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

What is Salvation?



Next Steps (Continued):

The Bible says, ***"Nor** is there salvation in any **other**, for there is **no other name** under heaven given among men by **which** we must be saved." Acts 4:12*

You may ask if I believe, what must I do to be saved. The answer can be found in Romans Chapter 10:

"[T]hat if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.For the Scripture says, Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.For whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." (Romans 10:9-13)

Does this sound too simple? It is. Salvation is a free gift. Our main problem is that we want to do something to earn it. We cannot, it has been purchased for us. All we have to do is to seek God, and He guarantees you that He will show Himself to you. I have watched God work in the lives of dozens of people. I am absolutely sure that He will work in your life! I know that I called upon God and He answered me!

The next things that we need to discuss are the attributes of God. Many people have a personal view of God which may or may not be correct. They may be absolutely wrong in their view. Or their god

may not really be God at all. For years my god was myself, I sought pleasure as my source of personal fulfillment. Here is what God says about Himself in His book, the Bible.

(1) God is a Holy God

The word holy means separate. When applied to God, holy means apart from sin. Heaven as a place of God is holy. "And there shall in no wise enter into it [Heaven] anything that defileth…" (Revelation 21:27 KJV). People measure themselves by many different standards. These include (A) their own standards, (B) society's ever changing standards, and (C) their church or other religious institution's (or cult's) standards. It is worthwhile to ask ourselves where we fall upon these standards of judgment. Are we at the top of our class in our own standards? What about the standard set by our society? Since God is holy, He measures us by His holy standard. If God measured us according to His holy standard, where would we fall? The answer according to God, is FAR SHORT. Remember, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23) If we measured anyone against this standard, where would they fall? Again, they would fall FAR SHORT.

Since God is Holy, and Heaven is God's home and is also holy, would anyone be good enough to earn his or her way to Heaven?

(2) God is a God of Justice

The Bible records in Genesis 18:25: "Shall not the Judge of the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25c) God must do right. Let's suppose that a person measured up to God's standard of perfection, he fulfilled all of the requirements. What would God have to do? The answer is that He would have to let him into Heaven.

Here are several illustrations that help to explain the concept of justice.

(A) Suppose that I killed a person, went to the judge, and he let me go. Would that be just?

(B) Suppose that I killed a person, went to the judge and told him I am sorry I won't do it again. Then the judge let me go. Would this be just?

(C) Suppose that I killed a person, went to the judge and told him that I'm sorry, I won't do it again, and I will do some good deeds to make up for the murder of the person. Would that be just?

The key concept of God's justice is that sin demands punishment. God cannot excuse or overlook sin.

In light of God's holiness and justice, who deserves punishment and is anyone good enough to earn their way to Heaven? The answer is ALL deserve punishment, and no one is good enough to earn their way to Heaven.

(3) God is a God of Love

God cannot violate His holiness or his justice. He cannot tell us that I love you; I know that you have sinned, and technically you cannot go to Heaven but I will let you in anyway. God's love cannot violate his holiness and justice. He has to satisfy them. How? To satisfy God's justice, someone has to pay the punishment for our sins. We need a substitute. I cannot pay the punishment for your sins because I have also sinned. The only one that can pay the punishment for our sins is somebody who has never sinned. The only one that has never sinned is God. How can God die for our sins? The only way that God could die for our sins is to become a man.

For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. (Gospel of John 3:16-17 KJV)

But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8 KJV)

Jesus Christ died for your sins past, present, and future. Does that mean that everyone is going to Heaven? No. What determines who goes to Heaven? What is the difference between the sinner, and the redeemed forgiven sinner? There is a condition that must be met for those that are going to Heaven. Those who meet the condition MUST go to Heaven. Those who do not meet the condition MUST go to Hell. This condition is shown below.

(4) God is a God of Mercy

The condition that we must meet in order to go to Heaven is found in the book of Romans, and it reveals God's attribute of mercy. The Book of Romans was written by the apostle Paul to Gentiles (non-Jewish people) like myself:

[T]hat if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.For the Scripture says, Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For whoever calls on the name of the LORD ***shall be saved****. (Romans 10:9-13)*

What does the Bible promise if you meet the condition of God's mercy? The answer is, you WILL BE SAVED. When we look at the passage in Romans above, we see two things.

(A) You must believe that you are a sinner and as a condition of God's justice is headed to **Hell.**

Hell = No Hope

(B) You must receive the free gift of salvation without believing that you can earn it by good works. After this God's justice and mercy requires that you go to **Heaven.**

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

Heaven = Hope, through the Promise by God through saving faith.

The Bible says:

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me." (Revelation 3:20)

You have to believe and answer the calling from the Lord Jesus to save you. If you have not done so, confess your sins to God and exclaim your belief to Him that you believe and trust in Jesus for your salvation.

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 1-25-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 1-25-2015. This week we open with the first reading from the Prophet Jonah who wrote about events that happened just before the Northern Tribes of Israel were taken captivity by the people about whom he was writing. Then we move to the second reading from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians and then close with the Gospel lesson from Saint Mark.

The first reading is from the Book of Jonah. Jonah was a Prophet who came from the region near Jesus' hometown of Nazareth. The context of the reading is the fulfillment of God's call to Jonah to

go to Nineveh to preach to his foreign Gentile enemy. You may be familiar with what transpired in the first two chapters before Jonah finally obeyed God. His disobedience included getting on a ship going in the opposite direction at which point a fierce storm arose that threatened the lives of all of those on the ship. The sailors threw Jonah overboard where he was swallowed by a great fish. After being in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights it finally vomited him up on the shore. This is where we enter the story. *Note: All of the verses in the range from 1-10 have been included in order to provide the full context and meaning.*

1 Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you." 3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days' walk. 4 Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown." 5 Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. 6 When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes. 7 He issued a proclamation and it said, "In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. 8 But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. 9 Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish." 10 When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it. (Jonah 3:1-10)

What does this story teach us about God, the human condition, and our life in the world. First, we see that God is a God of second changes. Verse one says, "Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the **second** time." Second, God is a God of compassion and mercy. He sent Jonah to Nineveh as a mission of mercy to inform the people that Nineveh was going to be destroyed. Thirdly, we learn that God rewards faith (Hebrews 11:6). Verse 5 says that the Ninevites believed God and showed that in their actions. Fourth, we learn that God responds to their repentance by not destroying them. Finally, we learn that God's plan of salvation extends beyond the Jews to the Gentiles (Jonah 4:11).

Jonah was reluctant to bring this message of salvation to the Gentiles who were also his enemies. This story provides insight to the human heart. Even though Jonah had received a direct revelation from God as a prophet, he was at first unwilling to share that message with those whom he deemed unworthy. There is a little bit of this in all of our hearts, it is called spiritual pride. In contrast to Jonah's hard heartedness we see the surprise responsive hearts of the Ninevites (Gentile enemies of Israel). The Lord is no respecter of persons. We have this concept corroborated in Acts 10, "Opening his mouth, Peter said: "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him" (Acts 10:34-35). The story of Jonah reminds us to reflect God's heart, which loves all people (John 3:16).

The second reading is from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. The context is that Paul is answering questions that the Corinthian church had asked him. In this particular section, he deals with marriage, singleness, circumcision, and buying one's freedom from indentured servanthood. This passage relays the criteria for making decisions that drastically changes one's life.

29 But this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none; 30 and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess; 31 and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away. (1 Corinthians 7:29-31)

The criteria for making life-changing decisions is to have an eternal perspective. Paul gives certain examples about what that may look like for the Corinthian people. He is not encouraging singleness for the sake of holiness or an emotionless existence. He is saying however that we must view our circumstances in light of an eternal perspective. If this world in its present form is passing away, how now shall we live?

The Gospel reading is from Mark Chapter 1. The context is immediately after Jesus' baptism and subsequent temptation by the devil in the desert.

14 Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." 16 As He was going along by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen. 17 And Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." 18 Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. 19 Going on a little farther, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were also in the boat mending the nets. 20 Immediately He called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away to follow Him. (Mark 1:14-20)

This passage records the beginning of Jesus' public ministry that includes His message and the calling of His messengers. First, His message is one of good news, which is what the word "gospel" means. Jesus came to let people know that it was now time for them to respond to His invitation to enter into the kingdom of God. Instead of the kingdom of God being far away and only for a few elite people, Jesus let them know that the kingdom of God is actually among them (v. 15). The proper response to this good news is to repent, which means to turn from their sin, and believe in the gospel. This is the same response He asks from each one of us today.

The second part of this passage is the calling of His messengers. Simon, Andrew, James and John were all hardworking fishermen. Jesus invited them to be His disciples, which meant leaving their nets and following Him. In the case of James and John, this also meant leaving their father in the boat to carry on the family business without them. Jesus' disciples were not rabbinic students but were rather common tradespeople who would have been considered unclean by the religious authorities.

What we can see about God's heart from this passage is that He reaches out to the least likely candidates. First, Jesus proclaimed the Good News to the common person. One would believe that the Messiah would choose an elite class of religious leaders who show great promise in leading the kingdom. Instead, just as we saw in the first reading, God is no respecter of persons. The prerequisite for life in the kingdom is repentance and belief, not religious pedigree. In addition, God chose the lowly to be His representatives.

In my life, I have had to reconsider my beliefs regarding who would or would not come to believe in Jesus Christ. I worked in a state prison where I saw convicted criminals give their heart to the Lord that provoked deep change in their lives. Someone who would have been manipulative and self-seeking became trustworthy and sacrificial. One man in particular was a practicing Muslim and had even adopted a Muslim name. Over the years, his heart became softened and one day another of the professors led him to express faith in the Lord Jesus. This is just one example of people who are often marginalized by the Christian society thinking that they will never come to the Lord. How we treat people is a reflection of God's heart for them and that He wants all men to come to the knowledge of everlasting life in Him (2 Peter 3:9).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. As we saw in the lesson the word "gospel" is a word that means "good news." Do you see the message of the Bible as good news? If so, how is the kingdom of God being "at hand" good news in your life? How might this be good news to others in your life? Is there anyone with whom you would like to share the good news of Jesus Christ this year?

2. In the first and last reading we saw how God is no respecter of persons; He does not show partiality. How does the fact that God reaches out to the hearts of people who we may consider unlovable and impossible to reach challenge your beliefs about sharing your faith with others? Are there people that you are quick to judge? Pray that God would open your eyes to their potential and change your heart so that you can reflect His generosity in bringing unlikely people into the kingdom.

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/012515.cfm

First Reading JON 3:1-5, 10

Second Reading 1 COR 7:29-31

Gospel Reading MK 1:14-20

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

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 1-18-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 1-18-2015. This week we open with the first reading from the Book of First Samuel in which we learn about God's calling of this important prophet. Then we move to Saint Paul's First letter to the Corinthians and close with the Gospel lesson from Saint John. I included a brief story about a personal struggle I was having that is very common among men, which I hope encourages all Christians to be pure in their daily lives. We also include this week a more detailed study at the end regarding understanding our identity in Christ.

The first reading is from the Book of First Samuel. The context is the commissioning of the Prophet Samuel in the era of the period known as the Judges. This was the period of time when the history of Israel followed a pattern of rising and falling. God would allow His people to fall into the hands of their enemies, next the people would repent and God would raise up a deliverer. After some time in freedom, the people would begin becoming complacent again and the cycle would repeat. This was also the era in which the people "did what was right in their own eyes" (Judges 21:25) versus following the commandments of the Lord. *Note: Many verses were omitted in the reading. Since this*

is a more comprehensive study of the Scriptures we have included all of the verses between verses 1 and 19.

1 Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD before Eli. And word from the LORD was rare in those days, visions were infrequent. 2 It happened at that time as Eli was lying down in his place (now his eyesight had begun to grow dim and he could not see well), 3 and the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD where the ark of God was, 4 that the LORD called Samuel; and he said, "Here I am." 5 Then he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, lie down again." So he went and lay down. 6 The LORD called yet again, "Samuel!" So Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he answered, "I did not call, my son, lie down again." 7 Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, nor had the word of the LORD yet been revealed to him. 8 So the LORD called Samuel again for the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli discerned that the LORD was calling the boy. 9 And Eli said to Samuel, "Go lie down, and it shall be if He calls you, that you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for Your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. 10 Then the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for Your servant is listening." 11 The LORD said to Samuel, "Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. 12 "In that day I will carry out against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. 13 "For I have told him that I am about to judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knew, because his sons brought a curse on themselves and he did not rebuke them. 14 "Therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever." 15 So Samuel lay down until morning. Then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. But Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. 16 Then Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." And he said, "Here I am." 17 He said, "What is the word that He spoke to you? Please do not hide it from me. May God do so to you, and more also, if you hide anything from me of all the words that He spoke to you." 18 So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, "It is the LORD; let Him do what seems good to Him." 19 Thus Samuel grew and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fail. (1 Samuel 3:1-19)

This is the story of young Samuel's initiation into the office of Prophet. He wasn't familiar with how the revelation of the Lord was going to come since "the word of the Lord was rare in those days" (v. 1). At first, Samuel didn't recognize God's voice and instead thought that it was Eli the high priest who was calling him. Finally, Samuel listened to the Lord and, as a result of what God told him, he had to convey a very difficult message to Eli. This must have been a challenging task and a sort of test for this young man to undertake since what Samuel told Eli was very somber news. Samuel had to convey the message that nobody in Eli's family line would continue in their priestly duties forever (14). God had already revealed to Eli that there would be judgment upon him for his lack of restraint on his wicked sons (1 Samuel 2:27-36). This was the final confirmation that the prophecy would come to pass. As a result of all of this, God officially confirmed Samuel as a prophet as we see in the closing verse 20 (not included in the reading. "All Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the LORD" (1 Samuel 3:20).

Some important lessons that we learn from this passage include:

- God will fulfill His promises, whether they be blessings or curses. If this is the case, a point of application is to be aware of God's promises and live in light of these realities.
- God spoke through the prophets to disclose ultimate reality for those of us who are finite. While this might have felt harsh at the time, it was actually for humankind's good to know the Truth. Some of the prophetic utterances were divinely inspired to became part of our Holy Scriptures (1 Peter 1:21). These Truths can be heeded or rejected while we are here on earth. But God discloses these ultimate things so that we might live as wise people here and now.
- Because we can trust God's Word, it's important for us to study in light of the truth He has revealed to us. We see this in Samuel's life as he learned to listen and even to do difficult things in order to follow God's voice.

The second reading is from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. Saint Paul wrote this letter in response to several matters that were happening in the church including sexual sin, improper celebration of communion, and lawsuits between believers. This particular section is focusing upon the sexual liberties that some people were taking. The City of Corinth was known for temple prostitution and all forms of promiscuous sexual practices related to pagan worship. Some of these people were now converted and part of the church but did not understand proper behavior in light of their new status in Christ (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Paul gives the overarching principle for a believer's newfound freedom in Christ in verse 12. Then he explains a particular application of that freedom. *Note: The intermediate verses that were omitted in the reading have been included in order to provide the full meaning in context.*

12 All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything. 13 Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will do away with both of them. Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. 14 Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power. 15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be! 16 Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, "THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH." 17 But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him. 18 Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. 19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:12-20)

There are three overarching principles that Paul uses to help Christians be discerning about the choices that we make. First, when contemplating one's freedom in Christ, we must consider whether this helps or hinders our relationship with God (v. 12). Paul said that all things are permissible for him but not all things are beneficial (v. 12). The second main point is that when we are united in

Christ we are one with Him in Spirit; therefore, when we sin we drag Him into any sinful patterns that we engage in (v. 17). This should help us to consider how our choices affect Christ, not just ourselves. The third overarching principle to help us be discerning in our freedom is the fact that our bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit; therefore we are to honor God with our bodies (19-20). All of these points put together provide a very strong deterrent when we are attempted to go back into immoral and sinful patterns. We are not only encouraged to resist sexual immorality but Paul actually calls us to flee from it.

Way back in 2002 I was leading a Bible study and I made an offhanded comment about how all of us are hypocrites at heart in one way or another. After class a woman who heard my comment gently confronted me about this comment and said, "No, not everyone is a hypocrite and you were wrong in making that statement." Her words cut me to the heart because like David who was confronted by the Prophet Nathan (2 Samuel 12:1-13) I was deeply disturbed by her words. This was because at that instant I realized for the very first time in my life that I had been addicted to viewing pornographic images for many years. After I left the class I poured my heart out to God and a strange thing happened. Over the course of the next several weeks I realized that my attraction and compulsive desire to look at pornography was gone. Two weeks went by without an incident, then three, then a month, then two months. After about six months I began to think that I needed to take precautions in my life because even though God delivered me it would be possible for me to go back into the cycles of viewing pornography, which involves feeling bad about it and destroying it, staying away from it for a week or two, then inevitably returning to it to begin the cycle all over again. These cycles were actually very similar to what we read about in the first reading in the era of the judges. I am very thankful to the work that God did in my life on that day in 2002, and greatly respect the woman for the courage that she showed in confronting me that day.

People, and especially men, fly around like insects and get caught in webs: lies, pornography, alcohol, stealing, and lusting after loose women. Are we so naïve to think we are like the bees who have stronger wings and can brush through these webs without getting caught in them? Unlike the cobwebs that we just brush off as we walk by, we cannot do this so easily with the complex webs (temptations) that we live in today. For many, these webs may start out only as an annoyance, slowing their progress, but later on they become like glue, binding them. God tells us "For the power of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). "And lead us not into temptation" (Matthew 6:13 you read every week in Mass, you may not realize that God really does provide the power to you to stop your sinful, compulsive behavior, whatever it may be. God stands at the door ready to deliver us from our temptations, and I am living proof. If you are struggling with your own temptations and not feeling any relief I urge you to connect with a brother or sister in the Lord and confide in them about the struggle that you are having. Then turn to the Lord in prayer, together, and outright ask for God to deliver you from your temptation. I don't know how He will respond, but you can be guaranteed that He will answer your prayer in the best way possible for your benefit.

The Gospel reading is from John Chapter 1. The context is Jesus' gathering of His disciples after His baptism by John the Baptist. From this passage, we see that John the Baptist and his disciples

recognized Jesus' identity as Messiah early on in His ministry.

35 Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, 36 and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" 37 The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. 38 And Jesus turned and saw them following, and said to them, "What do you seek?" They said to Him, "Rabbi (which translated means Teacher), where are You staying?" 39 He said to them, "Come, and you will see." So they came and saw where He was staying; and they stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. 40 One of the two who heard John speak and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. 41 He found first his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which translated means Christ). 42 He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter). (John 1:35-42)

John the Baptist, who was the forerunner of Jesus, declared that Jesus was the Lamb of God (v. 36). He understood that Jesus' mission as Messiah would entail becoming the atoning sacrifice for the sin of the world (v. 29), thus becoming the sacrificial lamb of God. Even though Jesus had never gone through formal "rabbinical training" they still recognized Jesus as a rabbi. The word means "teacher" (v. 38). One of the first disciples was Andrew who found his brother Simon and told him about his discovery of the long awaited Messiah. It is very significant that when Simon recognized Jesus as Messiah one of the first things He did was to announce a name change for Simon to Cephas. This almost indicates a type of covenantal relationship with Peter that consisted of a name change and Jesus obvious vision of who Peter would became later in his ministry, the "rock." While Peter did not characterize rock-like qualities throughout the Gospels, Jesus called him by his new name, thus calling him to a higher level of living than what he had previously known.

Each of the readings this week point to the fact that God has a vision for who we can become if we surrender our lives to Him. Samuel became the prophet, the Corinthians became purified, and Peter became the Rock. What's God's vision for you? Read the following excerpt about God's vision for who you are in Christ. See if these truths counteract any of the webs you find yourself falling into.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

(refer to the next page)

Truth that Counteracts Lies:

"The list below itemizes in first-person language who you really are in Christ. These are some of the scriptural traits which reflect who you became at spiritual birth. You can't earn them or buy them

any more than a person born in the United States can earn or buy the rights and freedoms enjoyed as an American citizen. They are guaranteed to the person by the Constitution simply because he or she was born in the United States. Similarly, these traits are guaranteed to you by the Word of God simply because you were born into God's holy nation by faith in Christ." (Source: Anderson, N. T. (2000). Victory over the darkness. Ventura, CA: Regal books. p. 51)

I Am Accepted:

John 1:12	I am God's child.
John 15:15	I am Christ's friend.
Romans 5:1	I have been justified.
1 Cor. 6:17	I am united with the Lord, and I am one spirit with Him.
1 Cor. 6:20	I have been bought with a price. I belong to God.
1 Cor. 12:27	I am a member of Christ's Body.
Eph. 1:1	I am a saint.
Eph. 1:5	I have been adopted as God's child.
Eph. 2:18	I have direct access to God through the Holy Spirit.
Col. 1:14	I have been redeemed and forgiven of all my sins.
Col. 2:10	I am complete in Christ.

I Am Secure:

Rom. 8:1-2	I am free from condemnation.
Rom. 8:28	I am assured that all things work together for good.
Rom. 8:31-34	I am free from any condemning charges against me.
Rom. 8:35-39	I cannot be separated from the love of God.
2 Cor. 1:21-22	I have been established, anointed and sealed by God.
Phil. 1:6	I am confident that the good work God has begun in me will be perfected.
Col. 3:3	I am hidden with Christ in God.

2 Tim. 1:7	I have not been given a spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind.
1 John 5:18	I am born of God and the evil one cannot touch me.

I Am Significant:

Matt. 5:13-14	I am the salt and light of the earth.
John 15:1-5	I am a branch of the true vine, a channel of His life.
John 15:16	I have been chosen and appointed to bear fruit.
Acts 1:8	I am a personal witness of Christ.
1 Cor. 3:16	I am God's temple.
2 Cor. 5:17-21	I am a minister of reconciliation for God.
2 Cor. 6:1	I am God's coworker (see 1 Cor. 3:9).
Eph. 2:6	I am seated with Christ in the heavenly realm.
Eph. 2:10	I am God's workmanship.
Eph. 3:12	I may approach God with freedom and confidence. (Source: Anderson, pp. 38-39).

"Understanding your identity in Christ is essential for living the Christian life. People cannot consistently behave in ways that are inconsistent with the way they perceive themselves. You don't change yourself by your perception. You change your perception of yourself by believing the truth. If you perceive yourself wrongly, you will live wrongly because what you are believing is not true. Next to a knowledge of God, a knowledge of who you are is by far the most important truth you can possess." (Source: Anderson, p. 47)

Interaction:

1. Look at the list and star one that you sense is very well ingrained in your way of thinking and acting in the midst of unwanted transitions.
2. Circle one that you sense needs God's help to become more real in your life during unwanted transitions. You may understand it cognitively, but your life fails to reflect the reality of that truth.
1. Spend some time in prayer asking the Lord to show you more of His vision for who you are in

Christ.

1. If you haven't come to the place in your life where you have placed your trust wholly in the Lord Jesus Christ for your forgiveness of sin and you would like to do so you can turn to God in prayer and ask Him to change your heart just as He changed the people that were in the passages we just read.

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/011815.cfm

First Reading 1 SM 3:3B-10, 19

Second Reading 1 COR 6:13C-15A, 17-20

Gospel Reading JN 1:35-42

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 1-11-2015

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



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 1-11-2015. This week there are two alternative readings provided both for the first and second readings, we will look at each of them. Then we move to a brief Gospel lesson from Saint Mark in which we see John the Baptist's testimony about Jesus' baptism in which all three Persons of the Holy Trinity are represented.

There were two choices given this week for both the first and the second readings, we will give a brief analysis of all four. The first reading is from the Prophet Isaiah. Isaiah prophesied during the time from 739 – 681 BC to the Jewish people who had walked away from God in their hearts and instead observed rote repetitive religious practices which were meaningless to them. Additionally, though they were rich in physical blessings, Isaiah warned them about their harsh treatment of the poor (Isaiah 3:15). Isaiah frequently uses a technique called "prophetic foreshortening" in which significant yet distant events are displayed as happening in the near term, such that their fulfillment is "telescoped" or "foreshortened" together with near term events. He also uses a significant amount of Messianic typology such as the display of Jesus as the Suffering Servant in Chapter 53. A theological type is something that prefigures it's ultimate explanation, such as the Prophet Jonah being three days in the belly of the fish which prefigured Jesus being in the grave for three days (see Matthew 12:40). Another of the types that he displayed was King Cyrus who was the King of Persia under whom the later Babylonian captivity of Judah (the southern kingdom) ended. Isaiah named Cyrus as God's chosen instrument under whom the 70 year Jewish captivity would be broken hundreds of year before he was even born (Isaiah 44:28). In Chapter 42, it seems that Isaiah is once again speaking of Cyrus as a type of the coming Messiah (Jesus). As you read the opening verses of Chapter 42, you should recognize the typological representation of King Cyrus whose identity is soon lost in the revelation of the Person of the Messiah. As we read the text from Isaiah, we likely don't immediately see the person of Cyrus but rather Jesus because we are so familiar with how Jesus fulfilled this prophecy. For us the distant event in Isaiah's day of the coming of Jesus Christ

completely overshadowed anything about the immediate circumstances being encountered by the Jewish people during Isaiah's time. *Note: The reading omitted verse 5 that has been included in the text below.*

1 "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. 2 He will not cry out or raise His voice, Nor make His voice heard in the street. 3 A bruised reed He will not break And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice. 4 He will not be disheartened or crushed Until He has established justice in the earth; And the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law." 5 Thus says God the LORD, Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread out the earth and its offspring, Who gives breath to the people on it And spirit to those who walk in it, 6 "I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, And I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations, 7 To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the dungeon And those who dwell in darkness from the prison. (Isaiah 42:1-7)

The opening verse reads almost exactly like God's pronouncement made at the baptism of Jesus Who said, "This is my Son in Whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). The baptism of Jesus displayed the Holy Trinity of God much like we see in this reading. At the baptism the Spirit of God descended on Him as a dove (Matthew 3:16) along with the Father's pronouncement as we just noted. In Isaiah's text we see the Father pronouncing His pleasure in the Son along with the proclamation that God has put His Spirit upon Him (v. 1), something that certainly looks far beyond King Cyrus. As Isaiah continues he explains the nature of Jesus and His ministry, he will be quiet and meek (vv. 2 – 3), not boldly proclaiming as had his predecessor John the Baptist, but quiet and not even breaking a brittle reed or extinguishing a smoldering lamp wick (v. 3). Verse 4 says that Jesus will "not be disheartened until He has established justice in the earth." In verse five Isaiah provides God's profound stamp of creative authority, He is the One "Who spread out the earth and its offspring . . . ." He is also the One who called the people in righteousness to worship Him alone and reminded the Jews of His covenant with them (v. 6). He reminded them that one of their purposes was to be a light to the nations (v.6) to open the spiritually blind eyes of the people (v. 7). When the Messiah comes, He would also be a light to the nations, as Luke said in Luke 2:32 regarding Jesus. The Messiah will open the blind eyes of the people held in bondage, both to their sin as well as to the captivity they would experience under various civil kings such as Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus. Saint Peter referred to this when he mentioned freeing the spirits in prison (1 Peter 3:19). As believers, we can proclaim that although we have not seen Jesus we believe that He has freed us from the darkness of our own spiritual prisons where we were held by the evil one in darkness (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

The alternative first reading is also from the Prophet Isaiah. The context is just after the depiction of Jesus as the Suffering Servant on the cross, something that happened over 700 years after Isaiah penned it (Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12). An interesting note about Isaiah 53 is that it is a forbidden Book in Jewish circles, something the rabbis avoid and the vast majority of Jews have never heard. "Who has believed our report and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed," Isaiah said (53:1). This

powerful display of Jesus is followed by chapter 54 in which Isaiah shows God's everlasting kindness. "For a mere moment I have forsaken you, but with great mercies I will regather you. With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you, says the Lord your redeemer" (Isaiah 54:7-8). The reading today from Chapter 55 is just before God more fully revealed His plan to bring salvation to the Gentiles who would be in-grafted into His plan of eternal salvation (Isaiah 56). As you read, try to keep in mind the context in which Isaiah gave his message in a time when the Jews weren't listening to the voice of God.

1 "Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk Without money and without cost. 2 "Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And delight yourself in abundance. 3 Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, According to the faithful mercies shown to David. 4 Behold, I have made him a witness to the peoples, A leader and commander for the peoples. 5 Behold, you will call a nation you do not know, And a nation which knows you not will run to you, Because of the LORD your God, even the Holy One of Israel; For He has glorified you. 6 Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. 7 Let the wicked forsake his way And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, And He will have compassion on him, And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. 8 For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. 9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts. 10 For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; 11 So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it." (Isaiah 55:1-11)

Isaiah's message is a picture of God's grace and provides some important information about God and our relationship to Him. God is impartial (v. 1). "Everyone who thirds" can come to Him. Second, God's grace cannot be earned (v.2), it is unmerited favor (see Ephesians 2:8-9). Third, God's Word is life but we have to listen to it to obtain this life (v. 3). Fourth, God's promises to His people are eternal and specifically the ones in the Davidic Covenant will be fulfilled (v. 3). We can rest in the fact that God will complete the good work that He began with Israel regardless of how hopeless things may appear in the Middle East at any given instant.

In verses 6 – 9 the Prophet emphasized the need for a person in the Old Testament to see the Lord before it was too late (v. 6), repent of their sin (v. 7a), trust in God's ability to forgive sin (v. 7), and recognize their insufficiency and sovereignty of the Lord (vv. 8-9). His message in this section was a general evangelistic calling that also gives us some insights into the nature of God. First, God is compassionate and forgiving of sin even though He is far above people in His ways and thoughts. Second, God calls everyone to repent of his or her sin and place their trust in Him. Third, people must not wait to place their faith in God as it may easily become too late when they become hardened by sin and the opportunity for them to believe passes. Finally, God reminds us that His ways are far above our own. In context this means that the way that God brings sinners to repent of

their sin and place their trust in Him is beyond our understanding, it is a mystery of God (John 3:8). This is what we discussed a in a previous issue when we studied Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus in John Chapter 3.

In the closing verses (10 – 11), Isaiah said that in the same way that the seasons are regular and reliable (v. 10) so it is that God's Word is regular and reliable (v. 11). The rain and snow water the seeds and make them fruitful. Therefore, God's Word operates in the hearts of His people through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:10-13) in order to make them fruitful.

The first alternative for the second reading is from the Book of Acts. The context is Peter's speech to the Roman centurion Cornelius (Acts 10:1), a god-fearing Gentile who respected the Jews by giving them alms (Acts 10:2). Cornelius had seen an angel of God telling him to send a delegation to bring Peter to Joppa so he could speak with him.

34 Opening his mouth, Peter said: "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, 35 but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him. 36 The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all) — 37 you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. 38 You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him." (Acts 10:34-38)

Peter explained how as we saw in Isaiah 42:6 that God's plan of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ wasn't limited just to the Jews but extended to anyone who believed. Peter's speech came after he had seen a vision of a great sheet descending from the sky and filled with animals that were ceremonially unclean to the Jews (Acts 10:9-16). In this vision, God commanded Peter to "kill and eat," and said that these animals were not to be regarded as clean because they had been cleansed by God (v. 15). In order to further emphasize the importance of this vision God repeated it three times. Therefore, when Peter met with Cornelius and heard about the miraculous events that had happened with him too seeing a vision from God (in the form of an angel) Peter understood that the plan of salvation had been extended to the Gentiles. In the New Testament era the church has stepped in where Peter left off, proclaiming the message of salvation to everyone, not just to the Jews as was Peter's (the Rock) primary ministry.

The second alternative for the second reading is from the Book of First John. The context of Chapter 5 is John's teaching on the nature of a person whose heart has been spiritually born of God (John 3:3). As you read, take note of both the characteristics of a Christian and second the assurance that God has provided them in His promises.

1 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him. 2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. 4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is

the victory that has overcome the world–our faith. 5 Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? 6 This is the One who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. 7 For there are three that testify: 8 the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. 9 If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for the testimony of God is this, that He has testified concerning His Son. (1 John 5:1-9)

The Book of First John provides a series of tests that reveal the heart of a true believer, and in the reading today we see several of them. First, a true believer follows the commandments of God (v. 2 -3), meaning the Ten Commandments plus the rules written on their heart through their conscience through the working of the Holy Spirit. Second, the true believer overcomes the world (v. 4), meaning that they are separated from it in a spiritual sense. Finally, a true believer is in tune with the Spirit of God that is truth (v. 6), who also testifies that Jesus is the Son of God. The Holy Spirit reveals this through the Holy Scriptures and in order to follow His testimony we must endeavor to read and study the Bible that is His revelation. Finally, John provided a picture of the Holy Trinity present at Jesus' baptism that we will see again in the Gospel lesson.

The Gospel lesson is from Saint Mark. The context is John the Baptist's proclamation of the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry. John was described as a most unusual man "clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist" (Luke 1:6). John the Baptist was Jesus' cousin, having been born to Elizabeth (Luke 1:34-37, Jesus' disciple John, the one whom Jesus loved, was also Jesus' cousin). His coming marks the fulfillment of Isaiah 40:3, "A voice is calling, "Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God." Here John introduced the Servant spoken of by Isaiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

7 And he was preaching, and saying, "After me One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals. 8 I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." 9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; 11 and a voice came out of the heavens: "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased." (Mark 1:7-11)

Now that John the Baptist had come, he was announcing the glorious coming of Jesus Christ (v. 7). John the Baptist said, "After me One is coming who is mightier than I" (v. 7a), then humbly said, "and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals" (v. 7b). John the Baptist then foretold how Jesus would not only baptize with water, such as he was doing, but would send God's Holy Spirit (v. 8). He then testified about the baptismal event of Jesus in which all three Persons of the Trinity were represented including the voice of the Father (v. 11), the Holy Spirit descending like a dove (v. 10c), and of course Jesus Himself.

What does all of this mean for us as we live out our lives as Christians? First, like John, we also are called to "prepare the way of the Lord" by preaching the Good News to the world that if they repent of their sin and place their faith in Jesus Christ they will have eternal forgiveness in eternity with

God. Although the church has in no way replaced Israel, the church is God's light to the Jews and the Gentiles during the church age until Jesus returns in glory. God is "patient and not willing that any should perish" to the extent that He uses unusual people like John the Baptist and even more unusual people like you and me to do His work! Finally, since the return of the Lord Jesus is imminent we need to accelerate our proclamation of this message, as well as live in a way befitting of His soon return.

Have a great week and if you get a chance please stop by the web page and leave a comment on this article.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

Read the following verses and answer the questions that follow.

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 NAS95 3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 4 in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

1. In the reading from Isaiah 42 we saw how the Messiah would be a light to all of the nations to open their spiritually blind eyes and hearts. What does Saint Paul say regarding the identity and actions of the active agent who blinds the eyes of everyone who does not believe that Jesus Christ bore the penalty for their sins on the cross?

2. The Jews were called as a light to the nations to bear witness of His glory and the divine plan of redemption through faith in God's promises and the coming of the Messiah who would bear their sins (Isaiah 53). As an "ingrafted" (Romans 11:17) believer in the faith of Abraham, in what ways are you working to combat the activities of the blinding agent(s) to bring the light of the glory of the Gospel to the people in your life? After you answer, would you consider building a list of those people in your life that don't know the Lord Jesus Christ and commit to pray for them on a regular basis until it becomes a habit?

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/011115.cfm

First Reading IS 42:1-4, 6-7 or IS 55:1-11

Second Reading ACTS 10:34-38 or 1 JN 5:1-9

Gospel Reading MK 1:7-11

Source(s):

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

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Dewey's Testimony



My Testimony

***Note: The text and numbers that are included in parenthesis are references to verses in The Bible. They are included for support and encouragement to all who read this testimony.**

This is my personal testimony regarding how Jesus Christ has changed my life:

Introduction:

Process. This single word can be used to summarize my relationship with Jesus Christ. Defined as "a series of actions or steps taken in order to achieve a particular end," the process of which I am referring to is God sculpting me into the "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14) masterpiece that He has created me to be. The "series of actions/steps" involved in the sculpting procedures are never-ending and I will not be a finalized work until until I reside in The Kingdom of Heaven (1 Peter 5:10). However, my journey with Christ during my Earthly life is not one of

perfection, but of direction. Although that journey tends to be ever changing and unpredictable, the direction always remains constant- Steadfast pursuit towards "the narrow gate" (Matthew 7:13-14) with the Heavenly Father as my guide (Psalm 32:8). With each passing day, God continues to mold me into the Disciple I was created to be (Isaiah 64:8). Throughout the course of this eternal walk with God, it is only Him that I wish to receive glory, honor and praise; I am merely a vessel at the disposal of my Master (2 Timothy 2:21). The Lord has placed it on my heart to publicly share my story of being redeemed by His Grace and Love, and it is my prayer that through the sharing of my testimony, God's Love can be witnessed and received by somebody who comes across this text. To all reading this, may The Lord bless you and keep you everyday of your life (Numbers 6:24), and may you come to experience the greatest love this world has ever seen through a relationship with Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:4-5)! Never forget: God loves you more than you could ever fathom no matter who you are, where you come from or what you have done in your life (Romans 5:8)!

Some background information about my life, and the mission that The Lord has placed on my heart to carry out:

My name is Dewey Dovel, and I am a Disciple of Jesus Christ. My mission for my life is to do everything in my power to spread The Gospel to all of creation (Mark 16:15), while sharing God's Love in my words and deeds (1 Corinthians 16:14). I want to be a "fisher of people" (Matthew 4:19), and a bold witness for The Lord (Acts 4:29). I want to live my life as a humble servant of The Kingdom of God consecrated to our Heavenly Father in order to fulfill my life's purpose: Complete devotion to carrying out "The Great Commission" (Matthew 28:18-20). I have been called to preach The Gospel, and I will do so as enthusiastically, eagerly and passionately as I can (Romans 1:15) while being as obedient as possible to the direction and guidance that the Holy Spirit provides me with throughout the course of my ministry/life (John 16:13). I couldn't feel anymore blessed or humbled in regards to where my life is taking me, and in the fact that God would anoint me with a future of proclaiming His Message; As the Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:16: "For when I preach The Gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach The Gospel." I truly am compelled to preach The Truth that is Jesus Christ (John 14:6) and the love that He has for the WHOLE world (John 3:16). I believe that there is no greater message to be shared in our world, than the message that is God's Love for humans exhibited through what Christ did for us on The Cross (1 John 4:10). It is His everlasting love that millions in our world today are longing for; They search to fill the void in their lives with anything they can find to satisfy the eternal emptiness that encompasses their hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Millions relish in temporary sin and pleasure to escape from the problems that they are faced with on a daily basis only to be disappointed and further grieved as their efforts to escape prove to be futile (Hebrews 11:25). Many individuals are searching for truth to the seemingly endless questions that are present in our world while longing for a better tomorrow (John 18:38). Our world wants change, revolution and solutions to fix our society and rescue mankind from the pits of our own self-destruction! It is only through Jesus Christ that we can witness a transformation in the hearts of humans (Ezekiel 36:26). Only through Christ can man find the solution to its problems and fill the void that is present at its core (Psalm 16:11). Only through Jesus Christ can we experience the hope and change we long for as a world (1 Peter 1:3)! It is through Christ alone that my life was forever changed! He has brought me a renewed life

filled with joy, peace, rest and hope for my future. In placing your trust in Him, He will do the same for you! (Matthew 11:28-30)

Prologue To My Testimony:

Now I know this introduction of who I am might make me appear as if I have had my life together from day one. Many people that I have shared these aspirations and desires for my life with are blown away by my passion and zeal I have for what God has called me to do; Many are quick to note that the typical 19 year old college student would much rather be intoxicated with the world than intoxicated with the Holy Spirit! Truthfully, I wish I could honestly say that the man described in my introductory paragraphs was the man that I have been since day one. As I alluded to towards the end of the previous paragraph, that man being described couldn't be any farther from the man I was before I met Christ! As a matter of fact, the man described in the previous paragraph does not paint an accurate picture of the man that I was the first 17 years of my life. In actuality, my past paints a clear picture of the two faced, narcissist, porn addicted, insecure, spiritually lost young man that I was until the moment when The Lord rescued me from the clutches of worldliness. It wasn't until I turned to Jesus Christ, repented (turned away from) of my sin and accepted Him as my Lord and Savior by receiving Him into my heart by faith that my life was changed. It wasn't by good works or anything that I ever did to earn my salvation or righteousness in the eyes of The Lord, but it was God's Grace alone that saved me from my hopeless life (Ephesians 2:8-9). It was through God's Power manifested through the Holy Spirit that regenerated my life, and continues to direct the course of my life on a daily basis. Jesus Christ set me free (John 8:36), and gradually pulled me out of the abyss that was Satan's grasp on my life. It was at The Cross where my life was changed forever; As I discovered from personal experience, it is ONLY at The Cross where our lives can be made new, and restored eternally through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17-19)!

Testimony:

I grew up in a household with a family strong in their Christian faith. As a child, I constantly sought my parent's approval and did everything I could to make them proud of me. My parents showered me in nothing but love, and I couldn't be anymore blessed or thankful to have them as my parents. I loved nothing more than the feeling of pleasing my parents, and over the course of time I made it my top priority to receive attention and praise from them. However, as I began elementary school it didn't take me long to realize that it would take a different kind of behavior in order to stand out in front of my classmates. From my perspective at the time, the behavior that was necessary to obtain attention from my peers was not the same behavior that my parents had taught me during my childhood. I knew that in order to be "cool" and "fit in," I would have to act in a way that was similar to the people I was surrounded with. Although this behavior would not reflect how my parents raised me, I was willing to do whatever it took to win the approval of my peer group. After all, garnering attention and praise from my parents had always been great, so naturally I assumed that any kind of attention received from my peers would be equally as satisfying. I wanted popularity, I wanted acceptance and I was not going to be labeled as average. My desire for self-gratification and attention was so powerful (even at a young age), that I began to act out in any way possible to be the

center of attention. The line that divided right and wrong became a blur to me as I starved for prominence in my social circle; Because I believed it would make me "cool and grown up," I began to swear at the age of 7. In a short amount of time, my flamboyance and ostentatious antics began to gain me the notoriety that I hoped for. In reflection, the publicity I was receiving from my classmates was more negative than positive. Nevertheless, I was satisfied that people were paying attention to me. Like it was with my parents (in my eyes), the actions of Dewey Dovel were the focal point of my peers. Unfortunately, I got to the point to where I was living two lives: the one my parents saw at home while I was in their presence, and the one I lived when I was around my peers. This was only the beginning of my gradual start down a slippery slope that only led to feelings of emptiness, discontentment and inadequacy. Before long, my growing thirst for social acceptance and conditional happiness would reach such a point that nothing could quench it. Heading into the genesis of my adolescence, I was in trouble.

I was confirmed and baptized at Crossroads United Methodist Church when I was 11 years old. As I previously noted, my family was strong in their faith, and as far as I was concerned I had inherited their faith/religious beliefs. We attended church as regularly as we could, and from conversations with my parents in addition to what I learned at church, I had a decent idea (for an 11 year old) about who Jesus was, and what He did for mankind. I also knew that if one was a Christian, they got to go to Heaven and at the time that was enough for me to want to be a Christian. After all, in my thought process I determined that one would be crazy to not want to go to Heaven! It was also around this time that I discovered that many of my classmates were beginning to be baptized or had already been baptized. I did not want to be left out of something that appeared to be the popular thing to do amongst my peers. So around the beginning of 6th grade, I began to ask my parents if I could be baptized since I was a "Christian." I told them exactly what I knew they wanted to hear: "I believe that Jesus Christ died for my sins and I accept Him as my Lord and Savior." Sure enough, my plea for their approval regarding my baptism was good enough to receive their blessing. Following a "Confirmation" process through our church, I was baptized and I couldn't have been any happier! My parents were so proud of me, and now I finally had the justification to brag to my classmates that I was baptized. Looking back, in my heart I know that although I had been baptized and had "accepted" Christ, I had not fully surrendered my life to Him; I had not truly accepted Christ into my heart, but merely said the right things to appease my parents so I could do what I believed to be the popular thing to do at the time. The fruit that was produced (See Matthew 7:15-20) in my life for the next 6 years would prove that I was still as spiritually lost as I was before I was baptized. Honestly, things only got worse for me (spiritually/emotionally/socially) from that day forward for quite some time.

My life was a blur from that day forward. On the surface, things were looking great; I was excelling in school and in baseball. My parents couldn't have been any more proud of the man I was becoming. I was attending church weekly, and proudly proclaimed that I was a Christian to my peers. Life was about as good as it could have been, or so it would appear to be from the outside. Truthfully, reflecting back on my life from 11-17, I couldn't have been anymore miserable. At the age of 13, I became addicted to pornography. My misery was fueled by this powerful addiction and the effects of my newfound obsession would prove to be tumultuous. I was fascinated with the visual and

physical temporary pleasure that pornography offered me. I knew from my parent's instruction that premarital sex was wrong, and somehow to this day I have abstained from it. However, my mentality soon became that if I could not have sex, I was going to get all the sexual satisfaction I wanted from what online pornography had to offer me. It did not take me long to become consumed with lust, and buried deep in the trap that is porn. Also, my language and dialect was very inappropriate; It felt as if every other word I said was a curse word, and try as I did, I could not stop cursing by my own power. What had begun as an attempt to sound cool to impress my peers had now become words that were rooted deep within my vocabulary. Worst of all, as middle school progressed into high school, my efforts to win the approval of my peers were failing. Out of frustration for what I perceived as a lack of my classmate's appreciation of me, I began to treat many of my peers very poorly, and from that moment forward I felt that the only way I could get any acceptance was to act out in negative ways. This would result in me spending more time in the halls exiled from class than actually in the classroom. Because of growing insecurity of my public perception, I began to brag about my ability to play baseball and would lie/exaggerate about anything that could make me appear honorable to my classmates. I was completely enslaved to my desire to be popular, admired and accepted. Seeing my continued failures of gaining social acceptance only compounded my despair. To counter my growing depression, I turned to pornography even more and used it as an outlet to escape my self imposed "problems." Pornographic material provided me with a temporary outlet to satisfy myself and take my mind off of my growing social failures. I began to fall deeper and deeper into worldliness, which only magnified the temptations that were present in my life. Of course, with no Biblical foundation or relationship with God, I had no power of my own to withhold from porn or other forms of sin that I clearly knew were wrong. I trudged through my first two years of high school before I changed schools. The change of schools was the most difficult thing that I had endured at that point of my life. Not only was I separated from the few friends I had at my previous school, but I became a social outcast at my new educational institution. I can't begin to express the depression I felt on a daily basis during my junior year of high school. I had zero true friends and felt lost and alone. Granted, I had completely brought everything on myself. I was difficult to relate to, made little effort in participating in fellowship with my new classmates and distanced myself socially in fear of being rejected. As my senior year of high school rolled around, I was at rock bottom spiritually, emotionally and socially. I was deeply depressed, and I began to feel more alone than I had ever felt in my entire life. I had no desire to live, and thoughts began to cross my mind as to if anybody would even care if I died. In my opinion, my life lacked purpose and I felt as if my future had no direction whatsoever. All of this led up to November 18, 2012 when my life was changed forever; It was on that date that I met the "Prince of Peace" for the first time in my life (Isaiah 9:6). In a matter of minutes following my introduction to Him, my life was never the same.

It was Thanksgiving Break. I was at my Grandmother's house alone, and I was deep in thought on the living room couch. Nothing in my life seemed to bring me any satisfaction. I felt exhausted spiritually from carrying the weight of my sinful baggage that I had accumulated from years of pornography addiction, self imposed social rejection and insecurities surrounding my public image in the eyes of my peers. I didn't know where else to turn, and as far as I was concerned life had lost its appeal. In hindsight, I was so consumed with the negative effects that my sin was having on my life that I was completely oblivious to all of what I had been blessed with. I had a full college

baseball scholarship, I was set to graduate high school with honors and my family had provided me with virtually everything that I had ever asked for. Yet in the midst of it all, I could only dwell on my countless failed attempts at obtaining the social clout and attention that I craved. At some point during that emotional "pity party," I took out my cell phone in preparation to watch a pornographic video in order to escape from the onslaught of my despairing thoughts. As I took the phone out of my pocket, I noticed out of the corner of my eye a small book sitting on my Grandmother's coffee table. For whatever reason, I decided to pick it up and see what it was; It was a daily devotional book! Intrigued, I put my phone back in my pocket and started flipping through the pages and realized that there was a specific devotional for each individual date for every day of the year. I proceeded to turn to the November 18 devotional (the date of that particular day) and began to read the contents of the page. Immediately, my eyes burned from the tears that began to form, and before long I was weeping in the middle of my Grandmother's living room. Everything that I had been going through in my life socially, emotionally and spiritually was written on that page. It was as if I had given an interview of my life to a reporter, and I was reading the notes that were taken over what I had said. After I finished reading the devotional, I did something that I hadn't sincerely done in over 6 years- I prayed! In prayer, I asked God for the forgiveness of my sin, and begged for Jesus to come into my heart. I pleaded to my Heavenly Father that He would help give me the strength to change my life, turn away from my sin and restore it in such a way to remove my pain, insecurities and depression. Following my prayer, I felt a greater peace than I had ever felt in my entire life. Nothing special happened to me physically, but in my heart I knew that something had changed. At that moment, I officially was Born Again (John 3:3)! It was November 18, 2012 that I secured my eternal citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven. From that day forward, God began to transform every facet of my life! (Romans 12:1-2)

Through the power of The Holy Spirit, I put on "the new self," (Ephesians 4:24) or became a new Dewey Dovel! Obviously, the change I was undergoing was a process; I did not overcome my life of habitual sin overnight. However, the more I prayed, and the more frequently I read my Bible, the less attractive my old lifestyle trends became. I actually began to have success in overcoming the temptations in my life that were causing me to stumble and experience the heartache/inadequacy that I had been feeling for so many years. Slowly but surely, my language and dialect became more appropriate (Ephesians 5:4 & James 3:11). Over the course of a year and a half, my battle in overcoming pornography addiction was complete through the Power of Jesus Christ! I discovered that the Power and Authority I had in the Name of Jesus was far more powerful than my lustful urges and sinful nature (Luke 10:19)! Also, The Lord freed me from the domineering insecurities of pleasing all of my peers. I began to solely focus on living out God's Will for my life to the best of my ability, and in time my concern for popularity/social prestige vanquished (Galatians 1:10 & 1 Thessalonians 2:4). To my surprise, the less I focused on being popular and forcing my peers to like me, the more my peers showed me their approval/favor. Nearly a year following me becoming Born Again on that November afternoon at my Grandmother's house, God called me to preach The Gospel. In June 2014, I was baptized again firmly solidifying my full circle in being transformed by The Lord into a New Creation! To make a long story short, God changed my life. It was through my faith in Him, and the encouragement He gave me through what The Bible teaches us about His Love that I could be set free from my life of sin (Romans 6:15-23). Honestly, overcoming my sin was not an easy

task. The change was not instantaneous, and it was not always smooth sailing. There were many periods of frustration and confusion. There were occasional instances in which I would suffer a temporary relapse into pornography or cursing. However, the constant factor that gave me the strength to overcome my intoxication with worldliness was God's Love for me! I realized that no matter how many times I stumbled, God's support and love never wavered (Psalm 136:1). When I was at my lowest moments, God was right by my side (Psalm 23:4). He was always with me, even before I knew Him intimately through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 13:5). It was through Christ that I had the strength to overcome all the inequity in my life that was bogging me down (Philippians 4:13). It was Christ that gave me a new peace, a new hope and a fresh start in my life (Lamentations 5:21). No matter how many times I stumble (I continue to stumble more than I could ever keep track of), God's Love is enough to cover all my wrongs (Proverbs 10:12)! Jesus Christ has paid the price for my sin (1 Corinthians 6:19-20); He has made me righteous before God (1 Corinthians 1:30), given me new life (Galatians 2:19-21) and ONLY Christ deserves all glory, honor and praise (Revelation 5:12)! Not only has Jesus Christ changed my life, but He has the power to revolutionize EVERY life! He was sent by God to be the sacrifice for the sin of the WHOLE world! He is available to ALL people! (1 Timothy 2:4) He is ready to make an eternal impact on your life if you allow Him to do so! (James 4:8) Have you placed your trust and faith in Jesus Christ? Have you personally met the Prince of Peace?

Decision:

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin."- John 8:34

Some of you reading this testimony might very well be prisoners to sin. You are prisoners to pride. You are prisoners to jealousy. You are prisoners to lust or insecurities. You are in bondage to some sort of immorality and you long to be set free. You are a prisoner and you have tried time after time to be set free, but you haven't been able to escape through your own strength. I tell you the truth, you can be set free by Jesus Christ! The truth shall set you free!

It is through Jesus Christ that we are set free from the shackles and bondage of all our sin, mistakes and failures. It was only through God's Divine, Perfect Love that our lives can be transformed. It is through the precious blood of Jesus Christ that we can be set free of all our sins! (Romans 3:22) On that cross 2000 years ago, Christ bore all of our sin, guilt and shame; On that cross, Jesus Christ endured the epitome of the most humiliating, torturous way to die for EVERY person that has ever or will ever live! It is through God's Mercy, Forgiveness, Grace and Love that we have forever been set free of our transgressions when we freely receive Jesus Christ into our hearts as our Lord and Savior!

Jesus Christ came to save mankind! He came to set the whole world free from the bondage of sin! That means everybody! That means YOU! He thought about YOU on that Cross! Jesus Christ belongs to the whole world! He belongs to every race, gender, and ethnicity! He belongs to every sinner! He

is the atonement for all sins! He lived a perfect, sinless life and willingly died on the cross to wipe away your sins once and for all! You can be cleansed, and you can have a clean slate from all your past, present and future transgressions! Through Jesus Christ, you can be eternally set free and eternally forgiven! All you have to do is ask Jesus Christ to come into your heart by faith, freely receive Him as your Lord and Savior, and turn away from your sin (repent) with the help of God through His Holy Spirit! It's as simple as that!

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."- 2 Corinthians 5:21

Wouldn't it be awesome to go to bed tonight and every night thereafter knowing you're forgiven of your sins? Wouldn't it be refreshing to know everyday that you are going to Heaven, and someday you will get to dwell with God for all of eternity? You can have that peace and assuredness by coming to The Cross, and accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior by FAITH!

"I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation."- 2 Corinthians 6:2

Have you made the decision to accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? If so, say a similar version of this prayer to yourself, and at the conclusion of it you can know that you are forever saved! (See Romans 10:9-13)

Sinner's Prayer:

Dear God, I come to you in the name of Jesus Christ. I acknowledge to You that I am a sinner, and I am sorry for my sins and the life that I have lived; I need your forgiveness.

I believe that your only Son Jesus Christ shed His precious blood on the cross and died for my sins, and I am now willing to turn from my sin in repentance.

You said in Your Holy Word, Romans 10:9 that if we confess that Jesus is Lord, and believe in our hearts that God raised Jesus from the dead, we shall be saved.

Right now God, I have acknowledged to you that I accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior. With my heart, I believe that You raised Jesus from the dead, and I receive Him into my heart by faith. At this very moment I have become Born Again, and accept Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior and according to His Word, right now I am saved.

Thank you Jesus for your unlimited grace which has saved me from my sins. Lord Jesus transform my life so that I may bring glory and honor to you alone and not to myself.

Thank you Jesus for dying for me and giving me eternal life.

In Jesus' Name I Pray,

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

Amen.

If you just said this prayer and you meant it with all your heart, you are saved and you are Born Again. The Kingdom of Heaven is rejoicing at this very moment as new members of God's Kingdom have been established (Luke 15:10)! Congratulations! You are going to Heaven, and nothing will ever be able to take that away from you! The truth has set you free, and the truth (Jesus Christ) will be with you for the rest of your lives! Moving forward, I encourage you to get involved regularly with a church or Bible Study program to help you grow in your faith. Once you find a church home, the next step is to become water-baptized. By accepting Christ you are baptized in the spirit (John 20:22), but it is through water baptism that you show your obedience to God (Romans 6:3-8). Water baptism is a symbol of salvation from the dead, and a public profession of our faith in Christ.

This is only the beginning of your walk with The Lord! May our Heavenly Father bless you and keep you everyday of your life, while serving as your guide as you embark on your journey with Him by your side forever!

God Bless!

"…And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."- Matthew 28:20

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 1-4-2015



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

Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 1-4-2015. This week we open with the first reading from Isaiah which is a picture of the coming of the Messiah and the eventual acceptance of Him by all of Israel. Then we move to the second reading from Ephesians in which we see the revelation of the mystery of the church, that salvation had come through Jesus for both Jewish and Gentile believers. Finally we conclude with the Gospel lesson from Matthew in which we study the visit of the magi to the baby Jesus in Bethlehem.

The first reading is from the Prophet Isaiah. The context is a continuation of his prophecy regarding the redeemed Israel after the Nation's full acceptance in the Messiah we know as Jesus Christ. In the previous chapter God told the Jews, "A Redeemer will come to Zion, And to those who turn from transgression in Jacob," declares the LORD" (Isaiah 59:20). When the Messiah comes, God said about Him that "My Spirit which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your offspring, nor from the mouth of your offspring's offspring, . . . from now and forever" (Isaiah 59:21). God said that eventually all of Israel would recognize the Messiah. "So they will fear the name of the LORD from the west And His glory from the rising of the sun, For He will come like a rushing stream Which the wind of the LORD drives" (Isaiah 59:19). Until then, the Messiah is a light to the Gentiles (Isaiah 49:6), the primary people that form the Church – with the exception of the few "completed Jews" who have believed. Jesus is a light to all of the nations during the church age, a period unforeseen by the Prophets (Ephesians 2:3-6), as we will see in the second reading. This Light is the only means of salvation, both for Jews and Gentiles alike (John 14:6, Romans 1:16). Until Israel is awakened to the reality of Jesus Christ as their Messiah, darkness will continue to reign in their hearts along with the rest of the unbelieving people in the world.

1 Arise, shine; for your light has come, And the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. 2 For behold, darkness will cover the earth And deep darkness the peoples; But the LORD will rise upon you And His glory will appear upon you. 3 Nations will come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising. 4 Lift up your eyes round about and see; They all gather together, they come to you. Your sons will come from afar, And your daughters will be carried in the arms. 5 Then you will see and be radiant, And your heart will thrill and rejoice; Because the abundance of the sea will be turned to you, The wealth of the nations will come to you. 6 A multitude of camels will cover you, The young camels of Midian and Ephah; All those from Sheba will come; They will bring gold and frankincense, And will bear good news of the praises of the LORD. (Isaiah 60:1-6)

After a prolonged four hundred year period of darkness, Jesus was born in a stable in Bethlehem, the light that shined upon the world. Isaiah predicted that Gentile leaders from the nations would bring gifts of gold and frankincense to the newborn King, something we will read about later in the Gospel message that happened with the visit of the magi. Perhaps most striking in Isaiah's message was further insight into the nature of God's provision of salvation. It would be for the whole world, not just for the Jews. God said that "Nations will come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising" (v. 3). Like many prophecies in the Old Testament about salvation, the reading today has an "already, not yet" sense. God has already provided His salvation to all who believe, both for Jews and

Gentiles. During the church age, which is a mystery not seen in the Old Testament, God provides salvation to everyone who will believe (Romans 1:16). However, in a future day all of Israel will come to believe (Romans 11:26). It is interesting to note that Isaiah's prophecy did not include the giving of the third gift, that of myrrh. As we will see in the Gospel lesson, this gift was also given to Jesus during the visit of the magi. Myrrh is a substance used in the preparation of a body for burial. This provided an insight about the nature of Jesus' ministry, that He would have to give up His life for His sheep (John 10:15).

We can read this now with the perspective of a prophecy that has been fulfilled by Jesus' first advent, in that He claimed to be the Light of the world (John 8:12). The question for us is whether or not His light fills our lives. If not, we are still in darkness, lost and alone in the world. If we want Jesus' light to fill our lives, all we have to do is ask. He will begin to work in our lives, helping us to become who the Father wants us to be. Then we will be part of those who come to Him to worship Him and so fulfill the prophecy "And will bear good news of the praises of the LORD" (Isaiah 60:6).

As we move to the second reading from Saint Paul's Letter to the Ephesians we will see more about this mystery of the church of God. The context is Paul's message to the Gentiles that salvation has come to them through Jesus Christ. *Note: Verses 1, 3b, and 4 which were skipped in the Mass reading were included in order for you to obtain the full meaning from the complete context.*

1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles– 2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; 3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. 4 By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; 6 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, (Ephesians 3:1-6)

Paul explained to the Ephesians the mystery of the church, that salvation had come both to the Jews and also to the Gentiles through the revelation of the Gospel (good news) brought about by the apostles and prophets (like Paul). The mystery is profound, that "the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (v. 6). As we move onto the Gospel lesson we can catch a glimpse of the drama that was unfolding in the universe as Gentile magi from the east recognized Jesus as a king in fulfillment of ancient prophecies while the majority of the Jews missed the significance of His majestic birth.

The Gospel message is from Saint Matthew and is the record of the visit of the Magi from the east while Jesus was yet an infant and still in Bethlehem before his family had to flee to Egypt because of the threat from King Herod. The context is that Jesus had already been born in Bethlehem and his parents had moved him out of the stable into a house. He was an infant, less than two years old. We can see this from Herod who later in Matthew made a plan to kill all infants two years old or younger. The "magi" were likely people from the Babylonian region along the Euphrates River in

present day Iraq south of Baghdad. They were educated people that were part pagan priest, magician, and scribe. They were also interested in astrology and this was woven into their mystical religious beliefs. According to what we know about the ancient beliefs of the magi and people like them, they would have seen this prophesy of a star as that of a coming ruler, a new King. When the star appeared in the sky to them back at their home somewhere in the east they began planning this journey to locate the new King! Evidently the magi either had some contact with Jews in their region or they had this prophesy handed down through some other source (maybe through Daniel and other Jews who were part of the Babylonian captivity hundreds of years prior to this). Nowhere in the text does it say that there were three of them, this comes from the three gifts. There were likely a small group of them but they would have been accompanied by a large number of guards and servants. This would have made their arrival that much more disturbing to King Herod, who was the current King of the region. He wasn't a Jew but was actually an Edomite (or called an Idumean), one of Israel's ancient enemies. We can trace the region of Edom back to Esau who lived there, but it is probably even older than that. The best one word description for Herod would be the word "scoundrel" because of the way he dealt with the people. Herod bought his way into the throne by paying off the Roman government. He was so bad that he had one of his wives executed and also just before he died he executed his son!

1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, 2 "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him." 3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet: 6 'AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.'" 7 Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him." 9 After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 11 After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12 And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way. (Matthew 2:1-12)

God gave the magi revelation to locate the Messiah through their understanding of the Jewish Scriptures, and they responded to this information by journeying a great distance to present gifts to the newborn King. They went to the most logical place where a King should be born, the capital city and seat of power. But when they arrived in Jerusalem, the newborn King was nowhere to be found. The Jewish scholars were consulted and they revealed that the place of the King would be in an unexpected place, a little town of Bethlehem. Matthew quoted the prophecy about which the magi were made aware from the Prophet Micah some four hundred years before the birth of Jesus. "But as

for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity" (Micah 5:2). The Jewish scholars may also have been made them aware of another prophecy in the Book of Numbers regarding a sign in the sky. "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near; A star shall come forth from Jacob, A scepter shall rise from Israel, And shall crush through the forehead of Moab, And tear down all the sons of Sheth" (Nu 24:17). The magi, unlike most of the Jews, recognized the validity of these predictions and acted upon it when they saw the sign in the sky.

As the story played out, King Herod, who pretended to be interested in worshiping the newborn King was only trying to get information in order to murder him. Later in Matthew's Gospel we find out about Herod's evil plan to locate the Messiah and kill him, something which God thwarted through having the holy family flee to Egypt (Matthew 2:16-18). After the magi had gathered untold information from the Jews, they continued following the star until it stood overhead at which point they found the Child, Jesus in Bethlehem. The immediate response of the magi was first to "rejoice exceedingly with great joy," second to present three royal gifts, and three to worship the Lord Jesus (vv. 10-11). At the closing of the story they were directed by God not to return to King Herod so they went back to their country another way (v. 12). These gifts were very valuable and through God's insight provided the means for Joseph and Mary to flee to Egypt to avoid King Herod's attempts to murder Jesus. As we said in the first reading, the last of the gifts was something that was prophetic of Jesus' ministry. Myrrh was something that was used in the preparation of a body for burial. Even though Mary was told about the suffering that she would experience in her life because of Jesus (Luke 2:34-35) she likely never connected the giving of the myrrh with what would happen to Jesus until after He had given his life for the sins of the world.

What does all of this mean for us today? First, God calls **us** to believe and follow His revelation about Jesus. It's not just enough to believe in certain things about Jesus (James 2:10), we are called by God to act upon our beliefs and to follow Him. This means forsaking our old way of life (Ephesians 4:22) and walking on the narrow road following the ways of Jesus Christ (Matthew 11:25-30). Second, when we do believe and follow Jesus our inherent response to God is joy. We may not always be happy, but we will find deep and meaningful joy that is rooted in having peace with God. Finally, when we believe and follow Jesus another response is to fall down and worship Him and respond in giving. During the Christmas season as we celebrate the birth of Jesus we commemorate this historical event by giving gifts to one another. However, the larger picture is that as followers of Jesus Christ our response to the truth of the Gospel message is that God has implanted within us a heart of generosity. Therefore, we can live in the spirit of Christmas all year round.

As we begin a new year, we often think of the past year and how we want to be strategic with the year ahead. We often make resolutions for changes, contemplate goals that we to accomplish and try to wash the slate clean of past mistakes. While these are all noble pursuits, they are not enough to provide the type of life that we were meant to live. Jesus said that he came to give us a different sort of life than one of merely trying harder and forcing ourselves to do things that don't come naturally to us. He came to change our lives, to give us new intentions in our hearts, so that we would want to become a new type of person, one who has love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,

faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Instead of making a New Year's resolution on your own strength that will probably get broken in the next few days, why not talk to the Lord and ask Him to make you into a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17)? Why not take the plunge and lean your full weight on Jesus by asking Him to give you His light for each step of your journey in this New Year? Are there decisions you need to make? Are there relationships that seem chaotic? Are there places of greed or anger that need to get confessed? Why not spend some time talking to Jesus and asking Him to be Lord of your life, to cleanse you of the past and to give you His light for the future? He's willing, are you?

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. The magi diligently searched for the king based upon the information they obtained from various sources including the Scriptures as well as from speaking to the Jews to inquire about where they may located the baby Jesus. What is the primary means that God provides for us to locate Jesus today? During the New Year, how will you make an effort to continue to search for the truths about Jesus in this primary source during your daily life?

2. In what ways can you relate to this summary statement of today's Gospel message?

"God calls us to believe and follow His revelation about Jesus and when we do our response is joy, worship and giving."

Believe:

Follow:

Respond:

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/010415.cfm

First Reading IS 60:1-6

Second Reading EPH 3:2-3A, 5-6

Gospel Reading MT 2:1-12

Source(s):

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

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 12-28-2014



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 12-28-2014. This week we open with the first reading from Genesis 21. Next we look at two readings for the second reading, one from Hebrews and the second from Colossians. Finally we conclude with the Gospel lesson from Luke.

There are two first readings, either from the Apocrypha or the Book of Genesis, we will cover the one from Genesis. The reading is from Genesis chapters 15 and 21.

> *1 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great." 2 Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 And Abram said, "Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir." 4 Then behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir." 5 And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." 6 Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:1-6)*

> *1 Then the LORD took note of Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had promised. 2 So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him. 3 Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac. (Genesis 21:1-3)*

In the first passage, we see that Abram was concerned that he did not have an heir. However, God comforted him by telling him that he would not remain childless. God promised to give him a son that would eventually start the line of descendants that would outnumber the stars (v. 5). They key verse is "Abraham believed in the Lord, and He reckoned it to him as righteousness" (v. 6). This is an important point that Paul brings out in the Book of Romans that salvation is by faith and not by works (Romans 4:3). This story is important to us because it clarifies the foundation of a people saved by faith in God. We are part of the offspring of Abraham when we walk by faith, as Abraham is the father of all who believe (Romans 4:16).

In the second passage, we see the fulfillment of God's promise made to Abram, now called Abraham. Sarah bore Isaac in her old age, something that was impossible but was not too difficult for God. You can imagine how hard it would be to believe in God's promises when it seems so impossible. But now they experienced the reality of God's blessing through the birth of Isaac, the child of promise. Likewise, God calls us to live by faith and His promises even when the feels the odds are against us.

There were two passages given this week for the second reading, we will cover each of them. The second of the readings was from Hebrews chapter 11. *Note: We included the intermediate verses that were skipped in the reading.*

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

considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type. (Hebrews 11:8-19)

We see in this passage of God has commended Abraham and Sarah for their faith. In the beginning of this chapter we find that "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6). With all of these examples including Abraham who is the father of faith, we find inspiration for our own journey of faith in God. Abraham was called out of his own land to go to a place that God would show him. He didn't have a map of God's plan but walked in faith day by day of what he did know. Then God promised him a son after Sarah was beyond the age of childbearing. By faith Abraham believed that God could perform this miracle. As we read earlier, Sarah conceived and gave birth to Isaac. When we walk by faith in God we are living as Abraham's children.

The other of the first readings was from Saint Paul's Letter to the Colossians.

12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. 18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them. 20 Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart. (Colossians 3:12-21)

Looking at the full context of this reading, we must understand that we first "put off" the old man because of who we are in Christ. Paul said in the opening of this chapter, "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God" (Colossians 3:1). That is a big "if." This passage is conditional upon a having a heart that has been changed by God (John 3:3, born from above). Paul continued, "For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3). After putting off the "old man" with its practices (v. 9), we are to put on the new man as explained by Paul in the reading. Paul culminates the list of things to "put on" by describing how love is the anchor for all of these good character qualities that we see in this passage. He said, "Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity" (v. 14).

The Gospel reading is from the second chapter of Luke.

22 And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "EVERY firstborn MALE THAT OPENS THE WOMB SHALL BE CALLED HOLY TO THE LORD"), 24

and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, "A PAIR OF TURTLEDOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS." 25 And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, 28 then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, 29 "Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, According to Your word; 30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation, 31 Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, And the glory of Your people Israel." 33 And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him. 34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed– 35 and a sword will pierce even your own soul–to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." 36 And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers. 38 At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. 39 When they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth. 40 The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. (Luke 2:22-40)

In the opening verses, Mary and Joseph were fulfilling the requirements of the Law that called them to provide a sin offering in the temple 41 days after the birth of Jesus. Next, Simeon comes into the story as man of faith of faith that patiently waited for the fulfillment of God's promise through the birth of the Messiah. Four hundred years had passed from the time of God's last revelation during which the Jews waited for the fulfillment of the promises. This time of silence was suddenly broken with the various miraculous events surrounding the birth of Jesus. This story tells of yet another miraculous outpouring of God's spirit of prophecy through Simeon and Anna. Simeon's prophecy focused upon Jesus being God's salvation prepared for all people, both Jews and Gentiles. He also prophesied to Mary about the grief she would bear over the Child's destiny. Anna, who was a prophetess, also verified that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

What do all of these things mean for us during this Christmas season? First, we can be confident that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's prophecies concerning the coming Messiah. He is the One who provides salvation to all people. Like Simeon, Anna, Abraham, and Sarah who waited almost their entire lives to see the fulfillment of God's promises we too need to remember to be patient and wait for God's fulfillment of His plan in our own lives. This means that even when we encounter extremely difficult circumstances we can still trust that God is working behind the scenes and will finish the good work that He has begun in is (Philippians 1:6). In this Christmas season if you are having a difficult time finding joy amongst the celebration, you can turn to Jesus who is the "consolation of Israel" (Luke 2:25).

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

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the first reading, we read how Abraham patiently waited for the fulfillment of God's promises. In what ways do you identify with Abraham and Sarah who waited for the fulfillment of an impossible promise? How does their story of faith give you direction and hope for your own journey of faith?

2. In the second reading, Paul provides a list of qualities that flow out of being set apart and loved by God that should affect how we live our lives. How does being "holy and beloved" (Colossians 3:12) change how you approach relating to God, yourself, and others? Re-read the list of character qualities (Colossians 3:12-21) and consider how each of them are expressed relationally in your own 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/122814.cfm

First Reading SIR 3:2-6, 12-14 or GN 15:1-6; 21:1-3

Second Reading COL 3:12-21 or HEB 11:8, 11-12, 17-19

Gospel Reading LK 2:22-40

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Keywords:

Abraham, Sarah, Simeon, Anna

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 12-21-2014

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



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 12-21-2014. This week we open with the first reading from the Book of Second Samuel chapter 7. Then we move to the second reading from Paul's Letter to the Romans and conclude with the Gospel lesson from the Gospel of Saint Luke. Christmas is only four days from this Sunday's lesson so we pray that all of you have a very Merry Christmas.

The first reading is from the Book of Second Samuel. This is the second Book following First Samuel, and was originally one Book until the separation made by the translators of the Greek Old Testament known as the Septuagint. First and Second Samuel were written by an unknown author and chronicled the events from the birth of the Prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 1:1-28) until the last words of King David (2 Samuel 23:1-7). First Samuel opens with a description of the corruption of the Levitical priesthood (1 Samuel 2:12-17) and the threats from Israel's main enemy the Philistines who captured the Ark of the Covenant (1 Samuel 4). One of the main things that happened in these two Books was the pronouncement by God of the Davidic Covenant. This is the Covenant which is God's promises to David made through Nathan and found in 2 Samuel 7, the text of today's reading.

Note: The intervening verses that were skipped in the reading were included below in order to provide the full context and meaning.

> *1 Now it came about when the king lived in his house, and the LORD had given him rest on every side from all his enemies, 2 that the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within tent curtains." 3 Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your mind, for the LORD is with you." 4 But in the same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying, 5 "Go and say to My servant David, 'Thus says the LORD, "Are you the one who should build Me a house to dwell in? 6 For I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the sons of Israel from Egypt, even to this day; but I have*

> *been moving about in a tent, even in a tabernacle. 7 Wherever I have gone with all the sons of Israel, did I speak a word with one of the tribes of Israel, which I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?'" 8 "Now therefore, thus you shall say to My servant David, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, "I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people Israel. 9 I have been with you wherever you have gone and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make you a great name, like the names of the great men who are on the earth. 10 I will also appoint a place for My people Israel and will plant them, that they may live in their own place and not be disturbed again, nor will the wicked afflict them any more as formerly, 11 even from the day that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. The LORD also declares to you that the LORD will make a house for you. 12 When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, 15 but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. 16 Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever."'" (2 Samuel 7:1-16).*

According the rules given the Moses the Lord's dwelling place was in the tabernacle, but King David desired to build a temple for God (v. 2). Nathan the Prophet told David instead that the Lord would make a house for him (v. 11) and that his descendent (whom we know was his son Solomon) would be the one to build the temple of God (vv. 12-13). The promises from God to David as relayed by the Prophet Nathan included first, that David would have rest from his enemies (v. 11), that his descendent would build a temple of God (vv. 12-13), and finally that the "throne of David" would be established forever (v. 13 b). We understand that after God later revealed the mystery (as we will see in the second reading), the One who would sit upon the throne wasn't King David's son Solomon, but the Lord Jesus Himself. Verse 14 is a description of Jesus' Second Advent, the coming rulership of Jesus during his coming earthly reign as we see confirmed by Revelation 12:5, "And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne." Israel is the one who gave birth to Jesus, and at His First Advent He was taken up into heaven (Acts 1:9). Jesus is the One that will sit on the Throne of David. Although Mary was the earthly host of Jesus, He was born as a child of the Nation of Israel, "a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars" (Revelation 12:1). Jesus is the Messiah of the Jews, and through the mystery of the church the Messiah of the Gentiles as well.

As you were reading the verses from 2 Samuel, it can be confusing as to whether the author was speaking about King David or the coming Messiah, the Son of David. The people in King David's era hearing about Samuel's prophecies may have desired to see David's greater son and believed that somehow Solomon would reign forever. However, Jesus is the One called the Son of David. In the

opening of Matthew's Gospel Jesus is called the Son of David (Matthew 1:1). Later in Matthew Chapter 9 two blind men called out, "Have mercy on us Son of David" (Matthew 9:27). Even those that doubted knew Jesus' identity. At one point after Jesus had performed great miracles the crowd called out, "this man cannot be the Son of David, can he?" (Matthew 12:23b). When Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday the crowd cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David; BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 21:9). Jesus had a messianic title, and was the One to whom was promised His reign would endure forever (2 Samuel 7:13).

As we celebrate Christmas just four days from today, this is the Royal Person that we commemorate being born in the manger, where all ceremonial lambs are born. After Jesus' resurrection, He "sat down at the right hand of the Father" (Hebrews 10:12), "having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time" (ibid). He is "waiting from that time onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET" (Hebrews 10:13). "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:13). Paul said that salvation is a free gift that comes through faith. "8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). No matter how hard we try, Jesus' work is still finished for us. We walk in the strength of God's power for His purposes as we see in the very next verse of Ephesians. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). As believers we have been sealed by the Holy Spirit, as Paul said in Chapter 1 of Ephesians. "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation–having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13). These are the spiritual truths that we are celebrating during Christmas.

As we move onto the second reading from the closing version of the Paul's Letter to the Romans, we see that the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus was the fulfillment of a great mystery that wasn't understood until after He came. The Gospel of Jesus Christ was something that was hidden in the former times, but is now understood, a mystery revealed by God through Jesus Christ.

> *25 Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, 26 but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith; 27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen. (Romans 16:25-27)*

The Good News (or Gospel) is appointed as a light to all the nations (v. 26d) which leads to the obedience of faith (v. 26e). Although this was a mystery in the ages past (v. 25b) it was manifested both by the many prophetic verses in the Scriptures and through the voice of the Prophets as we saw in the first reading. Paul said more about this mystery Ephesians:

> *2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you;*

> *3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. 4 By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; (Ephesians 3:2-5)*

The salvation of the Gentiles through Jesus' sacrifice and the church age was a mystery that wasn't revealed until after Jesus came. Although the prophecies were there concerning the in-grafting of the Gentiles into God's kingdom (see for example Isaiah 56:6-8 "foreigners," the salvation of the Gentile Rahab in Joshua 2:9-11, the salvation of the Ninevites in the Book of Jonah). Isaiah was more explicit about this coming salvation for the Gentiles. He said about Jesus, the Root of Jesse, "And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him, And His resting place shall be glorious" (Isaiah 11:10). Again, these are the spiritual truths that we celebrate during Christmas

The Gospel lesson is from Saint Luke and records the miraculous event of the birth of Jesus to the Virgin Mary.

> *26 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. 28 And coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." 29 But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. 30 The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; 33 and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end." 34 Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" 35 The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. 36 And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God." 38 And Mary said, "Behold, the bondslave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. (Luke 1:26-38)*

Many points arise from the reading. First, Mary is called the "favored one" in verse 28. She said about herself later in this chapter, "For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondslave; For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed" (Luke 1:48). One can hardly imaging the calling which God placed her to be the bearer of the Son of God. In the reading, God called Mary who found favor with God who was to be the bearer of God's Son Jesus who would through the "ark" (see below) of His bodily sacrifice save the world from their sin. Jesus was conceived not through normal human means but through the virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit (v. 34). Mary, was obviously very perplexed at all that was happening and called out to the Angel to explain these things (v. 34), who was more than glad to do so. Second, Mary's Son would be

called "the Son of God" (v. 35) and the Lord would give to him the throne of David (v. 32), the fulfillment of the prophecy that we saw in the first reading. Finally, Mary (and Joseph) were obedient to God in naming their Son Jesus, and Mary promised her obedience to God by calling herself "bondslave of the Lord" (v. 37). By the way, Jesus is from the Hebrew name "Jeshua," which means "the Lord is Salvation." Jesus is the salvation of the entire world, which is why we are so pleased to celebrate His birth on Christmas.

Noah, who came centuries before, was also called "blessed", and it was through the righteous and faithful acts of Noah that the world was saved from the flood. God said, "But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD" (Genesis 6:8). Noah built an ark to save the people of the world from the wrath of God that was to literally be poured out through the Flood. The Blessed Mary on the other hand, bore the Son of God to be the ark of salvation for all who would believe. These similarities between Noah and Mary are important because they show how these two people were obedient to the difficult callings that God placed upon their lives. Although it's okay to ask questions when we discern the calling that God places upon **our** lives, it's also crucially important as believers to carry out His instructions.

While many of us are already familiar with the narrative concerning the birth of Jesus, this passage highlights important truths for our lives. First, Saint Luke brought out the fact that Jesus was born not through natural human relations but through the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit. This is important because since God is without sin this was the only means by which the sinless God-Man could come into the world. Second, since the virgin birth was a fulfillment of biblical prophecy we can trust other prophecies that speak to areas of our life and ministry. This includes things like how the second coming of the Lord will play out, how the world will be eventually unified under Jesus' earthly reign. Third, Jesus was sent to save His people from their sins. This is God's special invitation to counteract the destructive nature of sin in order to stand before a Holy God and not be rejected at the judgment. This is not only "a" plan for salvation, it is "the" plan. Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, no man comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

May you and your family have a very Merry Christmas.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the first reading, what began as a promise that David's son (we know as Solomon) would build a temple for God (v. 13a) expanded into a throne that would endure forever (v. 13b). The temple is a place where people gather to worship God, and in the Old Testament was a place inside of which God's Spirit dwelled. We know the ruler of the temple is Jesus forever, but how can the throne of the temple endure forever, when we know that it was destroyed in 586 BC and again in AD70?

2. In light of your answer to the first question, read what Saint Paul had to say in the Letters to the Corinthians. "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?" (1Corinthians 6:19). "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16). "And what

agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people'" (2 Corinthians 6:16).

How would you change your answer in light of the spiritual truth that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit on which Jesus is (and will) reign forever?

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/122114.cfm

First Reading 2 SM 7:1-5, 8B-12, 14A, 16

Second Reading ROM 16:25-27

Gospel Reading LK 1:26-38

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 12-14-2014

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



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 12-14-2014. This week we open with the first reading from Isaiah and then move to the second reading from Saint Paul's Letter to the Thessalonians. Finally, we close with the Gospel lesson that is a continuation of the study from John's Gospel that we began last week.

The first reading is from Isaiah 61. The first verse and a portion of the second were the ones that Jesus read from while He was teaching in the temple as is recorded in Luke 4:18. It is important to note that Jesus stopped reading halfway through verse two because the subsequent verses dealt with His Second Advent. With the benefit of hindsight it is easy to see this, although His listeners would not have been able to catch this important detail (see for example John 12:16). The verses in question (2b – 9) were omitted from the text of the reading covered in the Mass, although we have included them below in the section that is separated by the blank line. These intermediate verses (2b – 9) won't be fulfilled until after the church age when God pours out His judgment upon the earth during the tribulation period of the end times. As you read this Old Testament prophecy from the Prophet Isaiah you can almost imagine Jesus standing in the temple proclaiming His Word.

> *1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners; 2 To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD*

> *And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn, 3 To grant those who mourn in Zion, Giving them a garland instead of ashes, The oil of gladness instead of mourning, The mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified. 4 Then they will rebuild the ancient*

> *ruins, They will raise up the former devastations; And they will repair the ruined cities, The desolations of many generations. 5 Strangers will stand and pasture your flocks, And foreigners will be your farmers and your vinedressers. 6 But you will be called the priests of the LORD; You will be spoken of as ministers of our God. You will eat the wealth of nations, And in their riches you will boast. 7 Instead of your shame you will have a double portion, And instead of humiliation they will shout for joy over their portion. Therefore they will possess a double portion in their land, Everlasting joy will be theirs. 8 For I, the LORD, love justice, I hate robbery in the burnt offering; And I will faithfully give them their recompense And make an everlasting covenant with them. 9 Then their offspring will be known among the nations, And their descendants in the midst of the peoples. All who see them will recognize them Because they are the offspring whom the LORD has blessed.*

> *10 I will rejoice greatly in the LORD, My soul will exult in my God; For He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. 11 For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, And as a garden causes the things sown in it to spring up, So the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise To spring up before all the nations. (Isaiah 61:1-11)*

God revealed to Isaiah some important truths about the ministry of the Messiah Jesus. First, the Spirit of the Lord would dwell upon Him (v. 1). This truth is corroborated in the New Testament by eye witnesses to Jesus' baptism during His time on earth. The baptism of Jesus was recorded in three of the four Gospels. In the Gospel of John, John the Baptist said this about Jesus' baptism: "I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him" (John 1:32). Jesus, as God in the flesh, was in union with both the Spirit of God and God the Father as we find in the chronicle of Jesus' baptism. Saint Matthew detailed the event as follows. "After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased'" (Matthew 3;16-17). Here the entire Trinity of God is present. Jesus is being baptized, the Spirit descends upon Him, and the Father announces His pleasure in the Son.

Isaiah announced a second truth from God about the Messiah (that was of course yet future in his day), and provided some details about His ministry. The Messiah would be appointed by the LORD to do the following:

- "To bring good news to the afflicted" (v. 1b). Jesus brought the "Gospel," a word which means "good news." The Gospel was the good news for those who (and are) being afflicted, or poor in spirit (Matthew 5:3).
- "He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted" (v. 1c). Jesus was the spiritual healer. When

someone heals an injured person's wounds they "bind them up." Jesus did this to the injured world's heart. "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12, we will read this in context during the Gospel lesson).
- "To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners" (v. 1e-ff). The world has been held captive by sin, Jesus came to redeem the world and to free everyone held captive by it.
- "To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD" (v. 2a). The coming of the Messiah Jesus was the most "favorable year of the LORD" since the creation of the universe. Had the people accepted Jesus as their Messiah, Jesus' eternal reign would have begun. Jesus' coming would fulfill an untold number of Old Testament prophecies and open the way to the future renewal of the world through worldwide peace in the Millennial and eternal kingdoms.

Finally, if we move to the closing verses 10-11, we see some additional detail about the future ministries of Jesus as follows:

- The Messiah will give those who trust in Him a reason to rejoice: They will exalt the Name of the Lord in whose righteousness they will be adorned. "I will rejoice greatly in the LORD, My soul will exult in my God; For He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels" (v. 10).
- In the future, the world will be a place of universal righteousness and the earth's curse will be reversed. "For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, And as a garden causes the things sown in it to spring up, So the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise To spring up before all the nations" (v. 11).

The intermediate verses that were omitted in the Mass reading explain more about Jesus' ministry, but these details are concerning things that will happen after His Second Coming.

- After the Day of the Lord, referred as "the day of vengeance of our God" (v. 2), Jesus will comfort all those who mourn as a result of the terrible series of events that unfolded on the earth (v. 3). Part of what will happen during that time is terrible persecution of believers alive during that time. We see in the Book of Revelation how God comforts those who were martyred for their faith during this Great Tribulation period. "When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (Revelation 6:9-10).
- The war torn world will be rebuilt after the devastation brought about by the AntiChrist and God's vengeance of his evil rulership of the global commercial empire and false religious empire known as "Mystery Babylon" (v. 4).
- Gentiles will be in-grafted in the kingdom ("strangers," v. 5), as foretold by Paul in Romans 11:11-17. God will use the Jews' rejection of their Messiah during the unforeseen "church age" in order to bring the Gentiles into His eternal kingdom.

- The rightful priesthood will be restored to Israel with their honor restored with a double blessing (vv. 6-7). God said, "For I, the LORD, love justice, I hate robbery in the burnt offering; And I will faithfully give them their recompense And make an everlasting covenant with them. Then their offspring will be known among the nations, And their descendants in the midst of the peoples. All who see them will recognize them Because they are the offspring whom the LORD has blessed" (vv. 8-9).

That's a lot to digest. The key point of all of this is that the coming of the Messiah was a crucially important mystery that was fulfilled by the miraculous birth of Jesus that we will celebrate in just two short weeks from the date of these Sunday Mass study notes. We cannot underemphasize the importance of Jesus and as we transition to the second reading let's pause for a moment and ask God to help us to celebrate the upcoming holiday season with Jesus foremost in our minds.

The second reading is from the First Letter of Paul to the Thessalonians. The context is Paul's teaching on the upcoming calamity we mentioned in the first reading, the "Day of the Lord's judgment" (1 Thessalonians 5:2). Someone in Thessalonica had been teaching the false doctrine that the Lord had already returned (2 Thessalonians 2:2). Here Paul introduced the concept that the church would be taken up into the air along with church saints who had already died (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17). Chapter 5 opens with Paul's teaching on the **real** return of the Lord, for those alive during that generation when God will outpour His wrath upon the unbelieving earth. During that time many will come to faith in the Lord Jesus during perhaps the greatest turning of people's hearts to God since the creation of the world. Paul addressed these future believers and told them that "God had not destined them to wrath" (1 Thessalonians 5:9) and provided a list of instructions to them (vv. 11-15) including, "See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people" (v. 15). It is in this context that Paul provided the following instructions that are applicable to believers of all ages, and especially to those undergoing terrible persecution in the last days.

> *16 Rejoice always; 17 pray without ceasing; 18 in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 19 Do not quench the Spirit; 20 do not despise prophetic utterances. 21 But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; 22 abstain from every form of evil. 23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-24)*

Paul directed the believers to live in a state of unceasing joy and thankfulness (vv. 16-18) while holding to the truths of the Gospel message (v. 20, "do not despise prophetic utterances"). Because of all the false teaching that will happen in that era (and is already happening now, 1 John 2:18), they are to "examine everything very carefully" and only adhere to those things that are actually true (v. 21b, "that which is good"). Finally, Paul pronounced a blessing upon them, wishing that God would find them blameless upon His return, and noted that the written prophecy regarding what would happen in these last days would indeed prove to be true (v. 24). Paul's instructions to the

Thessalonians give guidance to us who would also live in light of truth. We do not do these things in order to be saved, we live this way because we are saved. It is God who sanctifies us—literally, sets us apart—so that our lives reflect His value system when we do not quench the Spirit of God who lives inside us. God is faithful.

Paul's message is important to us as we move towards the celebration of the birth of Jesus by the blessed virgin Mary. God calls us as believers to remember the work that He has done through sending Jesus to die on the cross for our sins. During the Christmas season we are to "set our sights upon Jesus." Although many in the world have set their sights upon Jesus in the manner of directing their weapons of unbelief against Him, Paul said that regardless of the circumstance and even in times of terrible persecution we are to "abstain from **every** form of evil" (v. 22, emphasis added).

The Gospel lesson focuses on what John the Baptist did to prepare people for the coming of the Messiah. John was a few months older than Jesus. They were cousins, so they very well could have spent time together as they were growing up and beginning to understand their unique place in God's redemptive plan. We read about the prediction of John the Baptist's ministry in last week's reading.

> *6 There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light.*

> *19 This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" 20 And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." 21 They asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." 22 Then they said to him, "Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?" 23 He said, "I am A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD,' as Isaiah the prophet said." 24 Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. 25 They asked him, and said to him, "Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" 26 John answered them saying, "I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know. 27 It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." 28 These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing. (John 1:6-8, 19-28)*

John the Baptist wasn't the Light but came as a forerunner of Jesus, the Light (v. 6-8). John the Baptist's purpose was to testify about Jesus so that people may believe (v. 7b). When the Jewish leaders asked John who he was, they inquired about whether he was Elijah or the prophet spoken of by Moses in Deuteronomy. The Jews were aware of these two prophecies, first that Elijah would return (Malachi 4:5) as well as the coming of a great prophet as predicted by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15. John answered them clearly by saying that he was neither the Christ (v. 20), Elijah (v. 21), or

the prophet of Deuteronomy 18 (v. 22). Instead, he quoted from Isaiah 40, with which they would have been familiar, "I am A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD'" (v. 23). Isaiah's description of John the Baptist was very accurate, as he was the one proclaiming Jesus in the wilderness "beyond the Jordan" (v. 28). John told them that the Messiah was among them but they did not know Him (v. 26) and that he was unworthy of even untying His sandal (v. 27).

The reading skipped a large section of text including verses 9 – 18. We are covering these verses because they are not being covered during the Mass during any soon upcoming Sundays.

> *9 There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 11 He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. 14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. 15 John testified about Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'" 16 For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. 17 For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him. (John 1:9-18)*

Even though Jesus created the world, many of His own people rejected Him as the promised Messiah (v. 10 – 11). However, this didn't stop the plan of God to grant salvation to all who believe (v. 12). Jesus was the "Word that became flesh" that "dwelt among [the disciples]" (v. 14). He is the one about whom John the Baptist testified, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me'" (v. 15). Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament Law (v. 17), and was the fleshly manifestation of God, because God the Father exists in the form of a Spirit that cannot be seen by man (v. 18). Jesus is eternal, because He existed before John the Baptist although He was born physically some months after this greatest of men (Matthew 11:11). These are some profound truths that we can ponder as our lives move towards the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ on Christmas Day.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the Gospel lesson we learned about John the Baptist who came as the fulfillment of the prophecy concerning the coming of a forerunner announcing the ministry of Jesus. Later in the Gospel, we learn that John's life was cut short by King Herod in an outright persecution for the content of John's message to repent and as Paul said in the second reading "abstain from every form of evil." Jesus took over where John left off and continued the calling to repent (Matthew 4:17), then His life was also cut short. What difference does knowing that **you** will be persecuted for your faith make in your life as you carry on this same message?

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

2. How does your understanding of the context of the second reading from Paul's First Letter to Thessalonians help you to place Christian persecution into a different context?

3. Review the list of what the Messiah was appointed for in the Old Testament passage of Isaiah. Pick one of the bullet points that resonates with you and talk to God about how this truth impacts you. Let God know that you want Jesus to be that kind of Messiah for you.

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/121414.cfm

First Reading IS 61:1-2A, 10-11

Second Reading 1 THES 5:16-24

Gospel Reading JN 1:6-8, 19-28

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 12-7-2014

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



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 12-7-2014. This week we open with the first reading from Isaiah in which we see a prophecy about the coming of the forerunner who would announce the Messiah. Then we move to the second reading from Second Peter and close with the Gospel lesson from the first chapter of Mark.

The first reading is from Isaiah chapter 40. This section of Isaiah focuses upon the preaching of the Gospel as well as prophecy concerning the coming of the Messiah (Jesus). In the first verse, "Jerusalem" refers to the Nation as a whole. *Note: Verses 6-8 that were skipped in the reading were included below.*

> *1 "Comfort, O comfort My people," says your God. 2 "Speak kindly to Jerusalem; And call out to her, that her warfare has ended, That her iniquity has been removed, That she has received of the LORD'S hand Double for all her sins." 3 A voice is calling, "Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. 4 Let every valley be lifted up, And every mountain and hill be made low; And let the rough ground become a plain, And the rugged terrain a broad valley; 5 Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, And all flesh will see it together; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken." 6 A voice says, "Call out." Then he answered, "What shall I call out?" All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. 7 The grass withers, the flower fades, When the breath of the LORD blows upon it; Surely the people are grass. 8 The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever. 9 Get yourself up on a high mountain, O Zion, bearer of good news, Lift up your voice mightily, O Jerusalem, bearer of good news; Lift it up, do not fear. Say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" 10 Behold, the Lord GOD will come with might, With His arm ruling for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him And His recompense before Him. 11 Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, In His arm He will gather*

> *the lambs And carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes. (Isaiah 40:1-11)*

In this passage, some timeless principles emerge for our lives today. A key point is that while humans are finite, God and His Word stand forever. If this is the case, then it is wise for us to study God's Word and to orient our lives around its truth. This passage also shares the two-sided nature of the Messiah's coming: "The Lord GOD will come with might, with His arm ruling for Him" and "Like a shepherd He will tend His flock . . .He will gently lead the nursing ewes" (v. 10-11). We see that God is gentle with those who need and accept His care, but He is also authoritative with those who are not willing to bend to His ways.

Another main theme in the reading is the prophecy of the future redemption of the Nation of Israel through the coming of the Messiah that will be announced by a forerunner. Although God disciplined Israel "double for her sins (v. 2), He began the restoration process first by sending John the Baptist as the forerunner of the Messiah Jesus as predicted in verse 3. Isaiah's message was a picture of the manner in which the Messiah Jesus would be revealed to the world through a spokesperson as a forerunner who sends a clear message:

> *Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. 4 Let every valley be lifted up, And every mountain and hill be made low; And let the rough ground become a plain, And the rugged terrain a broad valley; 5 Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, And all flesh will see it together; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken. (vv. 3b – 5)*

The forerunner, who in retrospect we know was John the Baptist, prepared the way for the coming of the King Jesus. John "cleared the way" by **preaching** the good news (the Gospel) telling the people that they needed to repent of their sins. John was removing the obstacles that lay in people's paths in order to receive the subsequent message from Jesus that He was the only way to God (John 3:3, John 3:16, John 14:6). John was "leveling the mountains and smoothing the ground" so the world could receive Jesus' Gospel. Like many prophetic writings, verse 5 has an "already not yet" sense in that although Jesus did come and His glory was revealed, in some future day He will return and all flesh will see the glory of the Lord.

Isaiah's message was also a picture of the literal, eschatological (end times) restoration of the Nation of Israel. In the last days, God will make Jerusalem the capital city of the universe and remove both the physical and spiritual obstacles standing in the way for people to come to the Lord in Jerusalem. Verse 3 says, "Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God." We see something similar to this in Revelation 16:12 where God says that He will make a way for the "kings of the east." Although the interpretation of this passage is difficult, it seems to mean that national leaders from regions to the east of Jerusalem will be converted to the true faith of God in the end times. Like many prophecies in the Bible, a day will come when we will be able to look back and understand the fulfillment of the prophecy in hindsight. Until then the best we can do is to "study to show ourselves approved" (2 Timothy 2:15). We must endeavor to utilize the prophecies to the best of our ability in a

way that calls the world to repent of their sin and place their faith in the one and only means of finding an eternal relationship with God, faith in Jesus Christ our Lord. Through Isaiah's message, we see the kindness of God who granted us salvation by His free grace (Ephesians 2:8-9). A caveat is that we must be willing to repent of our sins and turn from our former sinful behavior. This means to turn from, or agree with what God says about the seriousness of our sin.

The second reading is from the Second Epistle of Peter. The context is Paul's teaching on the return of the Lord which will occur at the conclusion of the period known in the biblical text as the "Day of the Lord." In this Epistle, Saint Peter described how the people in the future would say that since their daily lives were continuing as had been happening throughout all the previous generations that the Lord wasn't going to return. They would say, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation" (2 Peter 3:4). Paul informed his readers that Jesus would indeed return and reminded them of the flood that God unleashed upon the ungodly world during the days of Noah (2 Peter 3:4-7). What he was saying was that the coming Day of the Lord's judgment would unfold in a similar way as it did during the days of Noah. Our Lord had previously said, "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah" (Matthew 24:37). The reading for today picks up in verse 8.

> *8 But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. 9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. 11 Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! 13 But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. 14 Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless (2 Peter 3:8-14)*

As we said in the introduction to the reading, Peter said that in the future, scoffers would come saying that the Lord was delaying His return (2 Peter 3:4). Peter corrected this false teaching by explaining that God, Who exists in eternity, does not count time the same way people do on earth (v. 8). Since with God "a thousand years is like one day," the return of the Lord will come in an instant in the mind of God, quickly, "like a thief" (v. 10a). The reason that God has delayed isn't because He is not returning, but because He is longsuffering ("patient" v. 9c) and "not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (v.9d). This is the message that was preached by John the Baptist, the message that we will hear later in the Gospel lesson from Saint Mark. Peter went on to reveal some as yet untold prophecy about events that would happen in the universe sometime after Jesus returned. He said that the earth would be destroyed (or renewed) by fire (vv. 10b-11), and a new heaven and earth would be created "in which righteousness dwells" (v. 13b). Peter concluded the

reading with the crux of the matter. "**Therefore**, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless" (v. 14, emphasis added). He told them that since the Lord **was** going to be returning soon along with terrible events on the earth, and the earth would then undergo a purification process in which all unrighteousness would be removed, they needed to be behaving in a manner befitting of this knowledge. Jesus said, "But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into" (Matthew 24:43). The reality of Jesus' soon return should encourage us to live in a manner that is consistent with His character and ways.

As we move to the Gospel lesson, let's summarize what we have covered so far. We saw in the first reading how God in His grace would send a forerunner whom we know as John the Baptist to prepare the hearts of the people to receive the message of Jesus Christ. In the second reading, we saw that Peter warned the people that scoffers would come in the future saying that the Lord Jesus had delayed His return, and they would go on about their ungodly business as if the Lord was never going to return. Peter corrected this false theology and said the Lord was going to return and that we we should not mark time the way that it is done on earth, for God exists outside of time and with Him "a thousand years is as a day." No, Peter said, the Lord would return in an instant "as a thief in the night." Since He was coming quickly people needed to act in godly ways befitting of the imminent return of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 19:16).

The Gospel reading is from the opening section of the Gospel of Saint Mark. Mark, known as John Mark (Acts 12:25) had a bit of a checkered past because he was the man that deserted Paul and Barnabas during Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 13:13). During Paul's second missionary journey Barnabas wanted to take John Mark along, but this caused a strong disagreement with Paul (Acts 15:38-40). In spite of these events, John Mark went on to prove himself to be an extremely valuable co-worker in the Lord, and was even vindicated by Paul (Colossians 4:10). Mark was evidently a close disciple of Saint Peter because the latter described him as his son (1 Peter 5:13). Mark's Gospel was written for Roman believers, primarily Gentiles because of some nuances he used in translating certain words from the Aramaic and his use of Latin instead of Greek in some places. The main theme of Mark is the presentation of Jesus as the suffering servant of God as portrayed in Isaiah 53. He emphasized Jesus' humanity much more than the other Gospel writers including his emotions (for example Mark 8:12) and human limitations (for example Mark 11:12). Mark, unlike the other Gospel writers such as Luke, did not include lengthy genealogies of Jesus likely because these are not as significant to his intended Gentile audience.

> *1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: "BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY; 3 THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.'" 4 John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. 6 John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a*

> *leather belt around his waist, and his diet was locusts and wild honey. 7 And he was preaching, and saying, "After me One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals. 8 I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (Mark 1:1-8)*

Mark, obviously very familiar with Isaiah, quoted from his Book in the very first verse of his Gospel. The coming of John the Baptist marks the fulfillment of verse 3 from Isaiah 40 that we studied in the first reading. John was described as a most unusual man "clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist" (v. 6). The key point of this verse is now that John the Baptist had come, he would point the way for the coming of Jesus Christ (v. 7). John the Baptist said, "After me One is coming who is mightier than I" (v. 7a), then humbly said, "and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals" (v. 7b). John the Baptist then foretold how Jesus would not only baptize with water, such as he was doing, but would send God's Holy Spirit (v. 8). John the Baptist was Jesus' cousin, having been born to Elizabeth (Luke 1:34-37, Jesus' disciple John, the one whom Jesus loved, was also Jesus' cousin). Note that John's diet was indicative of his reliance upon God, the same way that Elijah relied upon God when he fed him by the ravens as told in 1 Kings 17:6. John the Baptist was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy about the coming of a "forerunner" that was saw in the first reading. His coming was also the fulfillment of the prophecy regarding the return of the Prophet Elijah given in the Book of Malachi. God said in that Book, "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse." (Malachi 4:5-6). The future fulfillment will be when Jesus returns with His church at the end of the age as we studied last week.

What does all of this mean for us as we live out our lives as Christians? First, like John, we also are called to "prepare the way of the Lord" by preaching the Good News to the world that if they repent of their sin and place their faith in Jesus Christ they will have eternal forgiveness in eternity with God. God is "patient and not willing that any should perish" to the extent that He uses unusual people like John the Baptist and even more unusual people like you and me to do His work! Finally, since the return of the Lord Jesus is imminent we need to accelerate our proclamation of this message, as well as live in a way befitting of His soon return.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. The Gospel reading said that "all of the country of Judea was going to [John the Baptist] . . . and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins" (Mark 1:5). What do you think motivated the people to confess their sins to him? As a clue, what word is repeated in verses 4 and 7?

2. As we look towards Christmas coming up in just two and half weeks, pray and ask God if there is anything standing in the way between you and the relationship with Him that He desires with you.

> *Dear God, is there anything that you would have me to do during this Christmas season?*

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

> *What mountains needs to be made flat, and hills need to be leveled in order for me to accomplish your will this Christmas season?*

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/120714.cfm

First Reading IS 40:1-5, 9-11

Second Reading 2 PT 3:8-14

Gospel Reading MK 1:1-8

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB