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, 6-19-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass Study Notes for **6-19-2016**. One of the main take away points from this week's readings is the role of Jesus as Messiah Who saves peoples from their sins. This is in contrast to the teachers of that age who taught that salvation came through obedience of the works of the Jewish Law. We will also discuss how taking your cross is an invitation to freedom and not a burden.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Prophet Zechariah. Zechariah, like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, was a priest. He wrote to the exiles in Babylon to comfort them by giving them God's Word that He would fulfil all of the promises He made to His covenant people the Jews.

First Reading:

Note: The reading omitted 12 and 13 which are include below.

Zechariah 12:10 – 13:1 NAS95 10 "I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn. 11 In that day there will be great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the plain of Megiddo. 12 The land will mourn,

every family by itself; the family of the house of David by itself and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Nathan by itself and their wives by themselves; 13 the family of the house of Levi by itself and their wives by themselves; the family of the Shimeites by itself and their wives by themselves; 14 all the families that remain, every family by itself and their wives by themselves. 1 In that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity."

Today's reading looks far forward to a future day in which God will awaken a remnant of the Jews who return to Him in faith. Saint Paul records this clearly in Romans 11 where he explains how God allowed the hardening of the Jews so that the Gentiles could find salvation. "For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery–so that you will not be wise in your own estimation–that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" (Romans 11:25). Once the very last Gentile that God has ordained has come to faith in Jesus the next chapter in God's master plan will begin, which is the awakening of the Jewish remnant alive at that time. "And so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB" (Romans 11:26).

In this passage, Zechariah is describing events related to the Day of the Lord, also known as Jesus' second coming. In the affairs at the end of time, Zechariah states that God will pour out the Spirit of grace and of supplication on the Jewish people. What does this mean? God's grace means that the Jewish people are given favor that they did not earn and that they do not deserve. A Spirit of supplication means that people will be given a burden to ask for things in prayer that are on God's heart, and He will answer their cries. Zechariah also describes great mourning as they look on the One that they have pierced. The mourning is likened to Hadadrimmon, where Josiah was slain by the Egyptians. The immense sorrow that was felt throughout all of Israel was a focal point in Jewish history because Josiah was one of the very few godly kings and did much to point Judah back to their covenant relationship with God. Therefore, when Zechariah says that their mourning over the killing of the Messiah will be like this great tragedy, he is clarifying that the Jews will understand and regret their role in crucifying Jesus in his first coming. This grieving will culminate in personal awareness of sin and impurity, so that God's people will see sin the same way He sees it.

Grieving over sin is an important part of growing to be like Christ. As a Christian, we are instructed by this passage to also be aware of the effects of sin in our own lives. Just as the Jews will be shocked and grieved over their blindness, we can ask God to shine His light into our lives and give us spiritual sight. This spiritual sight may cause grief as we start to see things from God's perspective, but it will ultimately cause cleansing and healing in our relationship with Him and bring wisdom for daily living.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Paul explains in the second reading, that those who believe in Jesus are the offspring of Abraham and, therefore, heir to the promise given to him in Genesis. The line of thought before the reading

delineates that the promise of God was made before the giving of the Mosaic law, and is predicated on faith not works, ethnicity, social standing, gender, etc. This section is a culmination of Paul's main point in the entire book of Galatians, where he explains that justification is by faith, not by works.

Second Reading:

Galatians 3:26-29 NAS95 26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

This passage sums up an important message that the believers in Galatia were struggling to understand. While they had received Christ into their lives by faith, there were some who were convincing them that they still needed to follow the Mosaic law. Paul definitively defends the truth that salvation comes by faith, not by works. He describes the law as a guardian or schoolmaster that was in place to point people to recognize their need for a Savior. So now the question is not "Are you Jewish?" meaning, "are you a son of Abraham?"; but rather, the question is "Are you in Christ?" No matter our national origin, socio-economic status, or gender, we can all be sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. The implication, then, is that we are all on the same team, working together to reflect the reality of Christ's life in our lives. We are heirs to God's promise to Abraham by virtue of being born again in Christ Jesus (John 3:3). Part of what it means to grow in Christ is to grow in our understanding of all the rights and privileges of being a son or daughter of God.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The context of the Gospel reading from Luke is just after his recording of the miracle of the feeding for the five thousand (Luke 9:10-17). The parallel Gospel accounts reveal that after this great miracle, Jesus retreated in the same boat that they had taken to the "desolate place" from the village of Bethsaida (Mark 6:30, 32, 45). The Gospel writers Matthew, Mark and John record an important event that occurred during the water journey. After Jesus had dismissed the crowds, He directed the disciples to take the boat to the other side of the lake, back to Bethsaida while He went up on the mountain to pray (Matthew 14:22). As the disciples attempted to work their way upwind (Matthew 14:24), they saw Jesus walking on the water (v. 25). At this point Peter joined Jesus walking on the sea, at least for a time until Jesus rescued him and helped him back into the boat (v. 29). Next the group went "up on the mountain to pray" (Mark 6:46) after passing by the "region of Magadan" (Matthew 15:39) where Jesus got into a heated discussion with the Pharisees who came to test Him (Matthew 16:1012). It is after this whirlwind of events that we pick up with today's reading.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 9:18-24 NAS95 18 And it happened that while He was praying alone, the disciples were with Him, and He questioned them, saying, "Who do the people say that I am?" 19 They answered and

said, "John the Baptist, and others say Elijah; but others, that one of the prophets of old has risen again." 20 And He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered and said, "The Christ of God." 21 But He warned them and instructed them not to tell this to anyone, 22 saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day." 23 And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. 24 For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it."

Jesus' inquiry of the disciples: "Who do the people say that I am" (v. 18) evidently took place in Caesarea Philippi as we see in Matthew 16:13 and Mark 8:27. It is interesting that Jesus chose this mysterious place because it was a location that was used for pagan worship. Jesus sought refuge in this unique place away from the crowds ("alone," v. 18) to seek fellowship in prayer with His heavenly Father, which was His practice. The disciples had just experienced the miracles of the feeding of the five thousand and Jesus' walking on the water. However, we know from the parallel account they continually failed to understand (Matthew 16:9). Therefore, Jesus inquired of them regarding His true identity (v. 18). The disciples said that the people saw Jesus as another John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the Old Testament prophets that rose from the dead (v. 19). Peter, being inspired by God Himself, declared Jesus to be the Messiah (another word for Christ), which means the anointed one of God who would come to save His people (Matthew 16:17).

Why would Jesus not want his disciples to share this with others? Was Jesus trying to hide His identity or obscure His mission in the world? No. We understand this warning in light of the misconceptions that the Jews had for the Messiah. Instead of a civil king that would vanquish the Roman rule, Jesus was a spiritual king seeking to vanquish the enemy of our souls, one heart at a time. He predicted how he would do this, which required his suffering, rejection by the Jewish leaders, crucifixion and resurrection. The call to discipleship to this type of king would require a level of commitment that some would have trouble accepting. Jesus shared an important value of life in His kingdom. Instead of being ruled by self and sin, Jesus saves us to bring us freedom to follow a new way of life that is ruled by His value system. In denying self, we are not building up a treasury of merit; instead, we are being freed up for the abundant life that Jesus came to bring us (John 10:10). In looking at it another way, God does us a favor by freeing us from the oppressive nature of self so that we can live the life He has designed for us to live in Christ. We lose what we thought was our life, but gain what God defines as true life. This requires great faith. No wonder those who give their life over to Christ and walk by faith are called the children of Abraham.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Just as the Jewish people in Jesus' day had misunderstandings about what they needed to be saved from, what are some misunderstandings that present day people think they need to be saved from? Which misguided notions of Jesus' Messiahship resonate most deeply with you? How does your growing knowledge of the Word of God and relationship with the true Messiah help you to counteract these misguided notions?

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2. How does understanding that denying myself and carrying my cross is not about working or merit, but about freedom? How does Jesus' promise to bring abundant life factor into your view of denying the false notions of what this life is about and give you encouragement to take up your cross in a way that brings life that is truly life?

3. When you consider the unity of the family of God through faith in Christ explained in the Galatians' reading, what ways can you contribute to the value that people have for one another and, especially for those who are different than they are.

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/061916.cfm

Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time Lectionary: 90

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, 6-12-2016

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **6-12-2016**. This week we will read about the confrontation and consequences that King David experienced after his sin of adultery with Bathsheba, killing Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, and then taking Bathsheba as his own wife. The second reading is from the letter to the Galatians, which reminds us that faith in Christ is what saves us, not works. The Gospel reading illustrates this truth by recounting the story of the unrighteous woman who showed great love for Jesus, for she had been forgiven much. All three readings weave together the redemptive story line of the gravity of sin, the inability of humans to fix themselves, and the beauty of the Gospel, which is embodied in Christ's righteousness that has been given for our salvation.

Introduction to the First Reading:

King David, the second king of Israel, is famous for a few things. One of his most shining moments was his miraculous defeat of the giant, Goliath (1 Samuel 17). One of his darkest moments was his adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah (2 Samuel 11). To cover up her pregnancy, David brought Uriah home from battle, so that her pregnancy would look legitimate. However, because Uriah was an honorable man, he would not sleep with his wife while his men were still on the battlefield making sacrifices for the nation of Israel. Instead of confessing his sin, David dug himself in deeper, and instructed the army leader to put Uriah in the fiercest part of the battle and to pull back on him, so that Uriah would be killed in battle. The once shepherd boy, turned King, had hit one of the lowest points of his life. Instead of coming clean, turning to God, and confessing, King David continued to try to deal with his sin on his own terms. This all came to a climax when the prophet Nathan came to tell the king a story as a way to help David come to terms with his sin (2 Samuel 12:1-6). The story was about a man who was extremely wealthy, who had livestock in abundance. One day a traveler came to him, and instead of killing one of his many animals for the meal, the

wealthy man took the one and only ewe lamb of his neighbor to make this man's meal. David's response to this story was one of complete outrage and disgust for the insensitivity and injustice of the wealthy man. In fact, David said "this man" should be put to death. Little did he know that "this man" was him!

First Reading:

Note: This includes verses 11-12 that were omitted from the reading.

2 Samuel 12:7-13 NAS95 7 Nathan then said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul. 8 'I also gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your care, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added to you many more things like these! 9 'Why have you despised the word of the LORD by doing evil in His sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the sons of Ammon. 10 'Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' 11 "Thus says the LORD, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you from your own household; I will even take your wives before your eyes and give them to your companion, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. 12 'Indeed you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and under the sun.'" 13 Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die.

It can be difficult for us to read passages like this, which recount God's just consequences for sin. But it is necessary to be exposed to the gravity and weight of sin or else we will try to brush it off, marginalizing its destructive effects. Our key character, David, tried to do this, but it didn't work. We have Psalm 32 that recounts David's internal suffering over his sin which had a crushing effect on him. He states, "When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away . . . for Your hand was heavy upon me" (Psalm 32:3-4).

In addition to the internal weight of sin, Nathan told of the external consequences that would be experienced as a result of his sin. Nathan's predictions came to fruition in a variety of ways. David not only had conflict with Israel's enemies, but conflict plagued his own household. For example, Amnon, one of his sons, raped David's daughter, Tamar (2 Samuel 13). Then, Absalom, David's son killed Amnon. This severe conflict culminated in an overthrow of David's rulership, where Absalom pitched a tent in the sight of all Israel and had sexual relations with David's concubines, thus fulfilling Nathan's prediction that David's companion would lie with his wives in broad daylight (2 Samuel 16:21-22). The gravity of sin and its destructive consequences are seen in an unfolding and snowballing way in David's life. There was no way for David to fix the problem of sin in his own life. His only hope was to cry out to the Lord for help.

After Nathan's confrontation with David, we have insight from Psalm 51 into what it looks like to be a man after God's own heart, which is the New Testament's description of King David (Acts 13:22).

Here are some key thoughts from Psalm 51, David's response to the Lord after Nathan confronted him that can guide our understanding of sin, confession, and forgiveness:

- He confessed his sin and grieved over the way he had betrayed God.
- He recognized that sacrifices and burnt offerings would never "make up" for his sin and that God was not looking for him to do heroic deeds to off-set the guilt.
- The sacrifice that David brought was a broken spirit. He knew that a broken and contrite heart would not be despised by the Lord.
- He turned to the Lord for forgiveness and trusted in God to take away his guilt. He rested in God's character, not his own righteousness.
- He asked God to "create in me a clean heart" so that his righteousness would come from the innermost being and would reflect the character of God. He basically told the Lord to do whatever it takes to make him clean from the inside out.

David's life is an example to us about the gravity and destructive force of sin. We learn from him that sin is a part of even the most promising and stellar people. Even if we have not committed adultery and tried to cover it up by having someone killed, Jesus said that lust and anger in our heart are equivalent to adultery and murder (Matthew 6:21-48). We all have sinned and fall short of God's glorious standards for the life He has given to us (Romans 3:23). Like David, we cannot fix ourselves with our own moral deeds. It is only God's mercy that provides a way of escape from the destructive force of sin in our lives. The next reading elaborates on this point and provides the clear antidote to our sin problem.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

In the letter to the Galatians, Saint Paul clarified that a sinner's right standing before God is only achieved through faith in Christ. This passage is one of many in the New Testament that point those who are guilty of sin to the only One who can assuage guilt, namely Christ Jesus. We pick up the passage right in the middle of Paul's defense of his practice not to make the Gentile Christians fulfill the Mosaic Law. The fact that this was a controversial question that needed to be answered in writing allows us, as current day Christians, to have insight into the dimensions of our standing in Christ.

Second Reading:

Note: This includes verses 17-18 that were omitted from the reading.

Galatians 2:16-21 NAS95 16 nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified. 17 "But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be! 18 "For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor. 19 "For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God. 20 "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ

lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. 21 "I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly."

This passage starts out by saying that man is not justified by following the Law, but through faith in Christ Jesus. In the early days of Christianity, there was some confusion over whether Gentiles who became Christians needed to follow the Jewish laws or whether faith in Christ alone was sufficient for salvation. Paul alludes to this controversy in the opening of this chapter and throughout these verses in the reading. At the Jerusalem council, which is recorded in Acts 15, the question about whether Gentiles have to live like Jews was definitively answered with a resounding "no."

This controversy allowed the key doctrine of justification by faith to be introduced into the record books of the Bible. The word "justified" is a term used in a court of law that is pronounced over one who is declared not guilty. As we saw in the previous reading and explanation of David's life, all have been pronounced guilty, for sin is part of the human condition. Paul shared that having right standing before God is not achieved by working really hard to please God ("works of the Law"—16), but by surrendering to Christ by faith ("I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me"—20).

In verse 16, Paul pointed out that even he, a Jew, was justified by faith in Christ, not in fulfilling the requirements of the Mosaic Law. In verses 17-18, Paul counteracted the implied argument that if Gentiles are not required to fulfill the Mosaic Law, then they will persist in sin and nullify the work of Christ and not achieve the righteous life that God desires for them. In response to this line of thought, Paul stated that the only thing that the Law does is to point out one's sin; it cannot save the law breaker. If he were to go back and build his faith on fulfilling the Mosaic Law, this would only result in being declared "guilty." He explained that he had to die to the Law so that he might live to God, which meant that the Law no longer hounded him to compliance. His compliance to God's standards was now generated from a new place in his heart—a place of surrender, devotion, and union with Christ. Because of Christ's love, he was now free to love God back and be in right relationship with Him. This freedom from the Mosaic Law did not negate God's grace, it actually celebrated it and relied upon it. For if one can fulfill the Mosaic Law from the heart, Christ's atoning death would be meaningless.

Paul realized the gravity and weight of his own sin and encouraged others to do likewise. He found forgiveness and grace by confessing His need for the Savior, Jesus Christ. Paul's new outlook can be ours as well, as we die to the old way of life that is structured according to handling sin on our own; and instead, live out of the new life that God has placed in every believer in Christ, the life of relational dependence on our wonderful Savior.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading paints a vivid picture of what it looks like when one encounters the forgiveness of Jesus in a very personal way. The story of the sinful woman who wets Jesus' feet with her tears,

wipes his feet with her hair, and pours perfume on his feet provides a display of tender-hearted devotion that should characterize all believers.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 7:36 – 8:3 NAS95 36 Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him, and He entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. 37 And there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, 38 and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume. 39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner." 40 And Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he replied, "Say it, Teacher." 41 "A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?" 43 Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have judged correctly." 44 Turning toward the woman, He said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45"You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. 46 You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. 47 For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little." 48 Then He said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven." 49 Those who were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?" 50 And He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." 1 Soon afterwards, He began going around from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God. The twelve were with Him, 2 and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, 3 and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who were contributing to their support out of their private means.

Right before this encounter in Luke, Jesus' authority had been questioned by the Pharisees. The common people were being convinced that Jesus was a prophet from God, but the religious leaders "rejected God's purposes for themselves" (Luke 7:20). Therefore, this story of the sinful woman and Simon, the Pharisee serve Luke's purpose in illustrating a sharp contrast between a receptive heart and a hard heart toward God.

Luke sets up the sharp contrast right at the opening of the story. A Pharisee, who had means, invited Jesus to a pleasant evening of eating and reclining at a table of equals. In this culture, the table would be set down low to the ground and diners would lay on their side, propped up on one elbow at the table and their feet behind them, away from the table. Hospitality was a high value and varying degrees of fanfare would have been shown in accordance with the status of the guest of honor. It would have been customary to have a bowl of water at the front entrance, where a servant would wash the guest's feet after walking dusty roads to arrive at the home. Obviously, this did not happen.

Simon's passive display of honor is contrasted with the sinful woman's active pursuit of Jesus.

The woman who had a bad reputation came in (uninvited and unwelcomed by Simon) and wept at Jesus' feet. Why would someone weep in Jesus' presence? Why would this woman actively seek Jesus out and come unwelcomed into a powerful and judgmental person's home, breaking all social norms and lavishing a display of devotion that was unprecedented? The clue is in Luke's descriptive term for her. She was a sinner. In Jewish society back then, there were different categories of people. The highest castes were reserved for people of good moral repute and coming from honorable families. The people in the lowest caste of society were those who were ethnically not Jewish and those who had dishonored themselves as Jews by sinning in a public way. This woman was a Jew, but had been relegated to the lowest cast of "sinner" by dismantling her reputation in the eyes of respectable people. The shame she would have endured is probably something that would be hard for us as Westerners to comprehend. Her sinful reputation made her part of an untouchable caste, as if her uncleanness would make anyone she touched unclean by association. Somehow, she had enough understanding and possibly even an earlier encounter with Jesus where she had felt loved and forgiven by him, despite her sinner status.

Put in this context, her boldness in approaching Jesus and touching him shows a level of devotion that is beyond being a fair-weathered "fan" of Jesus. This woman overcame a lot of social obstacles to display this level of gratitude to Jesus. Her heart was on trial before the respectable people, for Simon's revealed thoughts show the judgement and scorn that she endured. In some sense, then, Jesus' heart was on trial too, for Simon's expectation is that a prophet would not let an unclean and sinful woman touch him. Respectable people distance themselves from unrespectable people.

But Jesus did not follow this cultural norm. He broke the social rule and praised this woman for her display of love. He defended her tenderness with a clever story that allowed Simon to see that his sense of respectability caused him to be a self-righteous man, blocking him from having a realistic evaluation of his own sinfulness. The short story that Jesus told had 3 characters and a question. Two men owed the same man money. One man owed a little (about 50 days of work) and the other owed a lot (about 500 days of work). Neither of them could pay the moneylender back. Both of them had their debt cancelled. Which one of them loved the moneylender more? The point was made. Jesus had corrected Simon's misevaluation of his own sinfulness and this woman's sinfulness. Both debts of sin were beyond human fixing. Simon sheepishly responded to the question with the right answer, softening the blow of conviction by saying "I suppose." The moral of the story is summed up by Jesus' words: "*For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little*" (Luke 7:47).

Have you ever wept in a "holy" moment? Have you ever lovingly "wiped Jesus feet with your hair," so to speak? Have you ever poured out something valuable to show your love to Christ? Maybe you were gripped with the gravity of your own sin and rebellious heart, convicted that you were not able to fix yourself. Maybe you were overwhelmed with the truth of God's love for you, deeply impressed with His desire to risk His reputation to restore you to Himself. Maybe you were struck with the fact that you are just a small dot on the face of the earth and you are amazed that God cares about you. If

you have responded to these prompts of conviction by the Holy Spirit, then you are like the sinful woman, who received Jesus' love and actively pursued him to show him her love. If you tend to brush these promptings away, reminding yourself what a good person you are and priding yourself that you are not as bad of a sinner as most people, then you are hardening your heart and you are in a dangerous place, like Simon the Pharisee. This story can be a turning point for all of us as we allow God to show us places in our hearts that are tender or hard towards him.

The last part of this reading recounts the lives of others who had been touched by Jesus and were devoted to him in various ways. It's almost as if the camera pans out from the focused tender moment of the sinful woman's devotion and flashes a wide-angled lens to plethora of ways others responded to Jesus' lavish love for them. For example, The Twelve (disciples) and the women who traveled with Jesus were giving their lives on a daily basis to share the good news of the kingdom of God. Some of these followers had dramatic experiences of rescue from demons and others were considered more respectable by society. But each of them was denying their old way of life, counting the cost and following Jesus. This is the way of true discipleship.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Jesus said that when we serve people in need, it's as if we are doing it to him. You may have never physically poured perfume on Jesus' feet, but if you have served those around you by listening, caring, meeting needs, sacrificing your own reputation and time, etc., then you have shown your love for Jesus in these tangible ways. How does linking your service to others with your devotion to Christ affect your attitude and motives for service? How can this picture of the woman pouring perfume on Jesus' feet provide you with a renewed focus for the moments of obedience that you are being called to in your pursuit of Jesus?

2. All three readings reinforce key truths to which our lives need to respond if we are to be wise. Review the readings and write out what you learned about each of the following themes and how this impacts your life:

- The gravity of sin
- The inability of humans to fix their sin problem
- Various responses to conviction of sin
- The gift of God's grace, which offers forgiveness for sin
- Various responses to God's grace and forgiveness

Readings for the Week

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

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http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/061216.cfm

Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time Lectionary: 93

Source(s):

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 6-5-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **6-5-2016**. This week we begin with a reading from one of the Old Testament history books, 1 Kings. The passage relates the story of a miraculous healing by the prophet Elijah, who is sometimes thought of as a precursor of the Messiah Jesus. The second reading tells us how the Apostle Paul received the message He preached largely to Gentiles. It comes in the epistle that most clearly differentiates the Gospel message from Judaism. The Gospel

reading once more is from Luke. The miraculous event of this episode might very well remind us of the story of Elijah in the first reading.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Anyone familiar with today's story will recall the context. In the opening verses of chapter 17, we read about the prophet Elijah moving on to the region of Zarephath where a famine was raging because of the lack of rain, which Elijah had predicted in verse 1. Here, he encountered a widow who was gathering sticks for a fire to prepare what she thought would be a last meal for her and her son. The widow followed the prophet's instructions, and the flour and oil were multiplied to provide food for the three of them.

First Reading:

1 Kings 17:17-24 NAS95 17 Now it came about after these things that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became sick; and his sickness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. 18 So she said to Elijah, "What do I have to do with you, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my iniquity to remembrance and to put my son to death!" 19 He said to her, "Give me your son." Then he took him from her bosom and carried him up to the upper room where he was living, and laid him on his own bed. 20 He called to the LORD and said, "O LORD my God, have You also brought calamity to the widow with whom I am staying, by causing her son to die?" 21 Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and called to the LORD and said, "O LORD my God, I pray You, let this child's life return to him." 22 The LORD heard the voice of Elijah, and the life of the child returned to him and he revived. 23 Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper room into the house and gave him to his mother; and Elijah said, "See, your son is alive." 24 Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth."

In today's episode, the son becomes ill and dies. The widow, forgetting the miraculous provision of food that had sustained her and the boy, blames Elijah for her son's death. Without any argumentation, Elijah takes the boy upstairs, stretches out over him, and prays. He calls upon the LORD to let the child live, and God grants his entreaty. It's a wonderful, heart-warming story, of course. And we should praise God for His answering prayer and restoring life. After all, this is not fable; it is recorded in God's Word, and it is historical reality.

We can benefit from this historical incident by understanding at least two important truths. First, God is the giver of life. As Job said, God gives and God takes away. He remains God. This miracle demonstrates once again His omnipotence and His grace. The widow's response also bears an important reminder. She said that she recognized that God's presence and power were evident in His prophet. Although, we won't likely perform life-giving- miracles as Elijah did, still we should live and speak in such a way that those who observe our life and words will recognize that we belong to God.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

In the opening verses of his letter to the church in Galatia, the Apostle Paul argues strongly against false teachers who have perverted the true gospel of Christ. His language is pretty emphatic. He says that even if angels were to teach a gospel that was different from what he taught, they should be "eternally condemned" (v. 8). He, then, proceeds to tell them about his own experience in receiving the gospel from God Himself.

Second Reading:

Galatians 1:11-19 NAS95 11 For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. 12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. 13 For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; 14 and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. 15 But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased 16 to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus. 18 Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. 19 But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother.

Paul makes it clear that what he had taught the Galatians about Jesus had not come from the teaching of other men. God's gracious provision of salvation by faith through the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was revealed to Him by God Himself. It was on the road to Damascus (the story is told three times in the Book of Acts) that Jesus appeared to Paul (then called Saul) and dramatically changed his life.

The writer indicates that his readers knew that Saul, before his conversion, had persecuted the church of God, even trying to destroy it altogether. Because of his zeal for God and Judaism, he had risen high in his religious pursuits, being even more zealous for Jewish traditions than his contemporaries. God intervened in the persecutor's life, and Paul acknowledges that God had chosen him ("set me apart") even before his birth. The Apostle makes it very clear that it was all by grace; Paul had not earned the right to know and serve Jesus. In fact, his pre-conversion life and his sinful nature (like all the rest of us) could earn only God's wrath and condemnation. But in God's mercy—not giving us what we deserve, He offers us grace—giving us what we don't deserve as a gift when we put our trust in Jesus and acknowledge Him as Lord.

Paul continues to relate something of his early experience as a believer. He didn't consult with the church leaders, but he went away for meditation and learning. It was only after three years that he went to Jerusalem where the largest number of Christians was. He became acquainted with the Apostle Peter and stayed with him for two weeks. Paul is telling his readers all of this history so they

would understand that the gospel he preached did not come from the teaching of other men but by direct revelation from God.

Perhaps the most important lesson from this reading for us today is to acknowledge that the gospel message preached and written by the Apostle Paul is the continuation of the story of Jesus—His life, ministry, and provision for the salvation of those who will trust in Him.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

This significant event in the life of Jesus reminds us of the earlier reading of Elijah's restoring the widow's son to life. We must keep in mind that miracles in the Bible have great temporal benefit when they occur, but their primary purpose is to certify the prophet (or Messiah) as a bona fide messenger of God and to authenticate their message.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 7:11-17 NAS95 11 Soon afterwards He went to a city called Nain; and His disciples were going along with Him, accompanied by a large crowd. 12 Now as He approached the gate of the city, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a sizeable crowd from the city was with her. 13 When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her, and said to her, "Do not weep." 14 And He came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise!" 15 The dead man sat up and began to speak. And Jesus gave him back to his mother. 16 Fear gripped them all, and they began glorifying God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and, "God has visited His people!" 17 This report concerning Him went out all over Judea and in all the surrounding district.

The story is simple. A widow's only son has died and is being carried to his burial. Jesus demonstrates once again his compassion for the suffering, and he orders the young man to arise. Immediately, he is restored to life and begins to speak. There is a significant difference in this event from the prophet's raising of the widow's son in the Old Testament. In Elijah's case, he was alone with the boy. There were no witnesses, but, of course, the miracle happened nonetheless. In Luke's story, there were the people in the funeral procession ("a sizeable crowd") and Jesus and His disciples who were accompanied by a large crowd.

We can be sure that the mother was overjoyed at the raising of her son, but this miraculous resurrection brought fear to the crowd. Whether that was basically terror because of the extraordinary event or fright at the power demonstrated by this unusual preacher, we do not know. In any case, whether they understood fully what they were saying or not, they spoke truthfully, acknowledging that Jesus was "a great prophet." Furthermore, they confessed that "God has visited His people." The report of this event spread widely throughout the countryside. One might wonder, then, why Jesus was not more widely accepted by those who saw the miracles and heard the preaching.

Before we cast judgment upon those who did not respond in faith to what they witnessed, accepting

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Jesus as their promised Messiah, we must examine our own hearts. We have this story and many more recorded in the Gospels. We have the teachings of the New Testament witnesses, which, as the Apostle John wrote, "… were written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In what ways do the miracles recorded in the Bible cause you to bow in adoration and worship before the God of the miracles?

2. Have you rejected the false teachings of men and trusted fully and only in the gospel message that Jesus paid the price for your sin and offers you the gift of eternal life by faith?

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/060516.cfm

Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time Lectionary: 90

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, 5-29-2016

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **5-29-2016**. This week we spend a great deal of time discussing the mysterious person of Melchizedek mentioned in a reading from Genesis. We dedicate so much time to this man because of the way his ministry prefigures the eternal intercession and finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ on our behalf. In the second reading we learn from Saint Paul's teaching about the celebration of communion and conclude this week's study with the miracle of our Lord's feeding of the five thousand along the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The context of the first reading is when Abraham was returning from battle with the forces that kidnapped his nephew Lot (Genesis 14:12). Earlier, Lot had separated himself from Abraham after he chose the well-watered, fertile Jordan River Valley towards the east. Not long afterwards, Lot found himself surrounded by war in the nations surrounding the Dead Sea (Genesis 14:3). Abraham mustered his troops and successfully rescued his nephew and all of his possessions (Genesis 14:14-16). Today's reading picks up during Abraham's return from this perilous rescue mission as he passed by the city of Salem, what we know by the modern name of Jerusalem (formerly Jebus, the land of the Jebusites).

First Reading:

Genesis 14:18-20 NAS95 18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. 19 He blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; 20 And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." He gave him a tenth of all.

In the reading, we are introduced to the mysterious figure of Melchizedek, "priest of God Most

High" (v. 18b). Melchizedek is perhaps one of the most important people in the entire Bible, second only to Jesus. In fact, some believe that Melchizedek was the preincarnate Christ Himself, a "Christophany" or appearance of Christ before His physical birth to Mary as recorded in the Gospels. Why is Melchizedek such an important person, and what application does his ministry have for our lives today? Before we answer this question, we will provide some background about him.

Who is this man Melchizedek, king of Salem? In today's reading we find Melchizedek bringing out bread and wine to greet Abraham who was returning from battle with the forces that kidnapped his nephew Lot. The New Testament provides more information about this mysterious person. In Hebrews chapter 7, in verse 1 the text reads, "Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him." Looking at the book of Hebrews as whole you can see that it's grounded in an explanation of Christ through the perspective of the Old Testament Levitical priesthood, thus the title given to the book "Hebrews" meaning Jews. In Genesis 14:3 Abram, later called Abraham, the father of the Jews, is called a Hebrew. We see back in Hebrews 7:1 that Melchizedek is three things: 1. the King of Salem, the area we now identify as Jerusalem, 2. A priest of the "Most High God," meaning a priest of the *only* true God, and 3. one to whom Abraham the father of the Jews gave tribute. The lesser person gives tribute to the greater. To summarize, Melchizedek was a king, and a priest worthy of tribute.

Going on in Hebrews 7 we find in verse 17, "You [Jesus Christ] are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek," quoted from the Old Testament Book of Psalms 110:4. According to the Book of Leviticus under what we call the Jewish Law, all of the Old Testament Priests had to come from the tribe of Levi, but Melchizedek was a priest before the separate tribes or Law even existed! Yet Abraham gave a tenth portion (or tithe) to Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:4) as required under the later Law for all priests (verse 5). What is being explained here is that Melchizedek was one of a class of priests that foreshadowed the coming final, eternal (and final) High Priest, Jesus. Melchizedek, whose name means King of righteousness, could not have come from the line of Aaron (Levi) or Judah, because these did not exist during his lifetime. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrificial system, the final sacrifice was Jesus' own death on the cross which did away with the Levitical priesthood (Hebrews 10:11-14). Christ was from the "order of Melchizedek (Ps 110:4, Hebrews 7:17), not the line of Aaron. This new order is made even more clear by reading beyond the quoted section of Psalm 110 to verse 7, "Therefore He will lift up his [Jesus Christ's] head." This eternal priest Jesus of the non-priestly line of Judah is and will be exalted by God. As a side note, Melchizedek was the first biblical personality to picture the reality of a priest/king.

Now, with this wisdom in mind let's answer the question we posited in the opening, why is Melchizedek such an important person, and what application does his ministry has for our lives today? As Christians, we cannot underestimate the importance of what Melchizedek's priesthood teaches us. First, the "Melchizedekian" is eternal, in contrast to the Jewish sacrificial system that passed away after the destruction of the temple in AD 70. Truly, the Levitical priesthood died the moment that Jesus died and the veil was torn in two (Matthew 27:51) although the Jews nursed it

along for another four decades. Second, the priesthood of Jesus is eternal and is not tied to the life of the priest. Hebrews says, "The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing," (Hebrews 7:23). This is a critically important point because the Scripture says regarding Jesus, "Therefore He is able also to save **forever** those who draw near to God through Him, since **He always lives to make intercession for them** (Hebrews 7:25, emphasis added). Bold text alone does not do provide this quote with enough emphasis, as the implications for the church and the Christian are enormous:

- Since Jesus lives eternally, He is always there for us. His intercession with the Father God is eternal on our behalf. In contrast, human priests died and their ministries ended with their passing.
- Regardless of whatever type of human priesthood was instituted after Jesus' death, the Scripture is clear that the sacrificial system and associated priesthood was eliminated by God forever. The sacrifice of lambs (Exodus 12:5, Numbers 28:7), wine (Numbers 28:7), or bread (Leviticus 7:13) was forever eliminated by Jesus willingly offering Himself and one perfect sacrifice forever, because "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14). We can be thankful that Jesus' sacrifice cannot ever be repeated, and will never need to be.
- Jesus declared victor over sin, something whereas the Levitical priesthood left a memory of sin. We see this clearly in the Book of Hebrews.

  Hebrews 10:1-4 NAS95 1 "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. 2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? 3 But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. 4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."

- Jesus is the Victor of sin, and is nowhere in the Bible every portrayed as a victim but He chose to go the cross. Jesus is our Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, the One Who suffered on our behalf. Jesus said, "No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father" (John 10:18). Because Jesus was victorious over sin, we can be victorious over sin as well. The Bible says, "but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57).
- Jesus instituted a new priesthood consisting of all believers, and the old, broken, bloody, corrupt (Matthew 21:13) sacrificial system of the Old Testament has passed away forever. The Scripture says, "But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). As believers in the risen Lord Jesus Christ, we offer continual **spiritual** sacrifices to God. "Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased"

(Hebrews 13:15-16).

In closing, was the man Melchizedek in the reading the preincarnate Christ? Hebrews 7:3 says about him that he was "Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually." However, later in verse 15 the author make the point quite clearly that Melchizedek is a type of Christ, something that points to the later Messiah Jesus. "And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the **likeness** of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 7:15, emphasis added). So was Melchizedek Christ in the flesh? Maybe, though this isn't explicitly stated in the Scriptures. What we do know is that he points to Christ by representing an eternal priesthood that Jesus now carries for us.

As we move onto the second reading, hopefully each of us recognizes the principle of giving to God as demonstrated by Abram after his victory in rescuing Lot from the ungodly kings who surrounded him and took him captive. Our giving to the church, charities and those in need demonstrates that we understand the source of victory is God and He owns it all. We are to our time, talents, and treasures held loosely in our palms and let God take from them as He sees fit. As Christians we are not like the people of Pompeii who perished while grasping their possessions before trying to flee the volcano.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading from 1 Corinthians deals with Saint Paul's teaching on the celebration of communion.

Second Reading:

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 NAS95 23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25 In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

In the reading, Saint Paul spoke about the celebration of the communion meal. He said, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26, emphasis added). This teaching placed a clear time limit on the celebration of this important ordinance. As we look forward to the return of the Lord we, like the Jews on the evening of the Passover, walk in obedience to the Lord's commandment to celebrate communion *until* He returns.

The celebration of the Lord's Supper is a very important ordinance given to us by the Lord Jesus before He returned to heaven. Each time we celebrate communion we commemorate Jesus' death on the cross for us on which He gave his body and poured His blood for us. Jesus instituted the communion celebration during His Last Supper with the disciples on the eve of the Jewish holiday

known as Passover. This important feast commemorated the Jews deliverance from the final plague brought against the Pharaoh as recorded in Exodus 12. On the solemn eve many millennia ago, the Hebrew people were instructed to slaughter a lamb and mark their doorway with its blood. On that evening, the Death Angel passed through the land and killed the firstborn of every living thing, both human beings and animals, except those whom had followed God's commandment in faith by marking their doorways with the symbol of the Lamb of God. The Feast of Unleavened Bread, in which the Jews eat bread without the yeast rising agent, follows Passover. The absence of leaven is symbolic of the Jew's rapid flight from Egypt immediately after that first Passover evening in which the lamb was slaughtered in obedience to God command for the salvation of each household. The absence of leaven also came to be associated in later Jewish thought with the purification from sin, i.e. leaven is sin, such as Jesus noted when He said to be on watch for the "leaven of the Pharisees" (Matthew 16:6). The symbolism is clear; Jesus is *our* Passover Lamb, the Lamb of God that takes away our sin. John the Baptist said about Jesus, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Jesus is the "Lamb slain since before the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8).

What does this reading mean for our lives? First, God calls us not to forsake the assembly together in the communion service (Hebrews 10:25). As we celebrate communion from now until the day the Lord Jesus returns we look back to the one sacrifice that He made for our sins. Second, we can recognize that we are saved by grace through faith in God (Ephesians 2:8-9) the same as Moses and the other believers in the Old Testament. They looked forward to Jesus through the symbols of God's supernatural provision through manna and the healing by faith in God by humbly kneeling before the bronze serpent. The elements of communion are the way in which we remember Jesus' body broken for us and His blood shed to pay the debts for our sin. "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). This truly is a celebration, for though our sins are scarlet, we have been washed as white as snow through this sacrifice. We now live in response to this great and precious gift. May you not only celebrate communion, but each day, with a joyful and thankful heart.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading from Luke 9 records Jesus' feeding of the five thousand. This is the only miracle that appears in all four of the Gospels. The total number of people fed would have likely been over ten thousand as the crowd numbered five thousand men not counting women and children.

Jesus' feeding of the five thousand along the shores of the Sea of Galilee marked the beginning of a series of turning points in His ministry that we can identify by following the parallel accounts from the Gospel of John. One of these crucial points of decision for the crowds of followers is evident in the easy to remember verse 6:66 in John's Gospel, "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore." These turning points came about as the people began to determine in their hearts whether they are true followers of Jesus. Another of these is in the previous chapter of John where it says, "For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own

Father, making Himself equal with God" (John 5:18). This is where the rubber meets the road; the true followers of God are those that recognize Jesus as God in the flesh, the Messiah, rather than just a miracle doer who they thought would deliver them from their Roman oppressors.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 9:11-17 NAS95 11 But the crowds were aware of this and followed Him; and welcoming them, He began speaking to them about the kingdom of God and curing those who had need of healing. 12 Now the day was ending, and the twelve came and said to Him, "Send the crowd away, that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside and find lodging and get something to eat; for here we are in a desolate place." 13 But He said to them, "You give them something to eat!" And they said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless perhaps we go and buy food for all these people." 14 (For there were about five thousand men.) And He said to His disciples, "Have them sit down to eat in groups of about fifty each." 15 They did so, and had them all sit down. 16 Then He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed them, and broke them, and kept giving them to the disciples to set before the people. 17 And they all ate and were satisfied; and the broken pieces which they had left over were picked up, twelve baskets full.

As the story progressed, we know from the parallel accounts that Jesus asked Philip (who was from this region) to provide for the crowd. We know from that account that Philip responded to Jesus stating that to buy that much food would require the amount of 200 days' wages. This was a significant amount but worthless that far away from the city and in light of the huge size of the crowd. Nevertheless, the people had followed Jesus some distance away from the city and saw Him as One Who would provide for them, so it was natural for Jesus to accommodate their needs through His disciples. In this case, the people found out that God was the true multiplier of things. Again, we know from the parallel account in John that the people did indeed recognize Jesus as a Prophet, seemingly the One prophesied about in Deuteronomy 18:15. However, they misunderstood the role of the Messiah (John 6: 14 – 15). The people saw in Jesus a political ruler Who could free them from their poverty and Roman oppression. In the end, twelve baskets were left over corresponding exactly to the count of Jesus' disciples. Each disciple was left with one basket to highlight Jesus' ability to provide in the midst of impossible circumstances. God provided the food regardless of the people's faith and used this sign to point to the True Messiah Jesus.

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

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

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1. The Book of Hebrews opens as follows. "*In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe*" (Hebrews 1:1-2). With this passage in mind, move forward in the Book and study the context of Hebrews before and after chapter 7. What do you find regarding how Jesus really is the eternal priest/king that fulfilled the requirements of the Law and how He is our eternal High Priest that makes intercession for us (1 Timothy 2:5). What impact should / does Jesus' intercession make on your perspective and response the challenges, blessings, and your inadequacies?

2. In the Gospel lesson, Jesus called upon God's miraculous power to perform a miracle to provide for people's basic needs and at the same time to confirm Himself as the Messiah. It is evident from reading the synoptic Gospels that His disciples didn't understand the miracle until Jesus explained it to them some time later after feeding a second large crowd. What ways have you missed understanding the miracles of God in your own life? List two or three ways in which God has recently provided for you that you may have taken for granted. Tell God your thankfulness for His provision and ask Him to point out to you ways in which He continues to do so.

Going Deeper

Another figure that prefigured this ministry was Joseph in the Book of Genesis, then later on King David, also of the tribe of Judah. Do your own study on these people and see what amazing parallels you can draw between them and Jesus.

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/052916.cfm

The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

Lectionary: 169

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, 5-22-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **5-22-2016**. This week examine a reading from Proverbs and learn something about the Person of Jesus Christ. In the second reading we see how God uses trials in the life of a believer to make them grow in their faith and trust in Him. In the Gospel reading we learn about how Jesus promised His disciples how He would send the Holy Spirit to empower them to accomplish His work and to persevere through the tribulations that He predicted would come upon them.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Proverbs is a Book that provides wisdom from God on a variety of matters. Most of the Proverbs were written by King Solomon. While reading this section of the Bible we have to remember that these biblical principles were delivered to a people bound to the Mosaic Law. Additionally, we must keep in mind that they are general proscriptive principles and not prescriptive in every case. For example, Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it." While this is a good and godly principle all of us are acquainted with circumstances of parents who closely followed this principle but yet had wayward children. Proverbs 8 begins with the personification of wisdom, a common theme in this Book. "Does not wisdom call, And understanding lift up her voice?"

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First Reading:

Proverbs 8:22-31 NAS95 22 "The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way, Before His works of old. 23 From everlasting I was established, From the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth. 24 When there were no depths I was brought forth, When there were no springs abounding with water. 25 Before the mountains were settled, Before the hills I was brought forth; 26 While He had not yet made the earth and the fields, Nor the first dust of the world. 27 When He established the heavens, I was there, When He inscribed a circle on the face of the deep, 28 When He made firm the skies above, When the springs of the deep became fixed, 29 When He set for the sea its boundary So that the water would not transgress His command, When He marked out the foundations of the earth; 30 Then I was beside Him, as a master workman; And I was daily His delight, Rejoicing always before Him, 31 Rejoicing in the world, His earth, And having my delight in the sons of men."

The reading opens with the idea of the eternity of a certain person, "me" in verse 22. While we can say that God foreknew those whom He also "predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:29) and therefore knew us as believers in eternity past, the plain sense of these verses points to the eternality of the Person of Jesus Christ. The wording used by the author aligns with what John said about Jesus Christ in his Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). The proverb says about this Person that He was established from everlasting, "From the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth" (v. 23a). John said about Jesus, "We was in the beginning with God" (John 1:2). The proverb also speaks to the role of Jesus as the creator, while at the same time brings out the unity that exists between the Father God and the Son. Verse 30 says, "Then I was beside Him, as a master workman; And I was daily His delight, Rejoicing always before Him." Colossians 1:16 says, "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." Yet Isaiah said, "Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, and the one who formed you from the womb, "I, the Lord, am the maker of all things, stretching out the heavens by Myself, and spreading out the earth all alone." Finally, in Genesis 1:2 we see that "the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters" during creation. Therefore, the Trinity of God was involved in the creation process, we see a sense of this in today's reading.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The context of the second reading from Romans follows Saint Paul's teaching on justification by faith alone. Today's reading opens with the word "therefore," and as always we need to reflect upon what this word is "there for." In the reading that follows, the "therefore" provides the linkage to Paul's persuasive argument to the Christians in Rome regarding how God had justified them through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Paul looked back to how "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Romans 4:3) Paul taught how Jesus "was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification" (Romans 4:25). Paul's point was that

as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ we inherit the righteousness of God through our faith in Him, "just as if" we had never sinned at all. Understanding the legal concept of justification is essential because otherwise it makes our salvation the result of our "good" works. Salvation is something which God has stated expressly we cannot earn. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Through our faith in the finished work of the Lord Jesus on the cross we have a new judicial standing before the throne of God, "just as if" we had never sinned. For once we believe God has "removed our sins as far as the east is from west" (Psalms 103:12). Our faith is extremely important in the eyes of God, for God sees us through the righteousness of Christ (Romans 13;14, Galatians 3:27, Job 29:14, Isaiah 61:10, Revelation 3:4).

[Note: Our online readers will benefit by being able to quickly peruse these verses by the verse lookup feature by hovering over each of them. We encourage everyone to study all of the quoted verses used each week in Mass Notes.]

Second Reading:

Romans 5:1-5 NAS95 1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. 3 And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; 4 and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; 5 and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Paul taught how through our faith we are justified and "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 1). Paul taught in Colossians how as nonbelievers we were alienated from God (Colossians 1:21). Interestingly, in that same section of Colossians Paul continued with the concept of rejoicing in suffering (Colossians 1:24), which is exactly what Paul did in verse three of today's reading. Paul said, "we also exult in our tribulations" (v. 3a). He said that the reason we are called to do this is because it builds perseverance which leads to godly character, then onwards to hope (v. 4).

In applying today's reading we may ask how tribulation produces perseverance, character, and hope? Tribulation, a word which literally means "suffering," are any type of tests to your faith. This includes things like health problems, broken or strained relationships, persecution by nonbelievers, financial concerns, and the death of a loved one. If we turn to God during our trials, we can expect to experience growth in our faith as we see how God delivers us through them. God may deliver us from them, or sometimes He may. But regardless, the promise in today's reading is that if when we persist in faith God will use our trials to conform us more perfectly to the image of Jesus Christ, the Suffering Servant of God (Isaiah 53:1-12).

As I was reflecting upon the ways in which God has worked in my own life (see study question #2), I reviewed some of the thoughts that I had written in one of my prayer journals. In one journal entry dated 9/13/2011 me and my wife had been praying for a man we know to find a godly wife. I am

pleased to report that he got married in the summer of 2015 to a very godly young woman whom he met at church. In another entry dated 12/4/2011 I had been praying for God to provide a means for me to pay off a $25,000 surgical bill. In that case God provided through a combination of insurance and provisions through bonuses and my salary at work. As I continued to review my prayer journal I see how God has worked in so many different people's lives. Yet some of the people whom we have been praying continue to struggle. One in particular has had a half-down year long struggle in her life with chronic pain in her back. Perhaps God desires us to continue to pull together as believer to pray for her, and I am confident that He will continue to work in her life.

More recently however, God has been working in a miraculous way in my life. Men frequently don't share the struggles with their wives that they may have in their thought life. We should however share these both with God and when appropriate with a prayer partner of the same sex who would understand. Recently after watching a Christian movie that focused upon how God is able to produce miracles in the lives of people who pray boldly with faith I sensed a calling from God to present to Him a particular struggle that I was having with my thought life. After I was all pumped up spiritually after watching that Christian film, I brought this matter boldly to the Lord in prayer. After a week went by in which I did not struggle with this particular thought pattern, the thought occurred to me that perhaps God was up to something in my life. After a month had gone by I began to understand that God had indeed intervened in my life, and then began to focus upon ways to prevent myself from falling into this particular pattern again. What are some areas in which you are struggling? We encourage you to bring these to God and expect His answer as you persist in prayer to Him. If you feel your faith is weak, pray that God would first give you the faith that you need. Perhaps He will lead you to study a particular book, or meet with a particular person. But do expect God to show up when you come to Him boldly in prayer.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading from John chapter 16 is Jesus' counsel to His disciples about how they will be able to prosper once He leaves the world through His sending of the Holy Spirit. They are to expect great persecution and be "outcasts from the synagogue" (John 16:2). In fact the deception of nonbelievers in world will be so bad that "everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God" (v. 2b). Jesus promised how then when He went away He would send the "Helper," Who would "convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" (v. 8).

Gospel Reading:

John 16:12-15 NAS95 12 "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. 14 He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. 15 All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you."

Jesus taught His disciples how the Holy Spirit would "guide them into all the truth" (v. 13b). The

prophecy of the Holy Spirit led to the inspiration of our Holy Bible. Peter spoke about this by saying, "for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:21). The Word of God is but one of many ministries of the Holy Spirit that we as believers possess. The Spirit also works to draw unbelievers to faith in the Lord Jesus, convict both believers and nonbelievers of their sin, regenerate our spirits making us "born from above" (John 3:3), sanctify us in the Lord, help us in prayer, guide us in understand Scripture, provide us with comfort through His divine power dwelling within us, and provides us with gifts and fruits of the Spirit. Although Jesus' disciples certainly couldn't understand the implications of His prophecy concerning the coming of the Spirit, they spent their lives living out the fullness of all that the Spirit had to offer them even though they endured unparalleled tribulation in their lives.

We too are called to partake of God's divine gift through the ministry offered to us in the Holy Spirit that lives within us. It is this Spirit that empowers us to live lives pleasing to God. In order to take advantage of the Spirit's guidance "into all the truth" mentioned in today's reading, we must endeavor to become students of God's Word in the Bible. Our prayer is that these weekly studies will prompt you to go further in your study of God's word, and "test all things, holding fast to that which is true" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. What is something through which you either are suffering, or have suffered in recent years? In what ways have you seen how God produced in you the character qualities noted by Paul of increased faith, perseverance and character?

2. Perhaps one of the most useful ways in which you can learn from the tribulations allowed by God in your life is to journal about your experiences and then look back upon how God used these circumstances for His eternal purposes and your own good (Romans 8:28). If you have written down anything in past years, retrieve these journal entries and review the changes that have occurred since then. In what ways can you see how God actively used these trials to produce perseverance and character 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/052216.cfm

The Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity

Lectionary: 166

Source(s):

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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, 5-15-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **5-15-2016**, Pentecost Sunday. We open with the first reading from Acts that chronicled the Day of Pentecost when God sent the Holy Spirit to indwell the believers in the early church. Then we move onto the second reading from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians and discuss the gifts of the Spirit. We conclude with the Gospel lesson from Saint John where we will examine what it means when Jesus said, "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained" (John 20:23).

Introduction to the First Reading:

The theme of the readings this week goes like this: In the first reading, we see God's sending of the

Holy Spirit to the church. In the second reading, we see the revelation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Finally, in the Gospel lesson we find the commissioning by the Holy Spirit for all believers to spread the Gospel message. Let's begin with the first reading from the Book of Acts. This is the record of the momentous day on which God sent the Holy Spirit to indwell the believers in fulfillment of Jesus' promise (John 14:17). This event occurred fifty days after Jesus had risen from the dead and ten days after Jesus returned to heaven.

First Reading:

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

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

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

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Introduction to the Second Reading:

The context of the second reading from 1 Corinthians is Paul's teaching on spiritual gifts. The opening verses of chapter 12, from which today's reading are drawn make this clear and provide some important contextual information. "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware. You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to the mute idols, however you were led" (1 Corinthians 12:1-2). It's interesting how Paul wrote about how the Corinthian non-believers were pagans whereas by implication these new believers were non-pagans. Their conversion to Christianity resulted in a change of character, from pagan idolaters "led astray to mute idols," to those transformed by the renewing of their minds (Romans 12:2). Today's reading opens with the word "therefore" which provides a logical linkage to the people whose lives were transformed by God through their conversion by faith in Jesus Christ.

Second Reading:

3 Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. 4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. 6 There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. 7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. 12 For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:3-13)

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

culture thoroughly immersed in the worship of idols. God used these sign gifts in a powerful way as we can see in the first reading with the empowerment of the disciples to speak in various languages.

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

Before we read the text, since the central focus of the lesson will be on the concept of the forgiveness of sin let's review what God's Holy Word says about this crucially important subject. First, God says that everyone, except for Jesus, is a sinner. Paul said in Romans, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Second, God says that because of our sin, we deserve the penalty of death; having sinned against a Holy God Who is completely separate from sin. Paul said, "for the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a). We can never enter into the presence of our Holy God because we are sinful. The only way that we can enter into a relationship with God and be in His presence when we die is to have our sin forgiven by God. Third, there is good news. Paul continued in Romans 6:23, "but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23b-ff). Finally, only God can forgive sin. In Luke's Gospel Jesus was confronted by the Pharisees after he proclaimed the forgiveness of a paralyzed man's sins and they challenged Jesus authority to forgive sin. In response Jesus said, "Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins have been forgiven you,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But, so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, –He said to the paralytic—'I say to you, get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home'" (Luke 5:23-24). Though Scripture tells us to "confess our sins one to another" (James 5:16), only God can forgive sin. Jesus came to the earth as God in the flesh for the express purpose of dying on the cross for our sin (Romans 4:25). "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

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

that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. 11 For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; 13 for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED." Romans 10:9-13

We see that the forgiveness of our sin is free gift of God that comes by believing the good news of the Gospel. Jesus gave the disciples, and by application every Christian, what is called the Great Commission to preach this message about the forgiveness of sin. Jesus said, "Go therefore and make

disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20). This is the Gospel, meaning good news, that Jesus instructed his believers to preach to the world for the forgiveness of sin.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading records one of Jesus' post resurrection appearances to His disciples. Let's read what happened that Sunday evening when Jesus made a surprise visit to the disciples gathered in the upper room.

Gospel Reading:

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

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

What do the three themes we discovered in the readings today mean in our lives? First, God sent the Holy Spirit to indwell His believers in order to accomplish His purposes. He sent a diversity of gifts to a diversity of people in such a way that it forces the Church to work together as the Body of Christ. Second, God commissioned all believers, not just the ten disciples that were gathered in the room at Pentecost, to fulfil His Great Commission. This means that everyone that believes is to work to spread the Gospel message and to disciple believers, recognizing that not everyone will be gifted in either of these two particular areas. Some will be called to teach, and some to evangelize. You can

rest assured that if you truly commit your heart to the Lord that you won't automatically be called by Him as a missionary in Africa. However, you can be assured that God will call you to use whatever spiritual gift(s) that He has given you to your fullest ability.

As I am writing this week's study, I just returned from the funeral service of a friend back in our hometown. The man who passed away was quite young (his mid-50's) and was a lifelong believer in the Lord Jesus. As I have been reflecting upon his life, one of the things that stands out to me is his faithfulness. Although God gifted the man in various ways, he used these gifts in serving him faithfully up until he got sick and died quickly. Although he was a simple and uncomplicated man, he was always faithful in helping others. Although God doesn't call everyone to do the same things for Him, He does call us to be faithful in using the gifts that He has given us.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

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

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

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

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

2. What is your spiritual gift or gifts? One of the best ways to understand your gifting is to ask other believers for sometimes we cannot clearly recognize our own gifting. Another way it to use one of the many varieties of spiritual gift tests available online. Here is a link to one that I have found useful: http://www.churchgrowth.org/cgi-cg/gifts.cgi?intro=1

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

Readings for the Week

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

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/051516-pentecost-day.cfm

Pentecost Sunday, Mass during the Day, Lectionary: 63

Source(s):

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

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 5-8-2016

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **5-8-2016**. This week we will see in the first reading the murderous reaction of the Jews to Stephen's message in the Book of Acts. Then we continue the study from previous weeks from the Book of Revelation and conclude with the Gospel reading where we see Jesus' prayer on our behalf.

Introduction to the First Reading:

This reading is from the Book of Acts and it shows the immense opposition the early church was under. In Acts 7:1-53, Stephen gave a courageous speech that pointed out the inconsistency of the Jewish people's ability to follow God. This is included at the end of this study in the Going Deeper section. Stephen was one of the seven men chosen from among the larger group of disciples to serve in the food service ministry because the twelve apostles felt that they "should not give up preaching the word of God to serve tables" (Acts 6:2). After Stephen's appointment, a group of Jews from the surrounding nations "rose up and disputed with [him]" (Acts 6:9) because "Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people" (v. 8). Evidently, Stephen had many other skills and spiritual gifts than just his food service ministry. Before we go to today's reading, let's read what happened after his convicting speech so that we better understand the context.

Acts 6:10-15 NAS95 10 But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. 11 Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God." 12 And they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they came up to him and dragged him away and brought him before the Council. 13 They put forward false witnesses who said, "This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law; 14 for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us." 15 And fixing their gaze on him, all who were sitting in

the Council saw his face like the face of an angel.

In verse 12, the "Council" to which Doctor Luke (the writer of Acts) is referring is the Sanhedrin, which is the supreme Jewish court of justice, the same one that falsely condemned the Lord Jesus (Matthew 26:59-66). The Council acted the same way they did during the "trial" (using the term loosely) of Jesus in that they rounded up false witnesses to testify against Stephen (v. 13a). During the hearing, the Council provided Stephen with the ability to make a very long and reasoned defense (Acts 7:1-53). "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him" (v. 54) which is where we pick up with today's reading. *Note: The complete text of Stephen's speech is included in the Going Deeper section at the end of today's study.*

First Reading:

Acts 7:55-60 NAS95 55 But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; 56 and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." 57 But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse. 58 When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" 60 Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" Having said this, he fell asleep.

The main point of the reading was the great similarities between the way Stephen died and the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the same way that Jesus' death was filled with miracles (earthquake, darkening of the sky) Stephen's death was also miraculous in that he told how he saw a vision of the Lord Jesus exalted at the right hand of the Father in heaven and graciously prayed for the forgiveness of his murderers. In both of these cases, the Council heard false testimony and then rushed to execute the death sentence upon them. Just as Jesus did (Luke 23:34), Stephen prayed right before his death for God's forgiveness of their great sin of killing him (v. 54). As the saying goes, the apples don't fall far from the tree. As Jesus' devout apostle, Stephen followed closely the way of his master including forgiving his tormenters before his death. Ultimately, instead of having the Jews' desired effect of stopping the spread of the Christian message, the persecution of Stephen did quite the opposite. Stephen's example of bold testimony in the midst of persecution emboldened those that went after him as the growing church spread out across the globe.

There are three other points that emerge from the reading. The first is the introduction of Saul, who we know later as the Apostle Paul (v. 58). Here we see Saul assisting in the persecution of Stephen in guarding the cloaks of the people who were stoning Stephen to death. This was just a foretaste because we know that in the next chapter Saul began raging a holy war against the Christians. There Luke records, "But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison" (Acts 8:3). A second point in the reading that can be drawn is regarding the posture of the Lord Jesus in Stephen's vision. The author of Hebrews

records about Jesus, "When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:3c). However, as Stephen was being killed he saw a divine vision of Jesus "**standing** at the right hand of God" (v. 55c, emphasis added). Jesus' position "at the right hand of God" means He is exalted with God the Father in heaven. Jesus' standing position is as one commentator stated His "active interposition to help, as Mediator and King, or readiness to receive His persecuted servant" (Annotated Bible Notes). Hebrews says, "Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25). In the same way that Stephen saw Jesus interceding for him before the Father, when we die we can expect to see Jesus standing and interceding for us with the Father God. It is only through the righteousness of Jesus that we will be able to enter into the presence of God the Father. Finally, note that as the Jewish mob rushed to murder Stephen they covered their ears (v. 57). This is indicative of their response to hearing the sin of blasphemy, which gives an indication of the crime of which they were accusing Stephen of committing since blasphemy carried with it the penalty of death (Leviticus 24:16). Jesus foretold of the coming of this day when He said, "They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God" (John 16:2).

An application of the reading is that as believers we can expect to face persecution. Saint Paul said, "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12). As we do, we should remember that the church often grows the most during these times, as well as we may experience the most personal growth in these circumstances. We should endeavor in advance to develop a philosophy of suffering under persecution to the extent that when it comes upon us we are prepared to respond in ways that lead us closer to God. The North African apologist Tertullian (c. 160 – 225) wrote much about suffering and persecution. He said, "But go zealously on, good presidents, you will stand higher with the people if you sacrifice the Christians at their wish, kill us, torture us, condemn us, grind us to dust; your injustice is the proof that we are innocent" (Tertullian's *Apology*, Chapter 50).

Later in the Gospel lesson, we will see some insights that Jesus provided to us through the Holy Spirit's recording of Jesus' prayer to the Father on behalf of all believers. Interestingly, just prior to this prayer Jesus warned His disciples about the coming persecution. But first we will hear from Jesus through His closing warning to the world in the Book of Revelation.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is a continuation of the study in Revelation that we have looked at for the past several weeks. The context of today's reading is Jesus' closing words to the world as delivered by the angel to John. When John saw the angel, his immediate response was to bow down and worship him (Revelation 22:8). Instead, the angel told John, "Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God" (Revelation 22:9). Regardless of who brought the message, as you read the words that John recorded from the angel you will see that the message is directly from Jesus Christ Himself. Although the text doesn't state this outright as happens in the Old Testament prophets when they say, "Thus says the Lord,"

verse 16 says that the message is from Jesus.

Second Reading:

Revelation 22:12-20 NAS95 12 Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. 14 Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. 15 Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying. 16 I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star. 17 The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost. 18 I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; 19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book. 20 He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

Jesus provides His seal of authority to the message by clearly identifying Himself as the sender of it in verse 16 ("I Jesus"). This crucial closing message of Jesus to the world opens with the phrase "I am" which also clearly identifies the speaker as God. This phrase is repeated no less than four times in this short section. This is indicative of the importance that readers should give to it because it reveals that the sender is explicitly identified as God, the "I am" of Exodus 3:14. The speaker uses many phrases in the reading to identify Himself as God including "the Alpha and Omega" (v. 13), "the root and descendant of David" (v. 16), and "the bright morning star" (v. 16), and most importantly the outright statement "I Jesus" (v. 16).

Jesus' closing message is full of important scriptural truths:

- His return will be quickly (v. 12) in the sense that when it begins to happen the events will unfold quickly. Jesus bookmarked today's reading by closing with this same admonition, "Yes, I am coming quickly" (v. 20). Jesus said about this in the Gospel of Matthew, "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place" (Matthew 24:34). When the end-times events begin to unfold they will be concluded within a single generation.
- Jesus will reward those who served Him by bringing their rewards to them when He returns (v. 12). Justice will be provided by "render[ing] to every man according to what he has done." This means at least in part that He will bring punishment to those who don't serve Him when He returns. Verse 15 makes this clear, "Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying." In contrast, believers "take the water of life without cost" (v. 17) since they thirst for the ways of God and are the eternal recipients of His grace (unmerited favor).
- Believers are those who "who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city" (v. 14). They are those who "hears the words of

the prophecy of this book" without adding to or taking away from them (v. 18) as the false teachers were doing (and are doing today). Countless theological cults engage in practices that either nullify the Word of God (take away from it) or add legalistic, religious practices that their followers must observe in order to be saved (add to it). Jesus provides a clear warning not to do either of these things because otherwise they shall be forced along with all the other nonbelievers to enter into the Great Tribulation. This is the Day of the Lord's judgement spoken of in Revelation and previously by the Old Testament Prophets such as Jeremiah.

- Jesus, in His grace, sent this message specifically to the churches (v. 16) in order that they may receive and learn from Him the only way to the tree of life (v. 19). Those who resist His message of salvation through faith in Him alone (John 14:6) will find themselves eternally locked out of the holy city.

We can learn a lot from this closing section of Revelation. Jesus is faithful to us in that He continues to tell the world the truth about the only way to find peace with God in spite of the fact that the majority of the world has and will continue to reject His message. As we move onto the Gospel lesson we will see Jesus' heart for His believers as we listen in on a prayer that He gave on our behalf to His disciples before He ascended back to heaven.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The context of the Gospel reading from John 17 is Jesus' high priestly prayer that He offered to God the Father just before His arrest and crucifixion. He opened the prayer in verse one of this chapter by "lifting up His eyes to heaven" and saying, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You. even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life" (John 17:1-2). This sets the tone as He continues the prayer on behalf of both His disciples and those that will come to believe in their testimony.

Gospel Reading:

John 17:20-26 NAS95 20 "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; 21 that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; 23 I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. 24 Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. 25 O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; 26 and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

Jesus taught about the importance of a unified church in the reading. He said, "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me **through their word**; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may

believe that You sent Me" (John 17:20-21 emphasis added). Unity does not come by coercion or oppression. It comes by individuals who understand their true identity in Christ. When believers in Jesus fix their attention upon Jesus and His glory, the petty issues that often divide followers will fade away. Jesus helps us to see that unity is the result of belief in Christ, who is one with the Father.

Jesus prayed on behalf of His disciples who had believed by firsthand knowledge ***and*** for those who believed through the *testimony* of His disciples (v.20b, "through their word"). Unity is important in the church because it's through this unified message that God's power is revealed. All of the believers after the era of the disciples have come to faith in Jesus through the testimony of "**the word"** and "**their word**." "The word" is the testimony of the disciples through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit written into what we call the New Testament Bible. "Their word" is both the testimony of the disciples, *and* the testimony of all believers. Jesus' purpose in this message was a calling for the church of God be unified in their proclamation of the Gospel so that the entire world may believe (John 17:21f). Jesus brought this out in verse 26, "I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

As we contemplate the three readings from today what stands out is the great value that we have in following Jesus regardless of what it may cost us. Knowing the Lord Jesus as our Savior empowers us to tell others about Him in spite of the fact that we may be ridiculed or even harmed because of our testimony. In the western world it is easy to take advantage of our religious freedom and forget the great sacrifices which Christians around the world are making for Jesus every day. As we live our lives we are called to pray for them that suffer for Jesus around the world, as well as to prepare for persecution in our own lives.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In what ways have you faced or are facing persecution for your faith? How does Stephen's example, which mirrors Christ and knowing the warnings about persecution in Scripture, help you to face it more strongly?

2. Choose one of the ways that Jesus is described in the second reading in Revelation 22 and reflect upon what this means and how this character quality can make a difference in your own life.

- Jesus is coming quickly
- Jesus is the rewarder
- Jesus is the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end
- Jesus is the Root and descendent of David
- Jesus is the bright morning Star

Readings for the Week

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

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/050816-seventh-sunday-easter.cfm

Seventh Sunday of Easter

Lectionary: 61

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Going Deeper

The following is the text of Stephen's speech in the Book of Acts:

Acts 7:1-53 NAS95 1 The high priest said, "Are these things so?" 2 And he said, "Hear me, brethren and fathers! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, 3 and said to him, 'LEAVE YOUR COUNTRY AND YOUR RELATIVES, AND COME INTO THE LAND THAT I WILL SHOW YOU.' 4 "Then he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. From there, after his father died, God had him move to this country in which you are now living. 5 "But He gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground, and yet, even when he had no child, He promised that HE WOULD GIVE IT TO HIM AS A POSSESSION, AND TO HIS DESCENDANTS AFTER HIM. 6 "But God spoke to this effect, that his DESCENDANTS WOULD BE ALIENS IN A FOREIGN LAND, AND THAT THEY WOULD BE ENSLAVED AND MISTREATED FOR FOUR HUNDRED YEARS. 7 "'AND WHATEVER NATION TO WHICH THEY WILL BE IN BONDAGE I MYSELF WILL JUDGE,' said God, 'AND AFTER THAT THEY WILL COME OUT AND SERVE ME IN THIS PLACE.' 8 "And He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs. 9 "The patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt. Yet God was with him, 10 and rescued him from all his afflictions, and granted him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he made him governor over Egypt and all his household. 11 "Now a famine came over all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction with it, and our fathers could find no food. 12 "But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers there the first time. 13 "On the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family was disclosed to Pharaoh. 14 "Then Joseph sent word and invited Jacob his father and all his relatives to come to him, seventy-five persons in all. 15 "And Jacob went down to Egypt and there he and our fathers died. 16 "From there they were removed to Shechem and laid in the tomb which Abraham had purchased for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor in Shechem. 17 "But as the time of the promise was approaching which God had assured to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt, 18 until THERE AROSE ANOTHER KING OVER EGYPT WHO KNEW NOTHING ABOUT JOSEPH. 19 "It was he who took shrewd advantage of our race and mistreated our fathers so that they would expose their infants and they would not survive. 20 "It was at this time that Moses

was born; and he was lovely in the sight of God, and he was nurtured three months in his father's home. 21 "And after he had been set outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and nurtured him as her own son. 22 "Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds. 23 "But when he was approaching the age of forty, it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel. 24 "And when he saw one of them being treated unjustly, he defended him and took vengeance for the oppressed by striking down the Egyptian. 25 "And he supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him, but they did not understand. 26 "On the following day he appeared to them as they were fighting together, and he tried to reconcile them in peace, saying, 'Men, you are brethren, why do you injure one another?' 27 "But the one who was injuring his neighbor pushed him away, saying, 'WHO MADE YOU A RULER AND JUDGE OVER US? 28 'YOU DO NOT MEAN TO KILL ME AS YOU KILLED THE EGYPTIAN YESTERDAY, DO YOU?' 29 "At this remark, MOSES FLED AND BECAME AN ALIEN IN THE LAND OF MIDIAN, where he became the father of two sons. 30 "After forty years had passed, AN ANGEL APPEARED TO HIM IN THE WILDERNESS OF MOUNT Sinai, IN THE FLAME OF A BURNING THORN BUSH. 31 "When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he approached to look more closely, there came the voice of the Lord: 32 'I AM THE GOD OF YOUR FATHERS, THE GOD OF ABRAHAM AND ISAAC AND JACOB.' Moses shook with fear and would not venture to look. 33 "BUT THE LORD SAID TO HIM, 'TAKE OFF THE SANDALS FROM YOUR FEET, FOR THE PLACE ON WHICH YOU ARE STANDING IS HOLY GROUND. 34 'I HAVE CERTAINLY SEEN THE OPPRESSION OF MY PEOPLE IN EGYPT AND HAVE HEARD THEIR GROANS, AND I HAVE COME DOWN TO RESCUE THEM; COME NOW, AND I WILL SEND YOU TO EGYPT.' 35 "This Moses whom they disowned, saying, 'WHO MADE YOU A RULER AND A JUDGE?' is the one whom God sent to be both a ruler and a deliverer with the help of the angel who appeared to him in the thorn bush. 36 "This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years. 37 "This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, 'GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN.' 38 "This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and who was with our fathers; and he received living oracles to pass on to you. 39 "Our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to him, but repudiated him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt, 40 SAYING TO AARON, 'MAKE FOR US GODS WHO WILL GO BEFORE US; FOR THIS MOSES WHO LED US OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT–WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM.' 41 "At that time they made a calf and brought a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. 42 "But God turned away and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, 'IT WAS NOT TO ME THAT YOU OFFERED VICTIMS AND SACRIFICES FORTY YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS, WAS IT, O HOUSE OF ISRAEL? 43 'YOU ALSO TOOK ALONG THE TABERNACLE OF MOLOCH AND THE STAR OF THE GOD ROMPHA, THE IMAGES WHICH YOU MADE TO WORSHIP. I ALSO WILL REMOVE YOU BEYOND BABYLON.' 44 "Our fathers had the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness, just as He who spoke to Moses directed him to make it according to the pattern which he had seen. 45 "And having received it in their turn, our fathers brought it in with Joshua upon dispossessing the nations whom God drove out before our fathers, until the time of David. 46 "David found favor in God's sight, and asked that he might find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. 47 "But it was Solomon who built a house for Him.

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48 "However, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands; as the prophet says:
49 'HEAVEN IS MY THRONE, AND EARTH IS THE FOOTSTOOL OF MY FEET; WHAT KIND OF HOUSE WILL YOU BUILD FOR ME?' says the Lord, 'OR WHAT PLACE IS THERE FOR MY REPOSE?
50 'WAS IT NOT MY HAND WHICH MADE ALL THESE THINGS?' 51 "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. 52 "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; 53 you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it."

Questions:

1. Synthesize Stephen's speech into one or two sentences.

2. Why do you think Stephen went into such great detail about Jewish history and did not mention Jesus by name?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 5-01-2016

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **05-01-2016**. This week's study is long, but important. We challenge our readers to stick through it as we think that you will find great rewards in following the study.

The first reading from Acts we look at records the findings of an important meeting in the church called the Jerusalem Council. After this, we continue the study in Revelation in which we see how God presents a new, perfect Holy City that was made in heaven for the saints to dwell in forever. Then we close with the Gospel of John in which we see Jesus' foretelling of the promise to send the Holy Spirit to live in the hearts of all believers.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Acts and records the event known as the Jerusalem Council. Leading up to the reading Paul had endured some tremendous persecution to the extent that while in Lystra he was stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:19-20). It's possible that during this time Paul experienced his visions of heaven (2 Corinthians 12:1-6). After Paul's miraculous recovery, he traveled with Barnabus back to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch and "appointed elders for them in every church" (Acts 14:23). Here Paul said, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (v. 22c). Thus, Paul continued his leadership of the Gentile church and next journeyed to Jerusalem for a very important ecumenical council, meaning a gathering of all of the church leaders from both the Gentile and Jewish realms.

First Reading:

Acts 15:1-2 NAS95 1 Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." 2 And when Paul and

Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.

[If you would like to read the section that was omitted it is included at the end of this week's study.]

Acts 15:22-29 NAS95 22 Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas–Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, 23 and they sent this letter by them, "The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings. 24 Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls, 25 it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will also report the same things by word of mouth. 28 For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: 29 that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell."

As the reading opens, Doctor Luke records how some men from Judea began teaching that as Christians they must adhere to the practices of the Mosaic Law especially concerning the matter of circumcision (v. 1). This was the reason that Paul and Barnabas went down to Jerusalem, to discuss this extremely important issue. (The complete text of the ecumenical council meeting is included at the end of this study in the "Going Deeper" section). Evidently, James was the leader of the meeting; this is the James who wrote the biblical Book of the same name and a relative of Jesus. His leadership is implied since, at the conclusion of the council, he stood up unopposed and made the pronouncement that we see in verses 22 – 29. While this was an important finding of the council, we must remember the occasion that led to the initiation of the important gathering as well as the culture in which the events happened. Without saying it, James' bottom line gave believers confidence that they did not have to be circumcised according to the Mosaic Law. But they were to hold to other "essentials" including abstaining from food sacrificed to idols, from the eating of blood, eating of meat from animals that had been strangled, and from the sexual sin of fornication (v. 29). These things were so repulsive to Jewish Christians who had just come out of Judaism that the Gentile believers were asked to be considerate in these ways for the sake of unity. Obviously when we read over this list, we understand the degree to which the Jewish and pagan cultures clashed and the context in which the early believers were immersed. This cultural context greatly influenced the findings of the leaders in the meeting. If converted Jews and pagans were going to get along in the family of God, these bare essentials would help them achieve unity. We know later, Saint Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 8 that eating food sacrificed to idols was acceptable only if it did not violate one's conscience and that of those around them (1 Corinthians 8:10-13). The principle elicited by Paul in First Corinthians would seemingly also apply to the practices of eating strangled food and blood. However, the prohibition of sexual sin stands out on the list as a universal principle for believers of all time (for Old Testament believers and New Testament believers).

One of the big ideas in the reading is how God entrusted the ministry of the church to frail, imperfect believers to safeguard the treasury of truth with great diligence. The leaders of the church back then in this very crucial era in which the New Testament Scriptures were recorded were tasked with many great responsibilities. They were responsible for both keeping the church pure from false teachings while at the same time balancing the important cultural factors of their day including the movement of the church away from a purely Jewish organization to one containing a large proportion of Gentiles. The findings of the Council were important because it showed how the church leaders were willing to subjugate the Mosaic Law through their acceptance of Jesus' fulfillment of it through His death and resurrection. Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17). To the extent that the Law served to safeguard the conscience of the Jewish believers, it was important to them for conscience sake, but they were not to foist these legalistic practices upon the Gentile church.

Some application points that you could consider are regarding how cultural "baggage" affects our Christian walk and how that influences other believers. In what ways do we foist a list of requirements upon other believers around us who don't come from exactly the same cultural context as ourselves? Perhaps a good case would be a Christian who worships in a way that is different than your style (maybe they raise their hands, maybe they pray a spontaneous prayer) or a believer who votes for a different political candidate than you do. Is it possible to still be united in Christ, but differ on some of the unique expressions of faith? A good principle to follow, coined by St. Augustine in this matter: "in essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity."

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from the continuing study of the Book of Revelation. The context of the reading is after the conclusion of Jesus' one thousand year (millennial) reign on earth, a period during which Satan will be bound. Just prior to Jesus beginning this reign on earth, some three and one half years before, He had returned to the earth in fulfillment of Acts 1:11 and gathered all of the believers both living and dead with him to heaven. Believers that were already dead were rejoined with their bodies and given new glorified ones. Believers alive at Jesus' coming were gathered to Jesus in their living bodies after which they received their glorified bodies as well. Jesus had told His disciples, "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:3). It's evident that the New Jerusalem is the place that Jesus went to prepare and this perfect city is now being presented to the believers of all time as an eternal dwelling place. After the return of the Lord Jesus all believers now have real (but glorified), physical bodies so they require a real place to live. In contrast, when saints die in the current age they go to heaven without their physical bodies and without the need for physical lodging. Therefore, Scripture seems to indicate that God provides them the New Jerusalem as their dwelling place from the moment they receive their glorified bodies at the time of the return of the Lord Jesus to earth. In summary, people with only a spiritual body in heaven rest in that spiritual place, whereas when they rejoin their physical bodies they will again require a physical resting place. This is in spite of the fact that the New Jerusalem is somehow built in heaven!

After Jesus' thousand-year reign on earth, Satan was released from his bonds and allowed to lead

one last rebellion against God. In this huge battle of Gog and Magog (Revelation 20:8), he allied himself with the non-believers who had secretly held out during the millennial reign of Christ on earth. As these demonic forces surround the great city (Jerusalem), fire came down from heaven and devoured them (v. 9). Afterwards, every non-believer in the universe from all time stood before the "great white throne judgment" (Revelation 20:11). First, the devil joined the beast and the false prophet who were already in the lake of fire. Then the Scripture makes a very sobering statement concerning the universal judgment of non-believers, "And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:15). The lake of fire is called "the second death" (v. 14) about which Jesus said in the next chapter, "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8). God describes everyone who fails to trust in the Lord Jesus for salvation by these characteristics, regardless of how "good" they may have perceived themselves to be before the judgment against God's standard of perfection. As believers we understand that our perfection comes only through our acceptance of Jesus' finished work on the cross for us.

As the cataclysmic events grind to a sudden halt John records how the earth as we know it will be destroyed and replaced by a new creation in which there will no longer be any sea (Revelation 21:1). At this point one of the angels that poured out the last seven plagues introduced the bride of Christ, the group that we know as the church (v. 9). Today's reading opens with the New Jerusalem descending from the sky down towards the new earth. How the New Jerusalem that descends from the sky and the new earth relate to one another is unknown. We don't know if the city "touches down" or remains a heavenly dwelling place but within sight of the new earth, a form of "satellite city" in the sky.

Second Reading:

Note: Verses 24-27 which were omitted are included below.

Revelation 21:10-14 NAS95 10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, 11 having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper. 12 It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. 13 There were three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west. 14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

Revelation 21:22-27 NAS95 22 I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 23 And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. 24 The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of

the earth will bring their glory into it. 25 In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed; 26 and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; 27 and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

John described the New Jerusalem coming down out of the sky as a city with twelve gates marked by the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, signifying that the Old Testament pointed the way to this eternal city. The foundation of the city, though, was laid by the "twelve apostles of the Lamb" (v. 14) identifying that this beautiful city was built on the testimony of the New Testament disciples (learners), who later were called apostles (sent ones). In the intervening verses that were omitted from the reading (vv. 15-21) John provides greater details about the gates of the holy city, the walls as well as the size, some fifteen hundred miles square (v. 16). He described the street of the city as "pure gold, like transparent glass," (v. 21) something which is hard to understand. How can gold be like transparent glass? Suffice it to say that our categories of beauty can't contain the world that is to come.

Rejoining the reading in verse 22, John describes how there is no need for a temple in the New Jerusalem because, "the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." In verse 24 the Gentile nature of the church is specifically mentioned when John says, "The **nations** will walk by its light, and the **kings of the earth** will bring their glory into it," something about which we read in the first reading. The city is by definition a pure place in which "nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life" (v. 27). We saw a similar list of prohibited people in the introduction. The principle of repetition marks this as an important point. "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8) The "holy city, Jerusalem" (v. 10) will be just that, holy, forever and nothing unholy will enter it forever.

We can find rest in the fact that in spite of the current difficult circumstances we may be experiencing, or the haunting memories of things that have happened to us in the past, we will find eternal rest in a perfect place prepared by God for us. We will never again have to question whether someone is walking with the Lord, for everyone will be in perfect harmony with God. We won't be living in some ephemeral city consisting of wafting clouds as depicted in the media about heaven, but rather we will live in a perfect, physical city with a perfect, holy God forever. In this place we will find perfect fellowship with people from all walks of life, both Jews and Gentiles, and this will mark the perfect end of discrimination forever in ways that the civil laws could never do.

An important take away point is for us to remember that this world is not our home and it's not all there is. The world will tell us that the one with the most toys wins, but we are not playing their "game." We are live with an eternal perspective that is not satisfied with the finite and dead end satisfactions of this world. When these things are in their right place, we can enjoy them. What is eternal about this world is the human soul. That is why it is important to settle the question of our

eternal destiny now. This passage tells us how we can know if we are permitted into the New Jerusalem, God's eternal city. "Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life" will be allowed to enter. How do we know if our name is written there?

The Bible tells us that it is the Lamb's book, which is significant. Who is the Lamb? None other than Jesus Christ (John 1:29 tells us that Jesus is the Lamb of God, who takes away sins of the world). When sin entered the world through Adam, a blood sacrifice was required for the forgiveness of sin (Hebrews 9:22). All through the Old Testament, lambs were sacrificed in place of the person who deserved to die for the sins they committed. Jesus' death and shed blood, as the Lamb of God, was the final and complete sacrifice to provide forgiveness for sins (Hebrews 10:12). First Peter 1:3-5 and 1:18-21 explain the importance of Jesus' sacrificial death for the salvation of our souls:

1 Peter 1:3-5 NAS95 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

1 Peter 1:18-21 NAS95 18 knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, 19 but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. 20 For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you 21 who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

Therefore, you can have assurance that your name is written in His book of life if you are trusting in the Lamb of God to take away the penalty for your sin and looking to Him to give you a new life that is eternal. If you have not consciously made this choice to trust in Jesus' sacrificial death to cover the payment for your sin, you can pray right now to tell Him that you would like this free gift, which provides forgiveness of the debt you owe God and assurance that your name is written in the Lamb's book of life.

The Gospel reading will teach us more about belief in Jesus, for Jesus told His disciples about how they could demonstrate their belief and love for Him.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from John chapter 14. Jesus had just told His disciples that He was going away to prepare a place for them (John 14:3), which was mentioned in the discussion on the second reading. Jesus also told His disciples that He wouldn't leave them as orphans, that He would come to them through the promise of a Helper, "that He may be with you forever" (John 14:16). In today's reading, we learn about this Helper Jesus promised to the disciples and to all believers who trust in His name. This discussion was prompted by the question in 14:22: "Lord, what then has happenedthat You are going to disclose Yourself to us and not to the world?"

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Gospel Reading:

John 14:23-29 NAS95 23 Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. 24 He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me. 25 These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you. 26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. 27 Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful. 28 You heard that I said to you, 'I go away, and I will come to you.' If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced because I go to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. 29 Now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe."

The reading opened with Jesus clarifying why He is disclosing certain things to the disciples and not to others. Jesus explains that those who love Him will keep His commandments (v. 23a). He is telling those closest to Him, the twelve disciples, these things so that they might no longer be slaves, but instead, be intimate, like friends, knowing the will of God (John 15:15). He says, *IF* you love me, then you will keep my word (meaning obey Him from the heart and have His value system become your value system). Loving God naturally leads us to keeping the commandments of God; it is love in action: loving God leads to godly actions. It seems that one of God's love languages is following Him, instead of following our own inclinations and misguided desires.

Next, Jesus, who had just told His disciples that He was going away to prepare a place for them, told them how both the Father and the Son would "make Our abode with him"—him being the one who loves Jesus and keeps His word (v. 23d). So while Jesus was predicting His physical departure from this world, He reassured His disciples that He would still be with them, by making their hearts His new home.

He would make their hearts His home by sending the Holy Spirit to live inside of them. Jesus reminded them that this promise of the sending of the Holy Spirit weren't just His words, but the Word of the Father Who sent Him (v. 24), therefore all three Persons of the Godhead were involved. Jesus' promise was that He would send the Holy Spirit to them to "teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you" (v. 26). This was to comfort them and bring them peace (v. 27) because He had earlier told them that He was going to be leaving them (John 14:3). Looking back on what Jesus said, it is important to note that the Holy Spirit can't teach us all things or bring things to our remembrance if we are not putting His Word in our heart. We know that the Holy Spirit is the person who inspired the Bible, since Saint Peter said, "for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:21). We cooperate with God's work in our lives when we read, study and integrate the truth of God's Word in our daily lives.

Jesus told them all of this ahead of time so that when the Holy Spirit came, they would remember His promise of sending Him to them and be comforted. This is exactly what we find in the Book of

Acts. After Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension, many of His followers were confused and discouraged. But then, the promised Holy Spirit came, launching the Church in Jerusalem during the feast of Pentecost. The disciples, who had cowered in an upper room a few weeks earlier were now emboldened and spoke new and unlearned languages to preach the good news of salvation through Jesus. Such strange things were happening that Peter had to give an explanation to a large crowd who had gathered inquiring about the disciples. Peter's explanation was that Jesus had sent the promised Holy Spirit. Jesus, sending the Holy Spirit, was the "culprit" for these signs and wonders: "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear" (Acts 2:33). The sending of the Holy Spirit fulfilled what Jesus had predicted when He said that he wouldn't leave the believers as orphans (John 14:18) and that the Holy Spirit would teach them and bring to remembrance all things. He stands ready to do the same for us. The Holy Spirit is the Person of the Godhead who empowers believers for ministry.

The big idea in the reading is that Jesus promises not to leave any of us as orphans; but rather, He promises to give us peace through the presence of His Holy Spirit. We cannot overstate the importance of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives as believers in Jesus Christ. The Spirit's ministry to the hearts in whom He dwells is important not only for spreading the Gospel around the world but also for empowering us to accomplish all of the purposes of God in our lives. There are many Christians who are trying to live the Christian life on their own strength, living as an orphan. That is not God's intention. He specifically tells us that we are to rely on the Spirit to live the Christian life. If we don't know how to do this, we can ask Him to teach us. When we read Scripture, we can look for what it tells us about walking in step with the Spirit (Galatians 5:18) relying on the Spirit to produce the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), being filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), and having our mind set on the things of the Spirit (Romans 8).

There are manifold ministries of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer; here are just a few of the things the Holy Spirit gives us:

- A second birth, a spiritual birth, making us "born from above" or "born again" (John 3:3) with a regenerated soul (Titus 3:5).
- Confirmation that as a believer we are an heir of God and fellow heir with Christ (Romans 8:15-17).
- Membership in God's universal church, which is baptism with the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13).
- The ability to understand and apply the Scriptures to our lives (1 Corinthians 2:12).
- Intercession on our behalf in prayer (Romans 8:26–27).
- A seal or guarantee until the day that we are redeemed in heaven (Ephesians 1:13-14).

We encourage you to look up each of the verse references and ponder how the Holy Spirit empowers you to accomplish God's purposes in your life.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the first reading we considered how one's cultural background impacted their Christian beliefs and how these beliefs affected the other believers around them. When was there a time in which you met another Christian from a much different cultural context than your own? In what ways did you need to reexamine your core beliefs in order to provide them with the grace or leeway to accept them as brothers or sisters in the Lord?

2. In what ways can you identify with Jesus' disciples who were discouraged when He said He was going to leave them? How have you felt like an orphan? Identify which characteristics of living as an orphan or living as a child of God in the table below resonate with you. Talk to God and other solid Christians about your desire to be shored up in the areas you are still living like an orphan. Praise God for the confidence He has given you as a child of God.

Orphan	**Child of God**
Anxious and worried about needs: no sense of God's infinite resources. It feels like I have to make life work on my own and who I am is not enough.	Content about God's provisions: Has a sense that my God shall supply all my needs according to His riches in glory (Phil. 4:11-19).
Infused with a sense of conditional love and acceptance; you're only as good as your last performance.	Infused with a sense of unconditional love and acceptance; failure is not fatal (1 John 3:1).
Highly defended from a sense of vulnerability; needs to be safe, secure and right. Criticism either demolishes me or propels me to show them wrong. Either way, I protect myself from the gnawing voices of criticism. Shrinks back in fear and resists taking God-directed risks.	Learns that feeling inadequate is a natural consequence of the Fall. Instead of turning to self-protection, I try to find my adequacy in Christ (2 Cor. 3:5). This allows me to be realistic about my weaknesses and honest about my vulnerabilities with God and others. It allows me to overcome fear and take God-directed risks.
Prays when "on" or in crisis.	Prays throughout the day, knowing that the Spirit dwells in me and wants to relate to me (1 Thess. 5:17).

Uses "Christian freedom" to indulge the flesh, such as biting and devouring each other, being conceited, provoking and envying others. Gal. 5: 19-21 says: "The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality,impurity and debauchery;[20] idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions[21] and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like."	Uses "Christian freedom" to "serve one anotherhumbly in love" (Gal. 5:13). Starting to see the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23): [22] "But the fruitof the Spirit is love,joy, peace,forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,[23] gentleness and self-control." These are coming from the inside of my being, not just being imposed from the outside or merely trying to conform to Christian standards.
Needs to be in control and persuade people to see things my way. I am controlled by a need to impress people.	Becoming Spirit-controlled, which frees me up to submit to God-given authority, to let other people be "right" and to care more about incarnating Christ than impressing people.

3. Review the list of the ministries of the Spirit given in the Gospel lesson. How does the Holy Spirit help you overcome your feelings of separation and loneliness?

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/050116.cfm

Sixth Sunday of Easter Lectionary: 57

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Keywords:

Ecumenical Council, lake of fire, Great White Throne Judgment, circumcision, eating of food sacrificed to idols, Gentile Church, New Jerusalem

Going Deeper:

The following is the text of the ecumenical council event that was omitted from the reading.

Acts 15:3-21 NAS95 3 Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through

both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren. 4 When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. 5 But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses." 6 The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter. 7 After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. 8 "And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; 9 and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. 10 "Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? 11 "But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are." 12 All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. 13 After they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, "Brethren, listen to me. 14 "Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name. 15 "With this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written, 16 'AFTER THESE THINGS I will return, AND I WILL REBUILD THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID WHICH HAS FALLEN, AND I WILL REBUILD ITS RUINS, AND I WILL RESTORE IT, 17 SO THAT THE REST OF MANKIND MAY SEEK THE LORD, AND ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME,' 18 SAYS THE LORD, WHO MAKES THESE THINGS KNOWN FROM LONG AGO. 19 "Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, 20 but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood. 21 "For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath."

List the important truths this council tells us about the following:

- God
- Gentiles
- Jews
- Salvation

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 4-24-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **4-24-2016**. This week we begin with a reading from the book of Acts. The full title for the book is The Acts of the Apostles, relating the beginnings of the church that Christ established. Today's reading involves a portion of one of the Apostle Paul's missionary journeys. By contrast, the second reading is from the next-to-the-last chapter of the Bible, Revelation 21, which gives us exciting information about the new heaven and earth that God will bring into existence. The final reading, from John's Gospel, relates important words of Jesus on the night before His death, words that are intended to give us a means by which we can be known as His disciples.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Missions has always been at the heart of the ministry of the church. Just prior to His return to heaven, Jesus had told his disciples that they were to be his witnesses (Acts 1:8). He had commissioned them to make disciples, to baptize believers, and to teach new Christians to obey all that Jesus had taught (Matthew 28:19-20). The Apostle Paul and Barnabas had set out from Antioch to do exactly that, and they found a mixed reception wherever they went, first reaching out to the Jews.

In the previous chapter Paul and Barnabas had come to the city of Lystra in their journey. They healed a lame man, and the crowd thought they must be gods. But some trouble makers from out of

town came and incited the people against the missionary team. As a result Paul was stoned and left for dead. He was raised up, however, and the next day moved on to the city of Derbe. Our reading begins with the report that their preaching in that city had "made many disciples."

They then began a return journey to Antioch, their starting point, and along the way they "strengthened" and "encouraged" their converts to "continue in the faith." They made it clear, however, that the spiritual journey is often through times of tribulation and difficulty. As the Lord's representatives, they appointed leaders in the various churches and entrusted them to the Lord to give them guidance. After stops in a few other cities, they arrived back in Antioch to the church that had commissioned them to missionary service (Acts 13:2-3).

Paul and Barnabas gave to their home church a full report of all that "God had done with them." They recognized, as all of God's servants must, that anything of eternal value that is accomplished through their ministry is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit. It's what God does through his disciples that is critical, not what the disciples themselves may do. Their report included a new idea that later was to cause a great deal of disturbance among some of the Jewish-Christians. They reported that God "had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles." That was a new and troubling thought to many of their audience. They had thought that Jehovah was the God of the Jews exclusively. They were to learn, and Paul was the chief conveyor of this new truth, that God's redemptive plan is to include all nations and peoples on the basis of faith not ethnic or religious origin.

Although Paul was to continue in further missionary journeys, he remained in Antioch for "a long time," no doubt teaching and encouraging the saints in this new perspective of Jesus' church.

First Reading:

Acts 14:21-28 NAS95 21 After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." 23 When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. 24 They passed through Pisidia and came into Pamphylia. 25 When they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. 26 From there they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished. 27 When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. 28 And they spent a long time with the disciples.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The preceding chapters in this final revelation from God included word-pictures of cataclysmic events in the heavens and on earth. God's wrath against sin and rebellion is clearly evident in his judgments against evil empires and the devil himself along with his angels and those he has put in

power. When we come to chapter 21, however, the final judgment has occurred and all those who have rejected God's offer of salvation through faith in Jesus are cast into the Lake of Fire along with the devil and his angels for whom the lake was intended. What remains in this final book reveals more of God's gracious plan for His own redeemed people.

The use of symbols and figures of speech throughout the Revelation leave the reader enthralled with the splendor of God's future provision for the church. John, the human writer of this book, sees "the holy city, the new Jerusalem" coming down from heaven. He sees the city as "a bride adorned for her husband." This is clearly a reference to the church that is often described in the New Testament in terms that clearly define "the bride of Christ." (See, for example, Ephesians 5:22-32 and Revelations 19:6-9.)

John uses the term "tabernacle of God" to describe God's presence among men. Tabernacle basically means "dwelling." As God "dwelt" symbolically among His people in the Old Testament tabernacle in the Shekinah glory above the Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place, so His presence will be known as He dwells among His people in a permanent relationship in eternity.

If all that is true, it is no wonder, then, that there will be no tears in heaven, no death, no mourning, crying, or pain. The ruler (Jesus, the promised Messiah or anointed one), sitting on His throne, says, "Behold, I am making all things new." And John indicates that he has been instructed to write these words because they are "faithful and true." We can count on them.

Second Reading:

*Revelation 21:1-5 NAS95 1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, 4 and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." 5 And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He *said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true."*

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

What someone says just before he dies is most often regarded as extremely important. The night before Jesus was crucified, He had close, personal fellowship with His disciples at what we refer to as the Last Supper. In addition to having a meal with them, reminiscent of the original Passover in Egypt, and washing their feet in a new picture of His servant nature and the ministry of cleansing that He continues for His followers yet today, Jesus made three significant statements.

First, He said that the Son of Man (His most frequent reference to Himself) and God the Father are glorified in Him. Isaiah wrote of this feature of Christ, and, no doubt, it refers specifically to His

death in which God's marvelous plan of redemption is made possible, ultimately to bring great glory to Jesus and the Father.

In the next chapter of John (14:1-3), Jesus makes it clear that He is to leave His disciples to return to heaven. Here, He seems to be speaking more directly of the experience of His death and separation from the Father, which is a path the disciples cannot follow. The Apostle Peter tells us that Jesus, during those three days His body lay in the tomb, actually visited where the devil's angels suffered, and He preached, revealing to them their doom as a result of His sufficient sacrifice on the cross.

Finally, Jesus offers what he calls a "new commandment": they are to love one another. The standard for such love is "as [Jesus] loved" them. Previously He had repeated the Old Testament commandment about loving God and your neighbor (Matthew 22:37-39; see Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18). His final statement in this passage is significant, as well. He says that His followers will not be known by their doctrinal knowledge, astute learning, or their following of religious ceremonies and rites. Rather, they will be recognized as His disciples when they practice His kind of unselfish love to their brethren. Such a lifestyle will draw others to the One who can give that kind of love to His people.

Gospel Reading:

John 13:31-35 NAS95 31 Therefore when he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him; 32 if God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and will glorify Him immediately. 33 Little children, I am with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, now I also say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' 34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. These readings offer a call to self-examination. In what ways is your heart open to receiving fellow believers into your company regardless of ethnic origin, gender, or previous religious background? When are several times which your heat was darkened?

2. List two ways in which you demonstrate that you love your fellow believers as Christ loves you, seeking to encourage and build them up in their faith?

Readings for the Week

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Fifth Sunday of Easter

Source(s):

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 4-17-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **4-17-2016**. This week we will study readings from the Book of Acts, Revelation and the Gospel of John. We will go into some great depth on the first two readings. We hope that you both enjoy and learn something this week from our study and that you are forever spoiled for the ordinary.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Acts. Paul and Barnabus were on their first missionary journey to share the Word of God in the Jewish synagogues (Acts 13:4). So much happened in Jerusalem that they wanted others to know – Jesus Christ's death, resurrection and ascension had defined the Jewish faith in a whole new way. The Holy Spirit had been sent to the believers to empower them to be witnesses all over the world (Acts 1:8). Paul's and Barnabus were "set apart" to be witnesses to Who Jesus what and what He had taught them (Acts 13:1-3). They were also sent to help those who were lost in darkness such that they could see the light of the Good News that their sins could be forgiven and a new relationship with God could be established through faith in Jesus (Acts 13:38-39).

On their travels they often went to the Jewish synagogue to share how Jesus was the fulfillment of the promised long awaited Messiah (Acts 13:33-39). They gave convincing evidence to the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles that Jesus matched the description of the One from God Who would provide salvation. Jesus had risen from the grave, therefore, sealing the case that He was the Christ (Acts 13:32-33). In today's reading, we find Paul and Barnabus being invited back to the synagogue to continue sharing their insights about God's work through Christ.

First Reading:

Note: Paul's speech in Antioch was omitted from the reading. If you would like to read the speech it is included at the end of the study in the "Going Deeper" section.

Acts 13:14 NAS95 14 But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.

Acts 13:43-52 NAS95 43 Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God. 44 The next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord. 45 But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming. 46 Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. 47 "For so the Lord has commanded us, 'I HAVE PLACED YOU AS A LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES, THAT YOU MAY BRING SALVATION TO THE END OF THE EARTH.'" 48 When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. 49 And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region. 50 But the Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. 51 But they shook off the dust of their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. 52 And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

As a result of Paul's speech the previous week, a large group from the city gathered such that they didn't miss Paul's second address. The Jews received this second message of Paul very jealously

which resulted in them instituting persecution of Paul and Barnabus by "incit[ing] the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city" (v. 50) such that they were driven out of the city. However, many of the Gentiles in the mixed crowd heard Paul's speech and responded in faith (v. 48). Paul and Barnabus did as Jesus had commanded the disciples (Matthew 10:14) and shook the dust of the feet in protest while they left that city and went on to Iconium (v. 51).

The reading marks the transition point of Paul's ministry from the Jews to the Gentiles (v. 46) which then became his primary ministry (see Galatians 1:16, Romans 15:15-16). Paul said later about this in Romans, "But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous" (Romans 11:11b). The outpouring of God's Spirit on the Gentiles was something that the prophets predicted long ago. Isaiah said, "I will make you a light to the Gentiles, and you will bring my salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6). This marks the dawn of a new and unseen era, the church age. Paul spoke about this later in his ministry:

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. (Colossians 1:25-27).

The big idea in the reading is that in the midst of rejection and persecution, the Word of the Lord is still able to penetrate and transform hearts.

Next, we move onto the second reading in which we will see the eternal impact of Paul's ministry on the eternal lives of believers from around the world.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The context of the reading from the Book of Revelation is a "parenthesis," or pause in John's revealing of the seven seal judgments being unveiled by Jesus. We cannot overstate the importance of understanding the context of any reading, but especially when we are dealing with the end-time events portrayed here in the Book of Revelation. When reading Revelation one has to understand that the story moves between visions of events happening on earth to things happening in heaven. Along the way there are frequent pauses in the action, or "parenthesis," where the vision shifts from earth to heaven or vice versa.

Looking back from today's reading in chapter 7, beginning in chapter 6 Jesus pours out a series of judgments on the earth (Revelation 6:1-17). With the unleashing of the sixth seal, great signs are seen in the sky (Revelation 6:12). This accords with what Jesus spoke about in Matthew 24:29-30. John said, "I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun

became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood" (Revelation 6:12). Jesus said about this in Matthew, "But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (Matthew 24:29). The next verse in this section of Mathew provides is with strong clue as to the overall context of the signs as it relates to Jesus' promised return (Acts 1:11). Jesus said, "And **then** the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory" (Matthew 29:30, emphasis added). Jesus said that He would return after the display of the signs in the sky, which is just before the seventh seal judgment is poured out on the earth. This brings us to the parenthesis in the text from which we find today's reading, after the revelation of the six seal, but before the return of the Lord Jesus and the unveiling of the seventh seal.

The event that happens before the parenthesis of today's reading is another tangential pause in which John records the gathering of 12 groups of elect saints (meaning believers) from within Israel. John records the details of this event in the opening of chapter 7:

1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. 2 And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, 3 saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads." 4 And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: (Revelation 7:1-4).

The angels divinely mark 12 "tribes" of Israelites consisting of a large number of 12,000 from each group. The value of 12,000 is perhaps not a literal number but rather indicative of the fullness or total completion of the task. Regardless, this marking is such that these people are set apart in a way that they receive God's divine protection during the balance of the tribulation period, some three and half years. John makes this clear later in Chapter 12. "But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent" (Revelation 12:14). This "sealing of the bondservants of our God" is also indicated in the parallel passage in Matthew. Jesus says in that Gospel about this event, "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other" (Matthew 24:31). This divine sealing, marking or protecting occurs just before Jesus' return and the unleashing of the final judgements upon the earth including the seventh seal, seven trumpet judgements and seven bowl judgments. The bowl judgments conclude the wrath that God has stored out to pour out upon the unbelieving world at the end of the age. "Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished" (Revelation 15:1).

After the divine "sealing" is completed, the story moves to John's parenthetical vision of a large

group of believers in heaven, which is where we pick up at today's reading.

Second Reading:

Note: Verse 13, which was omitted from the reading, is included separately.

Revelation 7:9 NAS95 9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands;

Omitted verse:

Re 7:13 ¶ Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?"

Revelation 7:14-17 NAS95 14 I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. 16 They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; 17 for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes."

In the reading John said, "After these things," meaning after the sealing of the "144,000" (Revelation 7:4) and the outpouring of the first six seal judgments upon the earth. The scene now shifts back from events happening on the earth to events happening in heaven. We must be cautious in our interpretation of the events in heaven because those occur outside of the space / time domain to which we are bound to on earth. However, John's juxtaposition of this parenthesis in this exact spot in Revelation is significant because it indicates the source of the great cloud of believers about which John is speaking in the reading. Verse 14 reveals that the source of the "great multitude" (v. 9a) are "the ones who come out of the great tribulation." These "tribulation saints" are the believers who are killed for their faith as the end of age grinds to a halt during the reign of the Antichrist on earth. Later John says about this wicked person, "It was also given to him to **make war with the saints and to overcome them**, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him" (Revelation 13:7, emphasis added). During this terrible time, the reign of the Antichrist will be so strong as to almost fatalistically determine the outcome of each person alive on earth at the time. "If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints" (Revelation 13:10). The saints that are killed during this time will be divinely protected in heaven forever; in contrast to the "144,000," we saw who are divinely protected on earth during the

tribulation period. This group in heaven will no longer hunger or thirst, or be too hot or too cold" (v. 16) "for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd" (v. 17a). We will read more about Jesus' role as Shepherd in the Gospel lesson. Many of the Christian saints on earth during this time will be martyred for their faith, while the "144,000" will enter the Millennial Kingdom alive to repopulate the earth. When Jesus returns He will gather the saints (believers) that have survived up until that point as well as those saints that died in the Lord. Saint Paul said about this, "Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). This is the return of the Lord promised in Acts 1:11 and the rapture (or catching up) of all believers both alive and dead as stated in this verse from 1 Thessalonians.

The big idea in the reading is that even though this world does not recognize and treat God's people (saints) well, these verses reassure us that there will be justice and provision in the life to come with a sense of eternal comfort. We see how Jesus acted as the divine Shepherd of His sheep in heaven. As we move onto the Gospel reading, we will see how Jesus portrays Himself as the Shepherd of His sheep on earth.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from Saint John. The Book of John casts Jesus as the Son of God and speaks of eternal life in terms of knowing Him. The context of today's reading is Jesus' teaching on His role as the Shepherd of the true sheep in contrast to the false sheep and false shepherds that abounded in Israel during this time of extreme satanic activity surrounding Jesus' ministry.

Gospel Reading:

John 10:27-30 NAS95 27 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; 28 and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one."

The big idea in the reading is that God offers security to believers through the Great Shepherd Jesus Christ. Throughout the Scripture, the Lord God pictures Himself as the "Shepherd of the Sheep," and this occurs early in the Bible. The first time this concept appears is back in the Book of Genesis when Jacob was prophesizing about the twelve sons (and tribes) of Israel, this time about Joseph. "Joseph is a fruitful bough, A fruitful bough by a spring; Its branches run over a wall. The archers bitterly attacked him, And shot at him and harassed him; But his bow remained firm, And his arms were agile, From the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel)" (Genesis 49:22-24). The shepherd theme is reminiscent of the opening of Psalm 23, "The LORD is my Shepherd, I shall not want" v. 1). As we examine today's reading we find additional insight into the identity of this Shepherd of Israel. He emerges as a Shepherd-King figure Who has a special relationship with the LORD. This is none other than the Lord Jesus Himself, the about whom Jesus says of Himself, "I and the Father are one" (v. 30).

As believers in Jesus, we can find great comfort from John's writing. First, God will never lose any of His sheep, meaning that God Himself places a calling upon our lives to come to faith in His Son Jesus Christ (v. 28). Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:44). Second, we can trust that God will take care of us in the same way that a Good Shepherd takes care of His sheep. Finally, although we may feel judged by worldly people in this age, the only real judgment that counts is our True Judge the Lord Jesus Himself. We can trust that God's judgment will be correct in that as we enter eternity He will judge between the lost sheep and evil shepherds in our land and differentiate between the ones that do good in serving Him.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. How does the reading from the Gospel of John give you assurance that you are one of God's sheep? Some characteristics of His sheep are:

- His sheep hear His voice,
- Jesus assures us that He knows us, and
- His sheep follow him.

How can you use this Scripture to help you know that you are in the sheepfold and to counteract the doubts that the enemy uses against you to make you question your faith.

2. Looking at the first reading, how does the fact that Paul and Barnabus were met with rejection and violence while at the same time experiencing a degree of welcome give you an interpretative framework for your own experiences of sharing the Word of God with others?

Going Deeper

The following is Paul's speech to the Jews and Jewish converts (proselytes, Acts 13:43) in Antioch:

Acts 13:15-42 NAS95 15 After the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, "Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it." 16 Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, "Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: 17 "The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He led them out from it. 18 "For a period of about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness. 19 "When He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land as an inheritance–all of which took about four hundred and fifty years. 20 "After these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. 21 "Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. 22 "After He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, 'I HAVE FOUND DAVID the son of Jesse, A MAN AFTER MY HEART, who will do all My will.' 23 "From the descendants of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, 24 after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. 25 "And while John was completing his course, he kept saying, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am

not He. But behold, one is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.' 26 "Brethren, sons of Abraham's family, and those among you who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent. 27 "For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning Him. 28 "And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed. 29 "When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb. 30 "But God raised Him from the dead; 31 and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people. 32 "And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, 33 that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU.' 34 "As for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: 'I WILL GIVE YOU THE HOLY and SURE blessings OF DAVID.' 35 "Therefore He also says in another Psalm, 'YOU WILL NOT ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY.' 36 "For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay; 37 but He whom God raised did not undergo decay. 38 "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, 39 and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses. 40 "Therefore take heed, so that the thing spoken of in the Prophets may not come upon you: 41 'BEHOLD, YOU SCOFFERS, AND MARVEL, AND PERISH; FOR I AM ACCOMPLISHING A WORK IN YOUR DAYS, A WORK WHICH YOU WILL NEVER BELIEVE, THOUGH SOMEONE SHOULD DESCRIBE IT TO YOU.'" 42 As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging that these things might be spoken to them the next Sabbath.

Study Questions:

1. Trace the history of God's work in the world to bring people to reconcile people to Himself. For example:

- God chose the Jews and made them great in a foreign land (v. 17)
- . . .

2. List all of the evidence given by Paul in this passage to prove Jesus' Messiahship.

Readings for the Week

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