object. It represents a quality or essence, much like the word "beauty." God's glory is the reflection of His beautiful and perfect essence, the manifestation of His unique and sought after presence. Glory is the positive reference to His attractive reputation, which is manifested in who He is and displayed in what He does. We get a sense of God's glory by the loving dynamic within the three persons of the Godhead, with His generous and gracious interaction with humankind (as recorded in Scripture), and in His display of exotic beauty and intricate design in nature (general revelation). God's glory has been on display for all to see in creation, so that Saint Paul says: "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse . . . Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man . . . " (Romans 1:20,22-23).

Responding to God's glory and living in light of this reality is an important part of a life well-lived, a life that has eternal qualities to it. In the passage of Isaiah, it is the distinct privilege of people to declare His fame and reflect His glory to those who do not know. In our lives, we have the privilege to live for God's fame, and not our own on a daily basis. We can choose to order our lives around giving glory to God, or we can choose to exchange this opportunity in order to glorify self, honor the finite things of this world, or value what was created over the Creator Himself. Though the results are not always immediate, this passage reminds us that God's glory is worth pursuing.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The major theme of Hebrews is the pre-eminence of Christ. It involves some very important and deep theology, but it also includes very practical ideas about Christian living. In fact, the last three chapters give valuable teaching about walking in faith (ch. 11), walking with hope (ch. 12), and walking in love (ch. 13). Today's reading gives a helpful lesson about the value and necessity of discipline, which often may be painful but always serves God's good purpose.

Second Reading:

Note: Includes verses 8-10 omitted from the reading.

Hebrews 12:5-13 NAS95 5 and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; 6 FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES." 7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. 11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. 12 Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

The section begins with a reminder that discipline comes from God, and it happens in the lives of all Christians ("every son," v. 6). In fact, the very reality that God disciplines someone proves that person's sonship; he indeed belongs to God, because parents don't discipline someone else's children. It should be noted here that the words in the text express discipline and chastisement, not judgment and punishment. There is a difference.

Most people do not like pain and suffering, and we pray fervently to be rid of them. But, whatever the reason for the pain—whether it's the discipline of God or the consequences of natural infirmities, God can use the suffering for His good purposes. One writer, who has suffered a debilitating disease for many years, wrote: "If my parents could have stopped me from being afflicted by this disease,

they would have. But God didn't, and He's the perfect Father, knowing what will make me a better person. Because of their love, my parents would more likely have insulated me from some of the greatest lessons of life that I could learn only through my suffering. Because of God's love for me, He dare not withhold the pain and suffering."

But why is it necessary for God to discipline His children? What are God's motives? Unfortunately, many of us have been disciplined by an earthly parent out of impatience, sometimes to show us who's boss, or to get us to cooperate with their plan with no interest in our nurture. Some of the tactics that earthly parents wrongly use are guilt and shame, producing in us a fear of punishment and a surface compliance to the desires of the one with authority. If we view God like we view our earthly parents, then we have some soul work to do in order to trust God in the midst of His discipline.

God does not discipline His children in order to get begrudging compliance or in order to get even with wrongs we have done. God lovingly disciplines His children to help shape a worldview in our hearts that pries our fingers off of self-reliance, independence, and autonomous pride; and in exchange, opens our arms to embrace a God-reliant walk with Him. Saint Paul wrote of a time in his life where he was under so much affliction that he even despaired of life itself. As a result of this time of discipline, Paul internalized a deep reliance on God, saying: "we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead" (2 Corinthians 1:9).

In our immaturity (just like a child), we do not know how much we need our Father. We often live as if we are in charge and give a quick nod to God when we want to do well on an exam, need a new job, or feel like we are in a bind. But God, in His kindness, knows that this is low-level living in Him. Through having the proverbial rug pulled out from underneath us, He helps us to live in light of reality and recognize that we cannot do life on our own. In our disorientation and desolation, we desperately reach out for God's abiding presence and find our consolation in Him (not in our sense of control or carefully arranged circumstances). We begin to internalize His value system in our soul by living in dependence on Him, which is a "severe mercy" on God's part. God's motive is to bring life that is truly life (John 10:10) to us in the midst of His strategic and loving discipline.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

We hear a lot today about intolerance. We are urged to be tolerant of almost everyone and everything that someone might believe or do. Moral standards of right and wrong seem to have evaporated in modern society, and common sense has been replaced with personal preference. But, there is a standard; there is a right way, and everything contrary to that must be wrong. Jesus and Christianity are often criticized because of their claim that there is only one way to God. Today's reading emphasizes that truth in the teaching of Jesus Himself, who claimed to be that one way (John 14:6).

Gospel Reading:

Luke 13:22-30 NAS95 22 And He was passing through from one city and village to another, teaching, and proceeding on His way to Jerusalem. 23 And someone said to Him, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" And He said to them, 24 "Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. 25 Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, 'Lord, open up to us!' then He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know where you are from.' 26 Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets'; 27 and He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you are from; DEPART FROM ME, ALL YOU EVILDOERS.' 28 In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being thrown out. 29 And they will come from east and west and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God. 30 And behold, some are last who will be first and some are first who will be last."

Luke records important lessons from Jesus' teaching as the Lord makes His way to Jerusalem, where He is to suffer and die. He had told His disciples about His destiny, although they did not fully understand His plan of salvation until after the promised resurrection. Apparently, some had understood His teaching about the necessity to come to God through Him, and one asks Him specifically about it. Are there, he wonders, only a few that will be saved? Jesus answers by describing the entrance to faith as being "the narrow door." His further comments can leave no doubt about the exclusiveness of the way to God.

Not all who feel entitled to enter can do so. The "head of the house," no doubt a reference to God the Father, surely has the right to open and close the door to His own house, and knocking on the door will not achieve entrance if you are unknown to the householder. He makes it clear that past physical association with Him (eating and drinking, for example) is not sufficient. People also claim that they listened to Him teaching in their streets, but this is still not sufficient. Those who are actually entitled to enter are those who enter through the "narrow door." What is this narrow door that Jesus is referring to?

In the Gospel of John, Jesus answers the question by metaphorically referring to himself as the door to the sheepfold. Inside the sheepfold, the sheep are safe and find refuge. He said, "Truly, truly I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:7-10). It is clear from this and other parts of Scripture (John 14:6, Acts 4:12) that Jesus is the only entry point to eternal life.

It is clear, then, that apart from genuine trust in the grace of Jesus and His finished work at the cross, evidenced by His resurrection, there is no salvation. He indeed is the only way to God. Those who reject the opportunity to trust Him will weep and gnash their teeth when they see Israel's fathers and prophets in the kingdom and they themselves are left out. These words should bring them to repentance so they will be able to "recline at the table in the kingdom of God." The last—the down-and-outers, the ones who do not feel entitled—will be first in the kingdom because they have

accepted the lordship of Jesus in their lives.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. The pinnacle of God's glory is displayed in His work of salvation accomplished through Christ's perfect life, His death and His resurrection. How has God's glory changed you from pursuing the corruptible things of this finite world to orienting your life around the incorruptible beauty of God's nature? Where do you see God's glory being displayed in your life's choices, attitudes, and values? Where would you like to see God's continued work in your life and through your life to reflect His glory?

2. How did your parents discipline you as a child? What tactics/motives reflected the heart of God and what tactics/motives did not reflect the heart of God? What parts of that experience do you need to exchange in order to embrace the loving discipline of God in your life? What seasons of discipline do you need to revisit in your mind and mentally process with this new perspective of God's heart for internalizing His value system in you? How can this perspective on God's discipline being part of our sonship be an encouragement for you and those you love to stay faithful to God in the midst of suffering?

3. Since Jesus was speaking metaphorically of entering through the narrow door, what does it mean to do this spiritually? How does this metaphor get lived out in your life? It might require a first-time decision to follow Him if you have never articulated your allegiance to Christ or it might require daily moments of trust to show your allegiance to Him as Lord. What would it be worth to you to recline at the table in the kingdom of God and be with the Old Testament saints for eternity? How might you grow in valuing this eternal reward over short-term gratification that gets in the way of reflecting God's glory.

Readings for the Week

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

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/082116.cfm

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 120

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 8-14-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **8-14-2016**. This week the three readings follow the theme of persecution of believers and the need for us to assess our allegiances and alliances with those other than God. As believers we should expect persecution in light of the fact that others who walked with God before us experienced these things.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The context of the reading is the harsh imprisonment of Jeremiah, for the second time. This was as a result of the administration's "kill the messenger" approach as God brought the truth to southern kingdom of Judah about their certain destruction at the hands of the Chaldeans unless they repented. After he had been held in the dungeon (Jeremiah 37:15-16), King Zedekiah sent for him there and spoke with him before releasing him to the "court of the guardhouse" (v. 21). In the reading we will learn about the increasingly harsh treatment given to God's prophet Jeremiah. In reading the text we can begin to understand why Jeremiah became to be known as the "weeping prophet."

First Reading:

Jeremiah 38:4-10 NAS95 4 Then the officials said to the king, "Now let this man be put to death, inasmuch as he is discouraging the men of war who are left in this city and all the people, by speaking such words to them; for this man is not seeking the well-being of this people but rather their harm." 5 So King Zedekiah said, "Behold, he is in your hands; for the king can do nothing against you." 6 Then they took Jeremiah and cast him into the cistern of Malchijah the king's son, which was in the court of the guardhouse; and they let Jeremiah down with ropes. Now in the cistern there was no water but only mud, and Jeremiah sank into the mud. 7 But Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, a eunuch, while he was in the king's palace, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern. Now the king was sitting in the Gate of Benjamin; 8 and Ebed-melech went out from the king's palace and spoke to the king, saying, 9 "My lord the king, these men have acted wickedly in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet whom they have cast into the cistern; and he will die right where he is because of the famine, for there is no more bread in the city." 10 Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, "Take thirty men from here under your authority and bring up Jeremiah the prophet from the cistern before he dies."

Zedekiah's ungodly officials advised the king to put Jeremiah to death because of his discouraging words (v. 4). In their wicked eyes Jeremiah committed treason by supposedly weakening the war against the invading Chaldeans by calling for them to surrender rather than to resist. At this point the king surrendered Jeremiah into the custody of the "officials," using the term loosely. Once King Zedekiah surrendered his authority over God's prophet the people then took drastic actions against Jeremiah by lowering him into a cistern, an action obviously intended to bring about his death. It took the actions of a Gentile, Ebed-melech (whose name means "servant of the king") to bring about Jeremiah's rescue.

There are many parallels between the suffering that Jeremiah endured to that of Jesus during His earthly ministry. Jeremiah, a type of Christ, pointed the way to the future suffering of our Lord Jesus as the hands of the officials of His day. Because they persecuted God and His prophets, we should also expect persecution in our lives when we act against the ungodly officials in our day. Stephen said just before his own death, "Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become" (Acts 7:52).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading continues the study in the Book of Hebrews and picks up after the section known as the "Hall of Faith." Today's reading relates to what we read about in Jeremiah concerning hostility against believers of the Lord Jesus.

Second Reading:

Hebrews 12:1-4 NAS95 1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith,

who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. 4 You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;

Taking into account what we learned from chapter 11 ("therefore," v. 1a), we are called to focus upon the ultimate goal of Jesus Christ and forsake our sinful ways (vv. 1-2). We are to do this through using Jesus as our example. By focusing upon Jesus' illustration of resisting sin we too can be faithful in accomplishing the purpose that God has for us. However, in the same way that Jesus and the prophets were persecuted we too should expect to experience trials when we stand up for the things of God. The author of Hebrews makes it abundantly clear that by taking the testimony of Jesus along with the great cloud of witnesses into account we can persist through the inevitable trials that will come upon us. The reading closes by saying that we haven't taken outrageous measures to eliminate sin in our lives (v. 4). This points the way to the subsequent teaching where the author explains how God brings chastening into the lives of believers because as sons of God this correction is for our ultimate good (Hebrews 12:5-11). In the same way that God allowed persecution in the life of Jeremiah, He may also allow it in our lives. As we move to the Gospel reading we will see some similar teaching from Jesus on the need to assess our personal alliances in light of God's plans for us.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading from Luke follows a theme I will call "Forsaking allegiances and alliances for Jesus." Jesus was clear that His ministry would be one of division. For John said in the infamous verse regarding the division of the people over Jesus, "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore" (John 6:66). In today's reading we see another of Jesus' 6-6-6 moments, this time in the teaching to His disciples after Peter drew near to him amongst the crowds to ask Him a question. Peter had asked Jesus regarding His telling of the Parable of the Wedding Feast whether this parable was addressed to just His disciples or to the crowd as a whole. As Jesus was fond of doing he didn't answer Peter's question directly but did so by asking another question, "Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time?" (Luke 12:42). Jesus then provided yet another parable about the absent master and the behavior of the slaves while he was away (Luke 12:43-48). Jesus' teaching at this point culminated with an extremely important principle. The punishment of the wicked will be according the degree of knowledge that the person possessed (v. 48). This was obviously addressed to the Pharisees among the crowd, and Judas the betrayer who would have been among the twelve disciples. By application the teaching leading up to today's reading brings with the idea of everyone's call to exercise godly stewardship of the resources which they have been given. The call to godly stewardship may even involve the forsaking of friends and family for the sake of the Gospel.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 12:49-53 NAS95 49 "I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled! 50 But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished! 51 Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division; 52 for from now on five members in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three. 53 They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

In the very first season of the television series *Survivor*, Richard Hatch orchestrated the idea of a voting alliance. The "Tagi Alliance" as it was called, was a brilliant strategy that paved the way for future seasons of the program and showed the necessity of working together to accomplish the impossible in dire conditions. One of the most notable things about an alliance in general and this one in particular is that it excludes members outside of it. As viewers saw in the series, the Tagi Alliance resulted in considerable controversy with non-members as the show played out. In this case the issue that comes into play is that as the season winds down the ultimate conclusion requires the banishment of alliance members from the island. In today's reading we see how Jesus warned about the dangers of stubbornly clinging to an alliance which in effect makes a pledge of allegiance to someone other than God.

Jesus told His disciples along with large crowd how from now on families would be divided because of Him. By application, true followers of Jesus are called to examine their alliances and allegiances and be willing to forsake anything that leads them away from following God's plan for their lives. This may include stepping back from any relationship in which the other person attempts to lead you astray spiritually while praying for the opening of that person's eyes to the light of the Gospel.

Muslim background believers (MBB's) are one shining example of a group whom would readily identify with Jesus' teaching as well as what we learned about persecution in the first reading. Many MBB's have been forced to forsake their mother and father and even their own lives in order to follow the true teaching found only in the God of the Bible. Other readers of Mass Notes will also be able to identify with Jesus' teaching when they too found themselves marginalized or even outright reject by family members (and others) for their faith in Jesus. All three of today's readings point to a single verse from the second reading in Hebrews. "For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Hebrews 12:3). God calls us to focus upon Him to the extent that we are willing to assess any alliances or allegiances we may have that call us away from His plan. This may mean leaving the fellowship of a certain church or losing a relationship with a loved one. Through it all God calls us to never lose our focus upon Him.

Would you be willing to share your testimony with us for posting on the web site about the particular alliance or allegiance you were forced to break?

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In what ways does the things that happened to Jeremiah in today's reading mirror the Lord Jesus

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Christ?

2. What is a particular situation in your life in which you felt called by God to break an alliance or allegiance in order to accomplish God's purpose?

Readings for the Week

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

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/081416.cfm

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 120

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass-Study-Notes-for-Sunday_08-14-2016.pdfDownload

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 8-07-2016

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **8-7-2016**. This week we learn about the Hall of Faith in the Book of Hebrews and about Jesus' call to serve Him while He is away in Heaven.

The first reading is from the Apocrypha. You can read that online for yourself at http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/080716.cfm. In the future Mass Notes may include an analysis of these readings once proper copyright permission has been obtained for inclusion of that text.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The reading from the Book of Hebrews is from the section referred to as the "Hall of Faith" or "Faith Hall of Fame." The reading records the faith-filled events of some very important men and women of the faith. After reading the definition of faith in the first verse, look for repeating patterns in the second section.

Second Reading: The verses (3 – 7) omitted from the reading are set apart below.

Hebrews 11:1-2 NAS95 1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2 For by it the men of old gained approval.

Omitted:

Heb 11:3 By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

Heb 11:4 ¶ By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.

Heb 11:5 By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God.

Heb 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

Heb 11:7 By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

Hebrews 11:8-19 NAS95 8 By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; 10 for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. 11 By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE. 13 All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. 14 For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. 15 And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them. 17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; 18 it was he to whom it was said, "IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED." 19 He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.

Prior to launching into the Hall of Faith, the author provided the definition of this very important term, one that we may easily take for granted during the reading of the Bible. They say, "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (v. 1). Read this definition again, "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." As Christians, we understand intuitively that the context of faith is God. However, faith isn't an object in itself, rather the object of faith is God, for having spiritual faith in anyone but God is vain. For nonbelievers may

make statements like, "I have faith that I will get through this" and then rather be guided by their circumstances than God, although God is sovereign over all people and events in the world.

The second section of today's reading begins with, "For by it the men of old gained approval" and then moves to using the repeated phrase, "by faith [name]" followed by a commendation of the person's faith-filled actions. In the omitted verses we see that this follows the general chronology of the Bible beginning first with Abel (v. 4), then Enoch (v. 5) and Noah (v. 7). The reading then moves to person known as the "father of faith," Abraham in verse 8. Saint Paul affirmed this commendation of Abraham in Romans 4:16. Although we see that Abraham certainly wasn't the first to walk by faith in God, he along with his wife, was the one to whom God dedicated a substantial section for commendation in the Hall of Faith. The first portion of verse 8 reads, "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by . . ." The subsequent verses chronicle his and Sarah's faithful actions including leaving his known land to go to an unknown place. In verse 17, we see how Abraham passed perhaps the ultimate test of his faith by his willingness to offer up his one and only son as a sacrifice to God. This example of faith lived out by Abraham closely parallels God's willingness to offer His Son Jesus on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. In Abraham's case God stopped short of requiring the ultimate sacrifice of Isaac by providing the lamb himself for the sacrifice. However, we know that in the case of Jesus God provided the ultimate sacrifice through the sacrifice of His one and only Son. We read in the Book of John, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

So much can be said about the reading that concludes with, "All these died in faith, without receiving the promises" (v. 13a). How faithful were the men and women of God by following what He told them to do but without them ever receiving the promises that He made to them! The "Hall of Faith" stands as a testimony as to how we as men and women of the faith are also called to walk by faith in God's promises without expecting to see the ultimate answers during our natural lives. God calls us to walk in faith the same way as the biblical examples did, not only just the ones listed in today's reading. We do this through understanding God's promises made to us and walk by taking both baby steps and even giant steps of faith along the way as we sense God's calling. God may call us to leave our known land and proceed to a place with which we are not familiar. Or He may call us to lesser steps such as caring for the needy, or praying for others. During those times when we are doubting our faith we can turn to this section of the Book of Hebrews to see how those before us obeyed God and were commended for doing so. We can expect that if we obey God we too will one day be commended by God in our own "Hall of Faith."

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The second reading from Luke concerns the subject of readiness. Here we will see how Jesus calls us disciples of Him to be ready for His imminent return by accomplishing the works which He has given us.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 12:32-48 NAS95 32 Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. 35 Be dressed in readiness, and keep your lamps lit. 36 Be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast, so that they may immediately open the door to him when he comes and knocks. 37 Blessed are those slaves whom the master will find on the alert when he comes; truly I say to you, that he will gird himself to serve, and have them recline at the table, and will come up and wait on them. 38 Whether he comes in the second watch, or even in the third, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves. 39 But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have allowed his house to be broken into. 40 You too, be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour that you do not expect." 41 Peter said, "Lord, are You addressing this parable to us, or to everyone else as well?" 42 And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time? 43 Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. 44 Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. 45 But if that slave says in his heart, 'My master will be a long time in coming,' and begins to beat the slaves, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk; 46 the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and assign him a place with the unbelievers. 47 And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes, 48 but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.

Jesus called His disciples to fulfil the greater kingdom purposes for their lives by seeking first the kingdom of God as reflected in our Lord's Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:33). He told the disciples that the place on which they focus their investment reveals the true condition of their hearts (v. 34). Next, He provides them with a parable concerning a master who left his servants in charge while he was away (vv. 36 – 40). In the case of this parable, the Lord Jesus uniquely provides the interpretation of it before and after the giving of the parable itself. His disciples are to be ready for the imminent return of their master even though they do not know when he will return. By application this means that as believers, we are to be accomplishing the works of our Father God even though we do not know when Jesus will return.

The second section of the reading proceeds along the same line of reasoning but using an example with a contrast between a godly servant waiting for the return of his master (vv. 42 – 43) contrasted with that of an ungodly one who beat his slaves and got drunk while waiting (vv. 45 – 48). The application of these verses is that nonbelievers who commit great sins will be punished less than nonbelievers who commit great ones. For all believers are totally forgiven of their sins through the finished work of Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:14). However, the application of the reading as a whole doesn't just apply to nonbelievers as we see in the concluding verse. "From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more" (v. 48d-ff). The big idea is that God calls all people to exercise godly stewardship of the gifts

that He has given them. As people in the unique small set of believers (Matthew 7:13), we are to live with patient expectation that God could return at any instant while going about accomplishing the things that God has asked us to do. First and foremost, this means accomplish the Great Commission, making disciples and teaching them all things (Matthew 28: 16-20).

This week please join me in praying for a young man from my hometown who was recently (July 2016) diagnosed with a brain tumor and just underwent surgery. Please pray for his healing and that through this time he may reach out to God and find faith in Him.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In what ways would memorizing the author of Hebrew's definition of faith in God help you to combat future weaknesses in your own faith? "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." How does reading the Hall of Faith help you through these same weaknesses?

2. How does understanding the gifts which God has given you help you to exercise better stewardship of the things in your life?

Readings for the Week

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

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/080716.cfm

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 117

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass-Study-Notes-for-Sunday_08-07-2016.pdfDownload

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 7-31-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **7-31-2016**. This week we begin with a reading from the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes, written by Solomon, king of Israel, and the wisest man of his time. Although it is inspired by God—as is all Scripture–it is written from the perspective of a frustrated man who is seeking for answers to life's hard questions. The second reading is from Paul's epistle to the early church in Colossae. Its theme is the Christian life that is centered in Jesus Christ and how that is lived out in everyday life. Finally, we look once again at the Gospel of Luke and hear Jesus speak about the dangers of human greed.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Ecclesiastes is a hard book for many readers to understand, because at times it seems to support ideas that are contrary to other biblical teachings. For example, "There is a time to kill" (3:3). Of course, context is all important in interpreting Scripture, so we have to remember that the author, though the wisest of all men, is looking at life from a purely secular perspective. He uses the expression, "under the sun" more than two dozen times in the book.

First Reading:

Ecclesiastes 1:1-2 NAS95 1 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. 2 "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity."

Ecclesiastes 2:21-23 NAS95 21 When there is a man who has labored with wisdom, knowledge and skill, then he gives his legacy to one who has not labored with them. This too is vanity and a great evil. 22 For what does a man get in all his labor and in his striving with which he labors under the sun? 23 Because all his days his task is painful and grievous; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is vanity.

The authorship of this book is made perfectly clear from the very beginning. He is the third king of Israel, under whose reign the nation reaches the pinnacle of its world prominence, especially in terms of wealth. God had spoken to Solomon on at least two occasions and had asked him what he wanted above all else. Solomon asked not for riches or fame, but for wisdom, and God granted his request (1 Kings 3:5-12). And it was Solomon who built the temple for God to dwell in by His Shekinah Glory.

To read the exploits of Solomon is to discover a man of great talent, having written three thousand proverbs and a thousand and five songs (1 Kings 4:32). He failed to keep his promises to God, however, and he took numerous foreign wives and accumulated thousands of horses in direct disobedience to God's commands. As a result, Solomon questions life's realities. What is life all about? What is its purpose? What good is it for man to work hard when he gains little and cannot rest?

Today's reading records those questions and the completely unsatisfactory answers in Solomon's judgment. "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity," he writes. Another translation of this conclusion is "Completely meaningless! Everything is meaningless." We must remember, however, that this is not the end of all things. Solomon concludes this writing by acknowledging that his search "under the sun" has produced nothing, but there is a lesson to be learned. He writes, "Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind (12:13). Today, then, in spite of the apparent hopelessness of life sometimes, we are to keep God's commandments. That will give us the peace that Solomon was searching for.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Whenever a paragraph begins with the word "therefore," you have to ask what has preceded and how is it related to what is to follow. As a consequence to what Paul has taught in chapters 1 and 2, the believer should follow the instructions he is about to give. In other words, because the Christian recognizes that Jesus is God in the flesh (2:9), has "received Jesus as Lord" (2:6), and has been "made alive with Christ (2:13), he or she does not need to submit to the rules of the world that is controlled by Satan and his evil system (2:20).

Second Reading:

Note: Verses 6 – 8 which were omitted from the reading are included below.

Colossians 3:1-11 NAS95 1 Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things

above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. 5 Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. 6 For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, 7 and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. 8 But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, 10 and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him– 11 a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.

Instead of following the worldly way, the believer is to have a different motivation. The Christian has been raised up with Christ and is to "keep seeking the things above" (3:1). That is, his incentives should be spiritual, inspired from above, not worldly. Believers are to focus on "things above not on the things … on the earth (v. 2). The apostle uses the phrase, "set your mind," which reminds us of what he wrote in Romans 12, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters . . . Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (verses 1-2). It's a matter of the mind—what we think. Instructions like this have less to do with emotion and more to do with sound thinking and proper conduct as a result.

How is all this possible? Paul makes it clear; the believer "has died" (to sin), his life is "hidden with Christ in God," and one day Christians will be "revealed with Him in glory." It all begins with acknowledging these facts as true, considering our bodies as being dead to the evils that the writer lists (v. 5). Paul recognizes, as the Christian will, also, that we once walked in such sinful behavior, but now we are to put off all those sinful traits.

Since the Christian is part of the body of Christ, the church, he must put off sinful behavior and put on the new characteristics of the believer who is born again of God and has a new nature. Paul concludes this portion of the reading by reminding us that when men and women come into a relationship with Jesus Christ by faith, they join a host of believers whose prior differences are of no significance now. The family of God is distinct in itself but it no longer involves ethnic origins, religious distinctions, social positions, or any such differences. We are all in Christ and He is the center of all things and the head of the body.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Jesus was speaking to a large crowd, "many thousands," the text says (Luke 12:1). He speaks first to His disciples, warning them about dangers to come. Even though there will be some who will try to kill them, they are not to fear, because they belong to God. He encourages them to realize that God cares for every sparrow, and they are much more precious to Him than the birds. As Jesus was telling them about what would occur, He is interrupted by a request from the crowd. It's a personal concern that Jesus addresses and uses to teach important principles about possessions and greed.

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Gospel Reading:

Luke 12:13-21 NAS95 13 Someone in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." 14 But He said to him, "Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?" 15 Then He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." 16 And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive. 17 And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' 18 Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 'And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.' 20 But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' 21 So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

The request: "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." Without responding to the specific request, Jesus uses it as a springboard to reveal real-life principles that are not widely recognized or practiced (either in His day or today). Good teachers, by the way, will wisely take such opportunities to launch a lesson that has much broader application than the personal request or question of an individual inquirer.

Jesus begins by saying, "Not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." Then, as He often did, Jesus tells a parable, a story, to illustrate His point. He tells about a rich man who could think only of how to accumulate more riches and how to hoard them. He thought that he would then be able to enjoy a life of ease and plenty. The rich man's plight sounds a lot like many of our 21st century citizens in more affluent countries. To look at the size of people's houses and their overflowing garages, one might think that Jesus was wrong. "Stuff" does seem to be of great importance. Yet, as the Broadway play says, "You Can't Take It With You." So, we should consider our spiritual condition more than the abundance of things we own.

Jesus went on to share the climax of the story. God intervenes in the rich man's life and enlightens him—and us—of the insignificance of life if it is all wrapped up in what we have. There are two dire consequences of the rich man's plan. First, he has not thought of the future in eternal terms. His soul is lost forever. Second, he has not thought of his possessions in terms of their true value. What happens to them when he's gone? Perhaps we should also recognize that he gave no consideration to how those possessions could be used for wider benefit than his own personal enjoyment.

Jesus concludes, applying the lesson to all his hearers (and readers of the text today): "The man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" is doomed as was the rich fool. So, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19-21).

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Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. What are one or two ways in which you are storing up for yourself treasure on earth? In what ways does Jesus' teaching inform you heart as a defense against this?

2. Since you have placed your trust in Jesus for salvation, are you setting your mind on heavenly things, avoiding the lure of the world, and renewing your mind in God's Word? In light of what you learned today, what are some of the things that God has empowered you to do differently next week?

Readings for the Week

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

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/073116.cfm

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 114

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 7-24-2016

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **7-24-2016**. This week we cover three excellent readings in which we learn more about God's righteous nature, the forgiveness that we have through Jesus Christ, and how Jesus teaches us to pray.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading from Genesis picks up where we left off in last week's reading where we saw Abraham meet with two angels and the Lord Jesus Himself. This week's reading deals with Abraham's pleading with God concerning the people of the region of Sodom and Gomorrah. These cities were located just north of the Dead Sea in an area known for its great fertility. Today's reading chronicles the events leading up to the destruction of the cities turning them into the wasteland that they are today.

First Reading:

Genesis 18:20-32 NAS95 20 And the LORD said, "The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. 21 I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know." 22 Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham was still standing before the LORD. 23 Abraham came near and said, "Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 24 Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will You indeed sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? 25 Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" 26 So the LORD said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account." 27 And Abraham replied, "Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am but dust and ashes. 28

Suppose the fifty righteous are lacking five, will You destroy the whole city because of five?" And He said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there." 29 He spoke to Him yet again and said, "Suppose forty are found there?" And He said, "I will not do it on account of the forty." 30 Then he said, "Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak; suppose thirty are found there?" And He said, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." 31 And he said, "Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord; suppose twenty are found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy it on account of the twenty." 32 Then he said, "Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak only this once; suppose ten are found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy it on account of the ten."

The LORD told Abraham about the terrible sin of the people of the region of Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 20). The text says that the LORD would go "down" to Sodom (v. 20), a word which brings with it two meanings, geographically south and downwards spiritually. Looking back to chapter 13, we see how Abraham's nephew Lot chose to live in this fertile region when the land would not support both of their herds and there was a conflict among their herdsmen (Genesis 13:7). Abraham, a man who was well acquainted with God and knew of His grace and forgiveness, pleaded with the Lord Jesus before He went down to the region to judge them. We are not told how Abraham knew that the LORD's visit meant judgment. Regardless, Abraham began pleading on the basis of whether there were fifty righteous people in the cities would the LORD not destroy the people? Jesus' answer was implied as negative, there were not fifty righteous people in the region. After Abraham received this negative implication, he proceeded to boldly decrease the number, first to 40, then 30, 20, 10, and finally just 5. By implication by not responding to Abraham's final question the region of Sodom and Gomorrah did not contain even five righteous people. What a terrible condition the region had come to without having even five righteous people in the region!

We may ask, how many righteous people were there in these cities? We know that there was at least one righteous person in the land, the person of Lot, or at least he came to be righteous in his later life after the destruction of the region of Sodom and Gomorrah in which he lived. Even if Lot was righteous in the eyes of the Lord, this would not have brought the total number to the value of five predicated by Abraham's question. We know that the LORD did not destroy Lot. Rather He sent the two angels with whom Abraham had met and they eventually led him away from the city before the fire rained down (Genesis 19:24-25). Looking a bit deeper at Lot, although he may or may not have a righteous man at the time of the story in Genesis 18, we do know that sometime later he repented and was added to the hall of faith in the New Testament. We also know that God spared the city of Zoar from destruction because of Lot's request (Genesis 19:20-21).

The rest of Lot's family didn't fare so well. We know that Lot's wife didn't make the grade (Genesis 19:26). The relationship between Lot's daughters and God is murky since we know that they later engaged in immoral sexual relations with their father since they felt that after the destruction of Sodom every man was dead and that they had to save the race from extinction (Genesis 19:19:31). This severe faithlessness may be abrogated a bit in light of the fact that they had just witnessed the terrible extermination of everyone in the region in which they lived by fire and brimstone raining from the sky (Genesis 19:24). This brings to mine the story of Elijah when he thought that he was the

last believer alive in the entire world (1 Kings 19:14). Then the LORD reminded this great prophet during his brief season of faithlessness that there remained 7,000 who had or would be true to Him (1 Kings 19:18). So although Lot's daughters may have doubted God's promises made through Abraham we are not told the ultimate condition of their heart.

Abraham brought out the central point of the reading in his question at end of verse 25, "Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" The answer, one that is woven throughout the narrative of the decreasing numbers, is a resounding yes. Yes, the Judge of all the earth shall do justly, including the destruction of the wicked. Although in our day God mostly withholds judgment of the "wicked" until after they die, the Bible is clear that judgement is a certainty for those that deny the Lord Jesus and don't yield to His Holy Spirit in giving up their sinful lives.

It is useful to read what Saint Peter wrote about today's story and Lot:

*2 Peter 2:6-9 NAS95 6 (emphasis added) and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter; 7 and if He rescued **righteous Lot**, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men 8 (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds), 9 then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment,*

Peter's explanation helps us to understand the implications of living a **lifelong** pattern of sin without repenting through God's empowerment found through faith in Jesus Christ. Peter was clear that we are to learn from other's mistakes, and Sodom and Gomorrah stands as a "doozie" of an example useful to all of us today. Paul said, "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" (1Corinthians 10:11). This leads us to the main point of the reading. If Lot can find forgiveness and faith in God in spite of the series of poor choices he made, we took can do the same. God stands ready to forgive us of our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9b-ff). Through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, we are motivated to confess our sins (1 John 1:9a) and receive God's blessing upon our lives demonstrated by our service to Him.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The context of the second reading from Colossians continues from last week (Colossians 1:24-28) but skips forward to verse 12 of the second chapter. The context of the omitted verses 1 -11 in the second chapter leading up to today's reading is Paul's affirmation of Jesus' humanity and divinity, something which the Gnostics opposed. This was because the false teachers that had infiltrated the church taught that since only spirit was good in contrast to flesh that was evil, the person of the Lord Jesus could not have truly manifested Himself as divinity in the flesh. Paul said, "For in Him all

the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9). He also taught the Colossian church how they were complete in Christ Jesus and spiritually circumcised in their heart without the necessity of the physical operation itself (vv. 10-11). The reading continues with important teaching on a Christian's identity in Christ.

Second Reading:

Colossians 2:12-14 NAS95 12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. 13 When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

Paul taught that as believers our spiritually dead carnal life is buried in baptism as a picture of being born from the Spirit of God. When a person is immersed in baptism they make a statement that their sins are buried with Jesus Christ's burial, but when they emerge from the water they are raised in the newness of life in a similar was as when Jesus rose from the dead. Although Jesus was dead, God raised Him from the dead (v. 12d). Through faith God in a sense raised believers from the dead (v. 12c). In addition, as believers God forgave all of our sins – past, present and future (v. 13) and nailed the record of our transgressions to the cross of Christ (v. 14). This hostile "certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us" (v. 14a) has been forever taken away from us!

What does it mean to have all of our sins taken away, forever, with even the record of them being destroyed? One aspect is that if Satan (or we do in our ourselves) brings our past sins back into our mind, we can call upon God in prayer to fight this spiritual battle raging against us with a one hundred percent certain outcome. This is because as believers our God has forgiven us through the precious blood of Jesus Christ. It is only when we doubt our standing as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ that these attacks can harm our minds. Another aspect is that we can trust that although people may bring up our past sins God will never do it. God through Jesus Christ has placed our sins as far as east is from west (Psalm 103:12).

Next, as we turn to the Gospel reading, we will learn something from the Lord Jesus about how He instructed His disciples to pray specifically concerning their needs. This study will be useful because we know that prayer is the antidote to worry that comes when our enemies (spiritual and physical) bring up our past sins.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading from Luke is the Lord Jesus' teaching on prayer that He gave in response to one of His disciple's questions, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples." As you read, begin to develop a list of bullet points from Jesus' teaching. Ask, what is Jesus teaching **me** about prayer?

Gospel Reading:

Luke 11:1-13 NAS95 1 It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples." 2 And He said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. 3 Give us each day our daily bread. 4 And forgive us our sins, For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation." 5 Then He said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; 6 for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; 7 and from inside he answers and says, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' 8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. 9 So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened. 11 Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? 12 Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? 13 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"

What can we learn about prayer from the Lord Jesus? The big idea of Jesus' teaching on prayer was to pray to the Person of the Father, pray specifically and pray persistently. Prayer is an antidote to worry, as when Satan brings to mind our past sins as we just mentioned in the second reading. In order for this to be an antidote to worry, we must enter into the reality of this prayer, not just recite it. Here are some other points that we can learn about prayer from today's reading.

- We have a Father (that implies a relationship with someone bigger, wiser and more able to cope with this world than ourselves; we are not orphans).
- Our Father is in heaven (He is above the fray of this world and has power and resources at his command that we cannot even fathom).
- His name is holy (His name refers to his character and essence. If he is holy, then he relates in a way that is set apart from the world's way. His holiness is what creates a foundation of trust for us to surrender our will to His will, to turn to Him in our time of need.
- He has a kingdom that is on the move. We can choose to be part of His kingdom and allow His way of heaven to infiltrate this world through my life. Instead of worrying about how I'm going to make it in this world, I am now focused on being used by God to bring His ways to bear on this world.
- He forgives us, and through His strength we can extend forgiveness to others. This is a quality of the Kingdom of God that is countercultural to the world's ways.
- He leads us out of temptation and delivers us from evil. Do I really want to be delivered from temptation and evil, or do I want only to be delivered from the negative consequences of sin?
- He has a kingdom, power and glory that will be manifested forever. Do I want to be a part of this, or do I think that doing life on my own is a better option?

- God calls us to be specific in our prayer. If we (or others) are sick Jesus is teaching us to pray that we may be well. This may be intuitive to you, but how often have you been sick and not prayed for your own healing? Perhaps Jesus will allow sickness in your own life such as to give you compassion for others who are sick.
- God calls us to be persistent in prayer. This is clear not only in today's teaching but also in Jesus' teaching on the parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8). In that case Jesus applauded the efforts of a woman who continually nagged a judge to resolve her case. Jesus calls us to be persistent.

These are some amazing realities that Jesus understood and allowed Him to live in a countercultural way, free of worry and anxiety, because He knew who His Father was. He offers that same type of perspective to us, if we will ask Him to teach us to pray in this way.

As believers, we can be confident that God not only hears our prayers, but answers them. John said, "This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him" (1 John 5:14-15). The key is praying according to God's will. We do that by learning His will, and the way to do that is to study His revealed will in the Bible, the Word of God. God's answers to our prayers may **not** be as we expect. He may answer yes, not, wait, or lead us in another direction to pray. God calls us to pray boldly as we see in Hebrews: "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

We hope that what you have learned today will help you to pray more effectively and fervently by having the confidence that God will hear and answer you. Over the years I have prayed for a very long list (about 150) people each day concerning their salvation. Over the course of the last almost two decades I have seen God answer my prayers in miraculous ways. In one case a man who had experienced God's miraculous intervention in an accident came to know the Lord Jesus much later in his life as a result of a second drunk driving arrest. This was a man that I had been praying for over the course of about 15 years. He later told me that he had felt called to God during that entire time and this was the natural outcome of what had to happen. He was thankful for God bringing him to this point of decision by using the bad events in his life to turn him around onto the track of following Him. Perhaps one of my faithful readers will recognize the person about whom I am speaking. May God be glorified in all that we do and may we praise Him for His intervention.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Today we learned something from Jesus about how to pray. In what ways does Jesus' teaching challenge your current prayer life?

2. Look back at your some urgent prayers you made to God in the past year. Were any of these written in a journal? How were these prayers answered? How helpful would it be for you to write down certain prayer requests in a journal in order to be able to remember and to look back and

update them with notes about how God responded? Consider starting a prayer journal and using note cards to write down your urgent prayer requests that you carry with you each day.

Readings for the Week

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

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/072416.cfm

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 111

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 7-17-2016

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **7-17-2016**. This week we study a reading from Genesis where Abraham meets the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Who provides him with an important confirmation of a promised blessing. We also look at a reading in Colossians and close with the story about Mary and Martha in the Gospel of Luke.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The context of the first reading from Genesis is the appearance of the Lord to Abraham when he was ninety-nine years old just after he had obeyed God's order to be circumcised (Genesis 17:24) along with his son Ishmael (v. 13) born through his handmaid. Just prior to this, God had reconfirmed His promise of a son through Sarah by saying, "But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year" (Genesis 17:21).

First Reading:

Genesis 18:1-10 NAS95 1 Now the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, while he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day. 2 When he lifted up his eyes and looked, behold, three men were standing opposite him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth, 3 and said, "My lord, if now I have found favor in your sight, please do not pass your servant by. 4 Please let a little water be brought and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree; 5 and I will bring a piece of bread, that you may refresh yourselves; after that you may go on, since you have visited your servant." And they said, "So do, as you have said." 6 So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Quickly, prepare three measures of fine flour, knead it and make bread cakes." 7 Abraham also ran to the herd, and took a tender and choice calf and gave it to the servant, and he hurried to prepare it. 8 He took curds and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and placed it before them; and he was standing by them under the tree as they ate.

9 Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "There, in the tent." 10 He said, "I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife will have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him.

Note how the reading opens with "Now the LORD appeared" (v. 1) and then says in the next verse, "three men were standing opposite him" (v. 2b). In order to understand what is happening in these verses we must look beyond the verses covered in the reading. Later in this chapter we see that "the men" (plural) departed and Abraham was left standing with the LORD (Genesis 18:22) at which point Abraham did his famous reasoning with God about whether there were any righteous men in Sodom (Genesis 18:23-32). Next the text says, "As soon as He had finished speaking to Abraham the LORD departed, and Abraham returned to his place" (Genesis 18:33). If the men departed but Abraham was left standing with the LORD what was happening was that Abraham was standing face to face with the preincarnate Jesus Christ. God appeared in the form of a man to Abraham through, what theologians call, a "Christophany." As Abraham rushed around to prepare a meal for the group of two men (who were angels as stated in Genesis 19:1) and the Lord Jesus, the Lord provided yet another confirmation of His promise to him as they ate together. Sarah also heard the promise as she listened from the tent door while the "men" ate outside (v. 10). The Lord told him, "I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife will have a son" (v. 10).

For Abraham and all of those who walk by faith, this is an important passage that tells of God's story for redemption. Abraham is called the father of faith, because it was through him that the Messiah would come. He looked forward to redemption, while we look back in history at the cross, where the transaction took place. Jesus paid the price for our redemption and provides the way for us to be reconciled to the Father, resulting in eternal life. This re-confirmation of God's sending of a promised son delivered by none other than The Promised Son Himself provided an important foreshadowing of how God's promises may be trusted in the sending of the ultimate, final, only Son Jesus to the earth some two thousand years later.

God understands what we need in terms of confirmation of His promises during the times that we may be in doubt. In the same way that God understood Abraham's need for confirmation of His promise, we too may turn to God for the confirmation of the promises He has made to us. We do this first through understanding His promises, and then turning to the Scriptures to renew our understanding of the promises that we find there. In prayer, we affirm those promises and learn to stake our lives on what God has said. In our daily lives, we learn to walk by faith in God, trusting in His character and knowing that He will make good on His promises.

As we transition to the second reading, we will see the importance of understanding Jesus' true humanity in light of the false teachings happening in the early church. Although Jesus appeared to Abraham in the form of man as we saw in the first reading, the Bible states that Jesus was born in the flesh through Mary in order to live a perfect, sinless life and then gave Himself as the final offering of sins forever.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Colossians. It is vital to understand the context in which Paul is writing to the church at Colosse. Today's reading is from the opening chapter of the Book that is concerned with correcting the heretical beliefs of some in the Colossian church including elements of Gnosticism. This belief system taught that matter is evil, God is good and in the case of the Colossians, that Jesus was just another emanation of God and not fully God Himself in the flesh. They also taught that a special secret high knowledge (gnosis) was required for true salvation and spiritual enlightenment.

Second Reading:

Colossians 1:24-28 NAS95 24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. 25 Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, 26 that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, 27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.

Paul affirmed how Christ's body is the church for which he rejoices in his suffering (v. 24). The core of his message to the Colossians was how God had revealed through the church the mystery "which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints" (v. 26) which is "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (v. 26b-ff). It is through the reception and understanding of this mystery that believers are made complete in Christ.

A question that we must ask ourselves based on this text is whether Christ's sacrifice was sufficient or do we need to do something to add to it to make up what is lacking? What was Paul referring to when he said that his suffering filled up "what is lacking in Christ's afflictions."

The Scriptures are clear that God's work of redemption was finished on the cross when Jesus declared, "It is finished" (John 19:30). Hebrews 10:12 says, "But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God" (ESV), which further verifies that redemption was finished at the cross by Jesus' sacrifice. Paul himself affirms in various places and in various ways that Christ's work is sufficient to cover our sins. Cite numerous verses here.

God calls us to serve Him through our good works that flow out of a heart changed by God. This is clear from these verses in Ephesians:

Ephesians 2:8-10 NAS95 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

James in the Book by his name described the nature of saving faith as that which produces good works for God (James 2:17). Rather than thinking that by doing God's work we are earning our salvation, God calls us instead to seek His will for our lives and accept the blessing of Jesus' finished work for us. In this way we may be presented to God as "complete in Christ" (Colossians 1:28) as we read in today's reading.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading from Luke picks up from last week's message regarding the Good Samaritan. This time instead of relating a *story* about a traveler on a road, Jesus and His disciples were themselves traveling on a road. We know from the context that the village that we will read about them entering is Bethany. This small city was located very close to Jerusalem.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 10:38-42 NAS95 38 Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word. 40 But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me." 41 But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; 42 but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

The reading is a story about priority and motive. It's about the energy with which we do something. Martha busied herself with the dinner preparation while Mary sat at Jesus' feet listening to Him. This contrasts with how we saw Abraham and Sarah work together to prepare the meal for the Lord and then listened to Him during the meal (except Sarah listened from a distance). Here Mary allows Martha to serve while sitting down and listening to Jesus. This bothered Martha who then spoke up to Jesus about the situation. Jesus gently corrected Martha's misunderstanding of Mary's motives, thinking that she was being lazy and neglecting in the serving of their important guest. Jesus told Martha that Mary did choose correctly to sit and listen at the feet of Jesus.

It's not a bad thing that Martha desired to serve Jesus, but there can be a service that is devoid of relationship. This is inferred by the way that Martha talks to Jesus about Mary. Her service was no longer about meeting the needs of Jesus but was about keeping score and trying to validate herself. Mary on the other hand was willing to appear culturally inappropriate by sitting at the feet of Jesus with the rest of the men. She felt comfortable sitting at the feet of Jesus, which is normal place for the disciple in that cultural context. Mary seems to be the only that truly understood that Jesus had to die. We know that the Gospels record how Mary anointed Jesus that evening. It is very likely that Jesus could smell Mary's anointing while He was hanging on the cross which would serve as a small comfort and blessing.

The main point of the reading is not that Jesus is reprimanding Martha for serving Him, but that He is saying that our serving needs to be connected to relationship (sitting at Jesus' feet). Mary showed

true devotion to Christ not just by serving Him a meal but by being present and listening to Him. She understood that Jesus' time on the earth was drawing to a close, something that Jesus' own disciples failed to understand (Luke 18:34).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Abraham is the father of faith and needed confirmation of God's reliability. What promises of God are you standing on and how is God reconfirming your faith to trust Him? How can others support you in your journey to walk by faith?

2. In the Gospel reading we saw how Mary sat and listened to Jesus while Martha busied herself with the preparation of the meal. In what ways was Martha jealous of Mary? Was Mary being lazy? Why or who not?

Readings for the Week

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

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/071716.cfm

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 108

Source(s):

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday,

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7-10-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **7-10-2016**. This week we begin with a reading from the book of Deuteronomy, which means "second law" or "copy of the law." A whole new generation had grown up since Moses first gave the law, so the new generation is given a review of the history of Israel since the Exodus and a modified and expanded review of the law. The second reading, from Paul's letter to the Colossians contains an essential explanation of who Jesus is. The final excerpt for this week is the recording of Jesus telling the very familiar story of the Good Samaritan. The story itself is amazing, but its application to the hearers (and today's readers) is most significant.

Introduction to the First Reading:

To understand literature of any kind, it is always important to consider the context of the passage under consideration. This is especially true of the Bible, since it is the inerrant Word of God, is given in a historical setting, and is intended to be relevant to the lives of the current and subsequent hearers or readers. Verse 10 of today's reading actually begins in the middle of a sentence, so we should look back several verses to see the context. Moses has promised (v. 9) that God would make His people prosperous both in the produce of their work and in their progeny. He will take delight in them . . . (now see today's reading).

First Reading:

Deuteronomy 30:10-14 NAS95 10 if you obey the LORD your God to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this book of the law, if you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and soul. 11 For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor

is it out of reach. 12 It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?' 13 Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?' 14 But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it.

Two conditions are given for this promised blessing of God: "if you obey" and "if you turn to the Lord … with all your heart and soul." It has been suggested that "obedience" may be the key word in Deuteronomy, because "obey" and "obedient" are used at least ten times in some translations. Not only does God expect His people to obey His commands, but Moses says that God has made His command easy for them to grasp. Verse 14 suggests that when God's people obey, He enables them to understand His Word (His commands), because they are "near," "in your mouth and in your heart."

Many people are seeking God as if He were unreachable, so transcendent that human beings cannot find Him. Although sin will surely separate a person from God, He remains available to the true seeker. Isaiah wrote, "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near" (Isaiah 55:6). One of the strong lessons from Deuteronomy is that obedience is necessary in order to know God. Jesus Himself said, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them" (John 14.23).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Colossians is one of the so-called "Prison Epistles," because the Apostle Paul wrote them to various churches in Asia Minor while he was jailed in Rome. His writings usually include a succinct but rich theological passage, explaining doctrine for the benefit of young believers and their leaders. Those deep teaching passages are most often followed by very practical instruction about Christian living. Today's reading is a primary statement of who Jesus is. One New Testament scholar notes, "In Colossians we have the most thorough presentation of Christology in the New Testament." The substance of the epistle may be summed up in a key verse (3:11), "Christ is all and in all."

Second Reading:

Colossians 1:15-20 NAS95 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities–all things have been created through Him and for Him. 17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. 18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. 19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, 20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

Paul concludes a very wonderful prayer for the Colossians with a reference to God's "beloved son, in whom we have redemption" (v. 14). Then, our reading for today begins, detailing who this "beloved

son" is. First, "He is the image of the invisible God." We learn two very important ideas here. "Image" means an exact copy; in other words, there is no difference in essence between God and Jesus. Also, since God is invisible, He has made it possible for us to see Him in physical form through the incarnation of Jesus. John's Gospel is helpful here: "No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known (1:18).

The term "firstborn of all creation" has been confusing to many, thinking that Jesus was a created being, not having existed as God before creation. However, what Paul has in mind here are the rights and privileges of a firstborn son, especially the son of a monarch. The expression was used of David in Psalm 89:27, "I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth." So, the idea is of priority, not birth order.

Speaking of creation, Paul teaches that it is Jesus by whom everything has come into being: "All things have been created through Him." Not only that, they were created "for Him." He is supreme over creation. In fact, everything in the world is held together by Him. Jesus is the creator and upholder of the physical universe, and He is also the creator and head of the church, that body of believers who, by faith, have become a part of His body (a metaphor for the church) of which He is the head.

If we learn nothing else from this passage, it should be very clear to the reader that Jesus is to "have first place in everything." He created it all; He sustains it; He will bring it all to completion when God's gracious plan of redemption is fulfilled. And that plan is made possible because in God's "good pleasure" Jesus provided the means of reconciliation with God by the "blood of the cross."

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

We sometimes read the story of the Good Samaritan, admiring his kindness and generosity in helping an unfortunate stranger who had been mugged (in today's parlance). To profit most from the story, we must recognize the circumstances that prompted Jesus to tell the story and understand both the the question that prompted the interchange and the answer. It's far more than an interesting tale. Its lessons may require some tough introspection and application.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 10:25-37 NAS95 25 And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?" 27 And he answered, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." 28 And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE." 29 But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30 Jesus replied and said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. 31 And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the

other side. 32 Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, 34 and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.' 36 Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?" 37 And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same."

A lawyer asks Jesus about eternal life. He asks, "What do I have to *do* to earn it?" Jesus reminds him of the basic law of God, which the lawyer acknowledges: to love God and your neighbor. When Jesus affirms his answer, He tells the inquirer to do it, to love God and his neighbor. "Who is my neighbor? the lawyer asks, and Jesus then relates the parable that has become so familiar to us today.

In the story there are four characters that are easily identified. The injured man is a traveler on a busy road between two cities. Three other travelers are noted: a priest who passes by the victim, perhaps because he thought he was dead and to touch a dead body would make the priest unclean until he went through certain required cleanings. The Levite was another religious person, who undoubtedly served in the temple or synagogue. Very likely, he also wanted to avoid the uncleanness associated with a possibly dead man. Finally, a stranger came along who was from Samaria. Most likely, the injured man was Jewish, perhaps identified by his clothing. Although Samaritans and Jews did not associate, this traveling Samaritan took pity on the victim and offered him assistance at some personal cost.

As someone has said, Jesus' parables are earthly stories with heavenly meanings. So, as we hear the story, we wonder what is the basic lesson to be learned. Who does each of the characters represent: the injured traveler, the priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan? Simply put, the first two represent people who, though religious, put feelings and convenience ahead of compassion and help. The Samaritan pictures the person who, though of a different religious and/or ethnic background, has compassion for someone in need and freely offers help. But the critical question is how do we identify the neighbor?

In answer to the Jesus' question, the lawyer replies that the neighbor is "the one who showed mercy," the Samaritan. Most of us misread the story. We seem to think Jesus is telling us to identify the needy around us as the neighbors who need help? No, He is teaching that we who see someone in need are to be the neighbor who brings aid and compassion to the needy even when they are not "our kind," and may be different from us in many ways.

We should also observe that the lawyer's initial question assumes that he—or we—can *do* something to inherit eternal life. The action of the Good Samaritan is evidence of a heart that is right before God. The heart that has a genuine love for God and serves Him comes to Him by faith and serves by His grace.

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Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the roles of the characters are easy to identify. In real life it is much harder to recognize the needs of the strangers and then to do something about it in a timely manner. In what ways do you see opportunities for you to be a compassionate neighbor to someone in need, even someone very different from you?

2. Whom among your neighbors and workplace could you consider as a "Samaritan" in that they are different from you in terms of beliefs and culture? What are some ways in which understanding this in advance may help you to accept help from others?

Readings for the Week

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

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/071016.cfm

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 105

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 7-3-2016

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **7-3-2016**. This week we learn something about how to find peace and comfort from God during hard times by resting upon His future promises of peace and prosperity in the closing chapter of Isaiah. We learn about the value of humility and how God calls us to reflect upon His works and not our own. In the Gospel reading we see God's early missionary force sent out before His crucifixion in order to spread the word of the kingdom being ushered in through the Messiah Jesus and about coming judgment for those who ignored His promises.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The context of the message from the last chapter of the Book of Isaiah is God's closing message to Judah concerning the ultimate future restoration of Jerusalem, the city of God's own choosing given to the people of his choosing – the Nation of Israel. Chapter 66 provides important insights to the contemporary audience who were facing threats from the Assyrian Empire who soon took over the Northern Kingdom and also the Babylonians who later took over Judah itself.

First Reading:

Isaiah 66:10-14 NAS95 10 "Be joyful with Jerusalem and rejoice for her, all you who love her; Be exceedingly glad with her, all you who mourn over her, 11 That you may nurse and be satisfied with her comforting breasts, That you may suck and be delighted with her bountiful bosom. 12 For thus says the LORD, "Behold, I extend peace to her like a river, And the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream; And you will be nursed, you will be carried on the hip and fondled on the knees. 13 As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; And you will be comforted in Jerusalem.

14 Then you will see this, and your heart will be glad, And your bones will flourish like the new grass; And the hand of the LORD will be made known to His servants, But He will be indignant toward His enemies.

In the opening verses God taught Isaiah how Jerusalem was as a holy mother to God's people, a place of safe dwelling and nourishment full of bounty (vv. 10 – 11). Jerusalem, which was at that time still standing and had yet to face the utter destruction promised to it (Isaiah 22:1-14), had been since the conquering of the Jebusites and the placing of the temple there been a beacon of God's glory to the world. The city in which God dwelled served to reveal Himself to the Hebrew nation as well as the surrounding Gentiles. It is no coincidence that the name Jerusalem itself means "city of peace" since it was (and will be in some future age) the representation of God's presence and rule on earth. In verse 12 we see this aspect of the City of Peace extolled, where God says, "Behold, I extend peace to her like a river." The next part of this verse reveals the future, universal significance of the City of God not just to the Jews but also to the Gentiles. God says that He will bring the glory of the nations into Jerusalem, with the coming of the nations is shown by Him to be a good thing. These would have been strange words to Isaiah's contemporary audience since they would have viewed anything from the Gentiles as unclean and dangerous. This was especially in light of the fact that the Gentile Assyrian army was posed ready to strike down the Jewish Northern Kingdom very shortly. The reading concludes by continuing the expression of God's peace and comfort to His people (vv. 13 – 15). God said their hearts would be glad (14a), that they would flourish physically like "new grass" (14b), and that He would conquer their enemies (14c).

This message of hope given by Isaiah the Prophet of Judah would have been very comforting to the people who had only to look to God for their ultimate deliverance from their enemies and future peace. Little did they know that the ultimate peace would not come until after they had killed their promised Messiah and waited while God fulfilled His divine plan by bringing the Gentiles to faith in Him through the mystery of the church (Ephesians 5:32). In our day we can look to Isaiah's message and find a similar application. We can trust that in the end God will vanquish our enemies, bring eternal peace to us as spiritual prosperity and ultimately will fulfil all of the prophetic promises that He has made to us. When we read about the "nations" in the Old Testament passages such as we saw in Isiah, we can trust that God has a plan for us and that we are a people grafted into the nation of his choosing, Israel. As in-grafted believers we share not only in the responsibilities of God's people, but also in the current and promised blessings.

The Scriptures teach us about the importance of focusing upon God both in the good times and the bad. I remember once a few years back while I was windsurfing on the eastern coast of Florida when the boom which held the sail to the mast suddenly broke in two and I was forced to swim a long distance back to the shore. My readers may recognize that many of the illustrations I include are often drawn from my experiences windsurfing! As I made my way back towards shore with a side-stroke while grasping onto my board and broken rig and kept my focus upon the distant shoreline. I found it helpful to focus upon my goal as I made progress towards it at a snail's pace. It is during these times when keeping the goal in sight is helpful and how promises never to leave us or forsake

us. During the easy times it's easy to place our beliefs on a shelf and not retrieve them again until the next hard thing comes along. But during our difficult struggles God becomes paramount in our minds. This isn't necessarily a bad thing because we do indeed turn more closely to God when hard times come rather than to fall away and feel that God has left us during our challenges. As I continued my long swim that day as I got closer to the shore the lifeguard who earlier been blowing his whistle at me for being too close to the guarded area began watching me through binoculars to see if I needed any help. With the whistle blowing exercise fresh in my mind I happily scurried onto the grassy shoreline of the public park quickly rather than waiting around for him to question me. I thought, how dare I break down in the guarded area where windsurfing was prohibited, and there was nothing that the lifeguard could do about it! These lessons have taught me reliance upon God and the value of focusing upon Him during the good times and the bad.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading picks up where we left off last week in Galatians. Here Paul continues his explanation of salvation by faith alone and not through the works of the Law. Earlier, Paul had just finished explaining the danger of the believers falling into the trap of conforming to religious Jewish practices for the sake of preventing persecution for their faith. Paul said, "Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ" (Galatians 6:12). Some in the church were urging conformance to religious practices including circumcision and the boasting about it as though they were the religious police, judge, and jury (v. 13). Paul's opposition to their boasting is the subject of today's reading.

Second Reading:

Galatians 6:14-18 NAS95 14 But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. 15 For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. 16 And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. 17 From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus. 18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen.

In this short message, Saint Paul extolled the value of boasting only in the finished work of Jesus Christ who died on the cross for us rather than in anything that we do, even if it be of great religious or spiritual value. God promises the peace will fall upon those that walk humbly in light of this admonition although they may endure persecution for Him (v. 17, the "brand marks of Jesus"). Paul closes the reading and the entire Book of Galatians with a closing blessing in which he calls for God's blessing while affirming the brotherhood of those whom he had addressed so sternly throughout his message.

Paul's words from the reading reminds us of the Prophet Micah's message from God to the people of his era. Near the end of his Book he wrapped up the entirety of the calling God was placing upon the

people in one short sentence: "He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8). As we saw in the first reading God calls us to focus upon His works and promises and through this we find comfort through our difficult times. In today's second reading Paul added to this by reminding his readers the value of walking in humility and boasting only in what God has done for them rather in what they have done for Him.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The context of the Gospel reading from Luke is Jesus' sending of the seventy, an early missionary group who went out across the land in pairs to present the message that "the kingdom of God [had] come near to [them" (v. 9). This group was given spiritual power for healing along with this message which also included an admonition for those who turned against God's provisions of the kingdom.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 10:1-12 NAS95 1 Now after this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them in pairs ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come. 2 And He was saying to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. 3 Go; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. 4 Carry no money belt, no bag, no shoes; and greet no one on the way. 5 Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house.' 6 If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you. 7 Stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not keep moving from house to house. 8 Whatever city you enter and they receive you, eat what is set before you; 9 and heal those in it who are sick, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' 10 But whatever city you enter and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, 11 'Even the dust of your city which clings to our feet we wipe off in protest against you; yet be sure of this, that the kingdom of God has come near.' 12 I say to you, it will be more tolerable in that day for Sodom than for that city."

Luke 10:17-20 NAS95 17 The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." 18 And He said to them, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning. 19 Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you. 20 Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven."

God sent the seventy in pairs with very specific instructions, the first of which was to discern the receptiveness of the house in which they were preparing to enter. Jesus had earlier warned His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount about "not casting their pearls before swine" (Matthew 7:6), meaning not to attempt to preach godly things to those persisting in ungodliness and unwilling to listen. Jesus expanded upon this admonition by promising to His missionary force that those who don't listen will be subject to severe and eternal discipline. Jesus told them that the destruction of those who reject the message would be worse than the destruction experienced by the unrepentant

sinners in Sodom which the Lord destroyed by divine fire from heaven (v. 12). This missionary force returned after the conclusion of their assignment with the astounding news of divine power over Satanic forces (v. 17). Jesus then told them about how He had already seen Satan fall from his exalted position and how He had given them this divine authority which they experienced during their journey (v. 19). In closing, Jesus pointed them to His higher purpose. They were not to boast about the power that He had given them for their missionary responsibilities but rather to rejoice in the fact that, unlike Satan and the nonbelievers, their names were written in Book of Life in heaven (v. 20).

By application, the power to which Jesus extended to His first ministry force of seventy people extends to us in a certain extent today. As missionaries of Jesus we are called to use discernment in gaging the receptiveness of our audience. We are also to recognize that like the seventy we too possess divine power that comes from God according to the spiritual gift which is given to us (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; and 1 Corinthians 12:28). We are also reminded to keep in mind the urgency of this message because nonbelievers will be judged with a worse fate than those at Sodom. And like we saw in the second reading we need to walk humbly before the Lord and exalt in His works rather than our own. We are to "rejoice that [our] names are recorded in heaven" (v. 20) while using the example of the seventy as guidance in how we are to approach that that may be highly resistant to the Gospel.

A few things to keep in mind regarding the reading are:

- There is a great need for missionaries in our world today.
- God places a great intrinsic value upon each person where He wishes that none would perish (2 Peter 3:9).
- The consequences of rejecting Jesus are real and eternal.
- Jesus demonstrated the value of community in accomplishing His missionary work by sending the missionaries in pairs. We don't need to accomplish our "scary" ministry alone but rather we can follow Jesus' example and work in teams to achieve the greater glory of God.
- There is a fantastic spiritual battle that is happening behind the scenes in the heavenly realm. As believers we enter the "second heaven" which is invisible domain but which is very real in terms of the spiritual battles being waged.
- Through all of these things we need to remember Jesus' Great Commission, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the Gospel reading we learned about Jesus' first missionary force of seventy people sent out as "lambs in the midst of wolves (v. 3). In what ways do you feel as a lamb among wolves in the work that God has called for you to do today?

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2. In what ways to God's promises empower you to accomplish His work, including the Great Commission? How does gaining a better understanding of God's promises help you? What are some ways in which you could learn more about God's promises and create future reminders about what you have learned?

Readings for the Week

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

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/070316.cfm

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 102

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 6-26-2016

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **6-26-2016**. A key verse this week that links all three readings together is in the second reading from Galatians, "For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please" (Galatians 5:17). We desire to accomplish great things for God, but our flesh works against us. When we cooperate with our carnal, fleshly desires we may not achieve the full potential that God has for us. We will see how these forces rage among the people in all three of today's readings.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The context of the first reading from First Kings is just before the appointment of Nimshi as the King of the Northern tribes of Israel and the replacement of Elijah the prophet by Elisha. Elijah, the great prophet of God, had just killed the prophets of Baal after the great contest at Mount Carmel. When King Ahab's evil wife Jezebel found out about the slaying of the prophets she set out to kill Elijah (1 Kings 19:2). This caused Elijah to flee and he came to believe that he was the only believer left in the entire kingdom. Elijah said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away" (1 Kings 19:10). God replied as we see in today's reading and corrected his false assumption.

First Reading:

1 Kings 19:16-21 NAS95 16 and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. 17 "It shall come about, the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall put to death. 18 "Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the

knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him." 19 So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, while he was plowing with twelve pairs of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth. And Elijah passed over to him and threw his mantle on him. 20 He left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, "Please let me kiss my father and my mother, then I will follow you." And he said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?" 21 So he returned from following him, and took the pair of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the implements of the oxen, and gave it to the people and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah and ministered to him.

God gave Elijah specific guidance to appoint Jehu as the king of Israel and to anoint Elisha as his own successor (v. 16). God told Elijah that he wasn't the only believer left and that He had 7,000 true believers left in the kingdom (v. 18). Next, Elijah went and found Elisha out working and placed his prophet mantle (clothing) on him. When Elisha wavered about immediately accepting this responsibility Elijah told him in effect that to forsake this appointment would be an affront to God (v. 20). So Elisha accepted his new position and made a traditional sacrifice to confirm the "covenant" made between him and God to fulfill the prophecy given to Elijah.

The reading points out just how bad conditions had become in Israel such that Elijah believed that he was the only believer left alive. However, it is interesting that while 7,000 believers remained, even that was a very low number in view of the large size of the nation. Evidently most of the people had succumbed to the evil pagan worship practices memorialized in the Bible by King Jeroboam the son of Nabat who is recorded as a standard of evil. We see that standard mentioned earlier in First Kings. "For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat and in his sins which he made Israel sin, provoking the LORD God of Israel with their idols" (1 Kings 16:26).

The big idea in the reading is regarding the supreme sovereignty of God. Even when the great prophet in the entire world felt that all hope was lost, God continued making plans for the future of the kingdom and reminding him of His omniscient and long-term view. In our age we can look to this passage to be reminded that God has our best interests in mind, is establishing future plans for us as well as all believers, and even when we feel totally spiritually alone our sovereign Father is superintending the circumstances for His glory and our best interests.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The context of the reading from Galatians is Saint Paul's teaching on the freedom believers possess in Christ as contrasted to the bondage that the false teachers were imposing upon the people by instructing them that they must obey the Mosaic Law. Paul explains further in the reading the battle between a believer's spirit and their flesh.

Second Reading:

Galatians 5:1 NAS95 1 It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

Galatians 5:13-18 NAS95 13 For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." 15 But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. 16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

Paul reminded the believers in Galatia of their overarching purpose by quoting from the Mosaic Law in Leviticus 19:18: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." He cautioned them not to use their freedom in Christ to take advantage of their "neighbors." The Jews by that time had come to understand their neighbor in a very narrow sense such that it only included their fellow countrymen. Jesus had earlier corrected this false teaching in Luke Chapter 10. There Jesus explained the meaning of "neighbor" by telling them the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus explained to His disciples that, of all the people who passed by the man who had fallen at the hands of robbers, the only one who acted as a true neighbor as intended by God in Leviticus 19:18 was "The one who showed mercy toward him" (Luke 10:37). This is extremely important in this context because the Epistle to the Galatians was directed at the false teachers who taught that in order for people to be saved they must obey the constraints of the Mosaic Law making them, in effect, proselyte Jews. Paul and Jesus taught something quite different, that the neighborhood of God included anyone who was in need. Our true family includes those who have come to the Father through faith in the Son (John 3:16). Therefore, instead of trying to follow all of the contours of the Mosaic law, one would fulfill the spirit of the law by being a loving person. The only way a person can be truly loving (self-sacrificing and honoring of others above self) is if their heart is surrendered to God and His Spirit is now in control of the individual. The difference between someone who tries really hard to be a good person and one who is a Christian, is the power of the Holy Spirit alive in one's heart. The Holy Spirit is God's evidence that His life is inside a believer. While a believer is a work in progress and will not be perfect in this life, a fundamental change has taken place when we surrender ourselves to God through Christ. A new relationship has begun and we are under the influence of God's Spirit, which transforms us. We begin to walk in step with the values of God's Spirit. And since God is love, it makes sense that He teaches us how to be more loving. This is not a matter of self-effort, but a growth in the life of God who makes His home in our hearts. Paul was clear that "*if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law*" (v. 18).

One wonders if at times Paul felt marginalized like Elijah as we discussed in the first reading where the prophet had fled from evil Jezebel's murderous plot. Paul, surrounded by false teachers that plotted to drag believers into the strictures of Jewish legalism, expressed God's prophetic word regarding the freedom that was to be found only through faith in Jesus Christ.

In our lives we must ask ourselves in what ways are we attempting to work out our own salvation through obedience to some form of religious law. It's hard not to notice those in our neighborhoods who never seem to leave their houses on Sunday morning to go to church. Do we hold to a false

belief system that we are a pretty good person because we have faithfully attended Mass on Sundays and holy days that we are somehow going to be set apart from others who have not so zealously obeyed the commandments of the church? When we place our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins we have moved from darkness into light (1 Peter 2:9). The difference between a person that has truly trusted in Jesus versus the one that is relying upon their own works for salvation is subtle but very real as Jesus explained to Nicodemus. In John Chapter 3 Nicodemus, a legalistic Jew from the group known as the Pharisees, was a Rabbi who came to Jesus at night for fear of the Jews (John 3:2). Jesus explained to Nicodemus how he could only enter the kingdom of heaven through faith in Him. In one of the most important verses in the entire Bible Jesus told him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Jesus went on to explain to him that in addition to the obvious necessity of physical birth, something much less obvious was necessary. In order to become a citizen of heaven one must be born spiritually through faith in God's Son. He told Nicodemus, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him." (John 3:16-17).

If you are struggling with understanding the true motives of your heart, the Scripture says that you should call out to God in prayer. Paul said, "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation" (Romans 10:9-10). As we move to the final reading this week, take a moment to affirm your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The context of the reading is Luke's recording of the beginning of the end of Jesus' earthly life just before he gave His life for us on the cross at Calvary. Earlier the disciples had been arguing over who among them was the greatest. Jesus then presented them with a child and told them, "Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me; for the one who is least among all of you, this is the one who is great" (Luke 9:48). He then corrected His disciples who had rebuked someone for casting out demons in the name of Jesus, saying "Do not hinder him; for he who is not against you is for you" (v. 50). This hints at some of the same tension that Paul was indicating in the second reading between the strict followers of the Law and those that followed it less closely or held to other religious traditions. Nowhere was this tension more evident than in the region of Samaria where the people were held in contempt by the Jewish legalists. The Samaritans were considered a half breed people since they had been overtaken by the Assyrian Empire during the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC. Interestingly, Jesus turned to this despised group for help in making the preparations for the celebration of His last Passover feast. This was the Passover after which the true Lamb of God would be sacrificed for the sins of the world.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 9:51-62 NAS95 51 When the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined to go to Jerusalem; 52 and He sent messengers on ahead of Him, and they went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make arrangements for Him. 53 But they did not receive Him, because He was traveling toward Jerusalem. 54 When His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" 55 But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; 56 for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." And they went on to another village. 57 As they were going along the road, someone said to Him, "I will follow You wherever You go." 58 And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." 59 And He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father." 60 But He said to him, "Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God." 61 Another also said, "I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home." 62 But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

We see in the reading that the Samaritans didn't welcome Jesus' disciple's efforts in making the arrangements for the Passover feast even though Jesus had sent messengers ahead of time to them (vv. 52-53). Instead, they were forced to travel onto another village, one which was very likely outside the constraints of Samaritan beliefs. When James and John, named by Jesus the "Sons of Thunder" (Mark 3:17), were confronted with the rejection of their efforts they showed their passion and love for Jesus by asking Him whether they should command fire to come down from the sky and destroy the Samaritans (v. 54). The disciples were familiar with how Elijah had commanded fire to come down from the sky to consume the sacrifice during the contest with the prophets of Baal, but now they were asking not to burn already dead cattle but rather living people! Jesus quickly corrected their false thinking and reminded them that He didn't come to "*destroy men's lives, but to save them*" (v. 56). This is reminiscent of what we read in our discussion of the second reading from John 3:17 where Jesus said, "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him." As the reading progressed, Jesus taught His disciples about true discipleship and answering the calling of God. A true disciple would have to be willing to not only forsake their comfortable home (v. 58) but also to forsake their family in order to follow Him (v. 59). Here we see a clear parallel with Elisha's initial response to God's call through Elijah that we read about in the first reading.

As believers in the Lord Jesus we are called to forsake the things which hold us back to true obedience of the Lord Jesus. As we saw in the first reading, when God places a calling upon our lives we are to respond in obedience. Our answer must be to forsake the things which may hold us back, whether they be family, as we saw in the Gospel reading, or religious practices as we saw in the second. Like Elisha, even if in our humanness we hesitate for a moment while we count the cost of our obedience, we are called to respond in faith by following the directives given to us by God. As a first step of belief we are called to forsake the false understanding that we are saved from our good works and rather seeing that our deeds flow from our relationship with God. As we enter into God's invisible spiritual kingdom, the "kingdom of heaven" that Jesus explained to Nicodemus in John 3:3, we participate through God's power, as Paul said in the reading from Galatians, being led by the

Spirit. At times although we too may desire to command fire down from heaven to consume our adversaries, Jesus calls us to a higher standard by recognizing these people as our "neighbors." This battle will continue for the duration of our life here on earth, "For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please" (Galatians 5:17).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Most Christians are not known for their love. Instead, the world characterizes us as judgmental, harsh, and angry. Who are the "neighbors" that you regularly interact with? What would it look like for you to walk in the Spirit and change this characterization with your "neighbor?"

2. Jesus illustrated true discipleship as a relationship with Him that prioritized Him above all other priorities. In what ways have you made intentional decisions to orient your life around His Kingdom principles? What has been the cost of discipleship for you? Are there any new ways that He is asking you to follow Him?

Readings for the Week

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

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/062616.cfm

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 99

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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