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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 133: 09/20/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the first reading from the Book of Isaiah, in which God provides an evangelical calling for everyone in the world. Then we continue to study Philippians by going back to Chapter 1. Finally, we move to the Gospel lesson from Saint Matthew on the parable of the workers in the vineyard, which paints a picture of God's marvelous grace.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Prophet Isaiah. The context is the section where God was telling of His free offer of salvation to everyone, not just the Jews to whom Isaiah was writing. God said, "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" (Isaiah 55:1). God was clear that His calling was

for everyone, as we see in verse 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." As you read, keep in mind this universal offer of salvation that God made to the world some seven hundred years before Jesus was born.

First Reading:

> *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. (Isaiah 55:6-9)*

The message is a general evangelistic call that also gives us insight into God's nature. 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 their sin and place their trust in Him. Third, people must not wait to place their faith in God, as it may become too late when they are hardened by sin and the opportunity 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 few weeks ago when we studied Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus in John Chapter 3.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Philippians. Paul and Timothy (Philippians 1:1) opened the letter by proclaiming to the believers in Philippi their confidence in God's work in their lives and in the lives of all believers. They said, "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" (v. 6). Paul then went on to testify how God had been working in his life in spite of and even through the hardships that he had endured in prison (Philippians 1:12-13). Note that we included all of the verses from 20–27, including the ones omitted from the reading in the lectionary.

Second Reading:

> *20 according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. 23 But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; 24 yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again. 27 Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel . . . (Philippians 1:20-27)*

Paul spoke about the inner conflict he had over whether it was more important for him to stay in the world to minister there or to join God in heaven, although the choice would, of course, be up to God. Paul said that regardless of what happened to him, he realized his life found meaning only when it was connected to the purpose of exalting God, "for to live is Christ and to die is gain" (v. 21). Paul undoubtedly suffered greatly in prison. Perhaps when he wrote these passages, he was experiencing something very difficult. Despite his hardship, Paul said his choice was to keep doing his work (v. 25). Next, he states the overarching theme of the Book of Philippians: the call to become more Christlike. He said, "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" (v. 27a). Throughout this Epistle Paul urged the believers to become more and more like Christ in their behaviors and attitudes. Paul closed this section with a call for unity among the believers in the Philippian church (v. 26). He told the Philippian believers to "[stand] firm in **one** spirit, with **one** mind striving **togethe**r for the faith of the gospel (v. 27b-c, emphasis added). This was also a call for Christlikeness, as Jesus prayed for unity in the church (John 17:21).

When we stand back and look at what Paul said, which of us would have the strength to say what Paul did while he was sitting in prison? Despite his circumstances, Paul continued to spread the Gospel, even when his life was in turmoil. Paul helps us to see that everything doesn't have to be perfect in our lives for us to minister to others and share the Gospel.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson is a parable from the Gospel of Saint Matthew. The context is that Jesus was talking to the crowds that were following him in the region of Perea, known as "Galilee beyond the Jordan" (Matthew 19:1). Some Pharisees also came to "test" Jesus by asking him a question about the legality of divorce (v. 3). Next, Jesus had a conversation with a rich, young ruler during which Jesus made the statement, "Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (v. 24). The text says His disciples were "astonished" and asked Jesus, "Then who can be saved?" (v. 25). Jesus' answer helps to shed some light into the mystery on how anyone comes to believe in God. He said, "With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (v. 26). With this introduction in mind, let's read the parable of the workers in the vineyard.

Gospel Reading:

> *1 For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. 2 When he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. 3 And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the market place; 4 and to those he said, "You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you." And so they went. 5 Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did the same thing. 6 And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, "Why have you been standing here idle all day long?" 7 They said to him, "Because no one hired us." He said to them, "You go into the vineyard too." 8 When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, "Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last group to the first." 9 When those hired about the eleventh hour came, each one received a denarius. 10 When those hired first came, they thought that they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. 11 When they received it, they grumbled at the landowner, 12 saying, "These last men have worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day." 13 But he answered and said to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? 14 Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. 15 Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?" 16 So the last shall be first, and the first last. (Matthew 20:1-16)*

Many people in large cities such as Los Angeles know how to hire workers by going to their local building supply store in the morning and selecting from among the men who gather there to find work each day. This was a common practice in Jesus' day. The workers would gather in the

marketplace with hopes of being hired for the rate of one denarius, which was a typical day's wage, with the day lasting from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm.

In this story about God's value system in the Kingdom of Heaven, the workers were hired at different times but, in the end, were given the same wage. Those who worked a full day were given the agreed-upon wage for the day. Those who worked less than a full day didn't know what they would receive, but they figured it would be better than nothing. How surprised they all were when the last workers received the same wage as the first workers. The landowner provided for them all, even though their effort was different.

Jesus' point is clear: No matter when a person comes to be part of God's work in the world, God provides generously to all. The Jews thought that since they were God's chosen people since the time of Abraham, they should receive special "compensation" for their labor. After all, they reasoned, they had borne the brunt of the labor in the heat of the day. Why should they be lumped in with all the death-bed conversions and get the same eternal reward as the Gentiles? What incentive would there be to surrender your life early and follow God? Wouldn't God's radical grace encourage a sense of licentiousness and living for oneself?

Jesus' rationale, here, is interesting. We surrender our lives because the landowner is generous (we can trust Him), and it's actually good to be in His presence for as long as possible. The ones who had been away from the landowner for much of the day had suffered enough. While those who come to Christ late in life are given the same eternal destiny as those who committed their lives to Christ early on, Jesus reminds them that the reward of being with God in His presence is generous already. And those who labor for the Lord are not really "sacrificing" anything—they have the benefit of a longer history with the landowner. Can we not trust Him and be thankful that He provides for all who put their faith in Christ: Jew or Gentile, lifelong Christian or death-bed conversion?

Let's highlight some of the key insights this parable implies about the nature of God. First, God is persistent in calling people to Himself. The landowner went out no less than five different times to call workers, including early in the morning (v. 1), about the third hour (v. 2), about the sixth hour and ninth hour (v. 5), and finally about the eleventh hour (v. 6). Second, God is very generous. The landowner gave the exact same wage to those who had started working much later in the day. Man, who was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), has a strong sense of judgment that was violated when all of the workers received the same wage regardless of how many hours they worked

that day. The wages that the landowner paid to the workers who worked less than a full day are what we call "grace," which means unmerited favor. Third, God is sovereign (v. 15). The landowner said, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own?" (v. 15a). Finally, God calls the workers His friends (v. 13), though we see that this is conditional upon believing. Jesus said in John's Gospel, "You are My friends if you do what I command you" (John 15:14).

In summary, God is persistent in calling people to Him, is generous, is sovereign, and calls believers His friend. Although His ways are above understanding, He has revealed Himself in the Scriptures. It is there that we discover that He is full of grace and patience in calling sinners to repent and believe in Him. Saint Paul said, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). The parable of the workers in the vineyard clearly illustrates the grace God provides by calling each person in the world to trust in the finished work of His Son, Jesus Christ. As we saw in the first reading, God calls everyone to believe in Him. The second reading also calls us to minister and spread the Good News even when our circumstances aren't perfect. Let us worship our wonderful, generous, persistent God with our whole lives.

Reflection Questions

1. A strong theme in this week's reading was God's abundant grace, which is able to forgive all of our sins. If you have received God's saving grace, what sins are you still trying to "pay" for by your good works? How might the truth of God's compassion and abundant pardon (Isaiah 55:7) and His provision of grace (from the parable of the generous landowner) help you to embrace the fact that you don't have to pay for your sins?

2. Another strong message in the reading was the surrender that happens in us when we realize who God is. Each of the readings called for life-change to happen as a result of realizing:

God's ways are not our ways

To live is Christ

The last shall be first, and the first last

Where do you need to integrate these realities into your own life, surrendering to our trustworthy and generous God?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 130: 09/13/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we learn from Paul about dealing with Christians who hold beliefs that differ from our own. Then we learn much about forgiveness in the Gospel lesson through the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant.

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First Reading:

The first reading is from the Apocryphal book of Sirach.

> SIR 27:30—28:7 *Wrath and anger are hateful things,*
> *yet the sinner hugs them tight.*
> *The vengeful will suffer the LORD's vengeance,*
> *for he remembers their sins in detail.*
> *Forgive your neighbor's injustice;*
> *then when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven.*
> *Could anyone nourish anger against another*
> *and expect healing from the LORD?*
> *Could anyone refuse mercy to another like himself,*
> *can he seek pardon for his own sins?*
> *If one who is but flesh cherishes wrath,*
> *who will forgive his sins?*
> *Remember your last days, set enmity aside;*
> *remember death and decay, and cease from sin!*
> *Think of the commandments, hate not your neighbor;*
> *remember the Most High's covenant, and overlook faults.*

The reading points out how sinners love their sin. However, it is easy for us to view ourselves as somehow outside of sin. Saint Paul reminds us that "*all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23). The reading goes on to remind us about God's clear call for us to forgive others (Ephesians 4:32), because as Paul said, "God in Christ forgave us." The reading closes with a reminder on how God (through Christ), forgives us. We have forgiveness only through our faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ. "*Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them*" (Hebrews 7:25).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading from Romans 14 follows a section in which Paul teaches about the godly calling to show grace to others with differing beliefs related to Christian practices such as the honoring of a

holy day or a person's choice to abstain from meat. Paul said, "He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God" (Romans 14:6).

Second Reading:

> *Romans 14:7-9 NAS95 7 For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; 8 for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. 9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.*

Paul continued his explanation by explaining why we, as Christians, should show grace to others with differing practices, driven by their beliefs in matters as debatable as what we eat or when we worship. As fellow believers holding diverging views on the negotiable topics we are to remember that our souls and wholly given over to the Lord. When we place our trust in the Lord he came into us and regenerated our previously dead souls. Jesus spoke about this reality in the Gospel of John when He emphasized the spiritual birth with Nicodemus. Jesus said that "you must be born again to enter the kingdom of heaven" (John 3:3). As believers in the Lord Jesus, the ones who testify with our voices that God has raised Him from the dead (Romans 10:9), our hearts are spiritually born again. As such, God has placed a seal upon us dedicating us to Himself. That is the whole reason that God has called us to Himself (Acts 2:39). The reading closes with, "For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living" (v. 9). Jesus' rulership is over both the living and the dead, in the sense that He is Lord over everyone including believers who are alive, believers who have died, and unbelievers both living (but spiritually dead) and dead (as those who suffer the second death).

Paul's message serves as a reminder to us about recognizing serving God as our ultimate goal instead of debating about relatively frivolous issues. Does one choose to go to church on a Saturday night instead of Sunday morning? Does one choose not to eat meat on Friday? Let us not disparage others because of their beliefs but let us instead remember through these debates that our reason for existing is to serve the Lord. It is hard to argue with someone about such issues while serving the Lord with our whole heart. People are dying every day without the knowledge of the saving grace of the Lord Jesus who gave Himself for their sins. Let's get on with fulfilling the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20) making disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Holy Trinity, and teaching

them to obey all that the Scriptures teach.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading from Matthew continues from last week in the section of Jesus' final, detailed teachings to His disciples before His triumphal entry into Jerusalem before He gave His life for the payment of our sin debt. Last week's reading covered Jesus' teaching on church discipline including the general procedure one Christian "brother" is to use in confronting another. Here, the term "brother" means a fellow believer. This week's reading continues Jesus' teaching about the godly behaviors of a Christian in forgiving others.

Gospel Reading:

> *Matthew 18:21-35 NAS95 21 Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" 22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. 23 For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. 24 When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. 25 But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. 26 So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.' 27 And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. 28 But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' 29 So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' 30 But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. 31 So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. 32 Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 'Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?' 34 And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. 35 My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."*

Peter asked Jesus a question about how often he should forgive another believer (brother, v. 21). Should I, Peter asked, forgive him even "up to seven times?" (v. 21c). Jesus answered him with a call to radical forgiveness, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven" (v. 23). Jesus then provided a parable in order to illustrate this high standard of forgiveness. We know that it is a parable because He introduces it by saying "For this reason the kingdom of heaven **may be compared to**" (v. 23, emphasis added).

The parable of the unforgiving servant begins with a certain servant who owed the king a sum that was impossible to repay, "ten thousand talents" (v. 24b). In biblical times, a talent amounted to about 20 years of wages for an average worker, bringing the debt to some 200,000 years of work. In our day we would say that the servant owed the king something like a zillion dollars, a sum which would clearly be impossible for anyone to repay not the least of which a lowly servant. Next, through an act of unbelievable grace, and clearly foreshadowing God the Father's forgiveness of us through faith in Jesus, the servant humbly fell upon his knees and begged for mercy (v. 26). Upon seeing the servant's heart, the king felt compassion and completely forgave his servant of the debt that he could never repay. The king provided a means for forgiveness knowing that the repayment of the debt was impossible by the man's works. As the story continues, we should expect the servant to leave the judgment hall with a sense of great peace and generosity, but that is not what happened.

As the servant left the encounter with the king-judge, he went out and found a fellow slaved who owed him a substantial sum, equivalent to about one hundred days wages (one denarii was about one day's wage). In contrast to the "zillion dollars" the first servant had owed to the king this was a relatively insignificant amount. Additionally, since this first servant's debts would have most likely included the sum total of all that was owed to him by all of the other servants who had borrowed from him, in all probability all of the debts had been erased. Though we have to be careful not to make a parable walk on all fours and instead to seek the central principle our Lord is getting at, all the members of this "loan pyramid" we will call it, were forgiven, including the first servant and all of the servants who owed money to him. Therefore, the act of the first servant in asking for repayment of the 100 denarii debt was pure greed. This calls into question the honesty of the servants "impassioned plea" before the king in the first place. As a result of his greed and unrepentant heart, the king ordered the debts of the servant reinstated, something which was impossible for him to ever repay.

Jesus' parable closes with the central point of Jesus' teaching, something worthy of repeating here and every day we live. "My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart" (v. 35). Lord, help us, without you we are powerless.

Jesus' teaching in the parable gets at some very important truths. First, unbelievers are separated from God the Father by a debt that they can never repay, even in 200,000 years or working to earn their salvation. The Scripture makes it clear that nobody can earn their way into heaven, regardless of how "good" they are and how hard they work. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20). God's standard of righteousness in order to enter heaven is perfection. Perfection cannot be granted by our doing of good works, but rather by faith in Jesus' finished work on the cross. The scripture says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Second, as believers we are called to forgive other believers, seventy times seven times, that is a whole lot! However, this principle of forgiveness also extends beyond believers, as is clear from the whole canon of Scripture. We as believers are to forgive others regardless of their spiritual condition. God has placed upon believers the unique ability to exercise forgiveness, something which the lost world has a hard time understanding. We have to exercise a degree of common sense here as repeated, unrepentant attacks against us may warrant the separation of ourselves from these circumstances. In other cases, such as the treatment of believers by nonbelievers in certain parts of the world (and even in increasing frequency in the western world), we should expect continuing mistreatment.

Finally, the principle we learned about showing grace to others with differing spiritual beliefs entails a need to forgive, in an ongoing manner, those who hold these views. Unless God changes their hearts, we must recognize that their beliefs will likely never change. No matter how much this offends us, we must turn our hearts to the Higher Judge, the King before whom we will stand to receive rewards for the things that we did with the gifts that He gave us during our lifetimes.

When we talk to others, we can find many stories of forgiveness, or the lack thereof. I think of someone I know whose daughter was abused by a man. She told me that she would never forgive that man. I think that in her mind the act of not forgiving him provided her with a certain sense of power and control over the abuser of her daughter. This brings me to a much deeper story about personal forgiveness, one that I have chronicled at length in my journey toward true faith in God and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. It was my struggle to understand and later to forgive someone who greatly harmed me during my childhood years that led me to the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ.

The bottom line is this. Because God has forgiven us from the payment of an impossibly huge debt brought about by our sin, we should likewise forgive others.

If you have a testimony about forgiveness, please share it with us in the designated space on the website.

Reflection Questions

1. Think long and hard about this question, and pray about it before you answer. Who is someone for whom you have heretofore refused to forgive? In what ways has your unforgiveness given you a sense of power over them? In light of what you learned today, will you grant forgiveness to the person who harmed you?

2. When was a time when you encountered another Christian who held different beliefs than your own? How do you classify this difference in belief as a major or minor difference? If the difference was one that, upon further reflection, you could classify as something rather minor, how does today's second reading help you to place this in perspective? What if the difference were more significant, say, concerning whether Jesus really did rise from the dead? Is there any principle that arises from the reading that could help you to relate to a person holding this belief? How does that principle relate to your calling to fulfill the Great Commission?

Sunday Mass Study Notes Lectionary 127: 09/06/2026

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with a comprehensive introduction to Ezekiel from the first reading. Then move to Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans and conclude with Matthew 18, where we discuss the procedure God has given us for resolving disputes among believers. We would like to think we would never need this, but conflict is an inevitable consequence of mankind's fall (Genesis 3).

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Prophet Ezekiel. He was an animated prophet who sometimes acted out the message that God gave him in very peculiar ways. For example, one time he dug a hole in the side of his house (Ezekiel 12), cooked his food using human waste as fuel (Ez 4:9), and lay on his right side for 390 days, then for 40 days more only on his left! Ezekiel was among about ten thousand in the second group of Jews that were carried off to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar's invading forces in 597 BC. He ministered after the tragic death of godly King Josiah in 609, who had enacted broad reforms in Judah. However, the people were so entrenched in their idolatry that they quickly returned to their tragic way of living after the king's death at the hands of the Egyptian army. Ezekiel's message, like many, if not most, of the prophets, is easier to understand after it has

been fulfilled than when interpreted in the predictive sense. For example, chapter 38 of his book contains a frightful prophecy about something that will come upon Israel in the future. We know from the description of the events in that section that nothing like this has ever come upon them up until now, but interpreting Ezekiel's message is extremely difficult without the benefit of hindsight. Such was the case even for Jesus's own disciples in interpreting relatively straightforward messages from Isaiah regarding the Lord Jesus himself. Interestingly enough, the meaning of today's reading is very clear.

The context of today's reading is clearly illustrated in the first six verses that precede it:

> *1 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 2 "Son of man, speak to the sons of your people and say to them, 'If I bring a sword upon a land, and the people of the land take one man from among them and make him their watchman, 3 and he sees the sword coming upon the land and blows on the trumpet and warns the people, 4 then he who hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, and a sword comes and takes him away, his blood will be on his own head. 5 He heard the sound of the trumpet but did not take warning; his blood will be on himself. But had he taken warning, he would have delivered his life. 6 But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet and the people are not warned, and a sword comes and takes a person from them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require from the watchman's hand.'" (Ezekiel 33:1-6)*

Ezekiel illustrated the people's responsibility to warn one another about their sin by likening it to the necessity of a person appointed to a military position to warn his superiors of an approaching army. It is common sense that a person appointed as a military guard would quickly report an approaching army, yet the people didn't warn each other about the approaching sin, even within their own souls.

With this context in mind, let's continue reading the text of the first reading.

First Reading:

> *7 Now as for you, son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel; so you*

> *will hear a message from My mouth and give them warning from Me. 8 When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you will surely die,' and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require from your hand. 9 But if you on your part warn a wicked man to turn from his way and he does not turn from his way, he will die in his iniquity, but you have delivered your life.(Ezekiel 33:7-9)*

Part of Ezekiel's role as a prophet was to vindicate the theocratic kingdom rule that God had ordained through the Law. This message was very specifically directed towards Ezekiel. Notice that the word "you" (and your) appeared no less than seven times in reference to Ezekiel. Verse one provided a good summary of the reading's big idea. "Now as for you, son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel; so you will hear a message from My mouth and give them warning from Me." This message was not, as some have said, in the context of evangelism. This admonition was addressed specifically to the Prophet Ezekiel, in the context of warning his fellow Israelites about God's strong call for them to live according to the terms of their covenant. Ezekiel's role was to call them back to their covenant relationship with God. Not only was Ezekiel a watchman for the house of Israel, but so were all the prophets, including the New Testament prophet John the Baptist, who acted in that role.

We can draw a theological principle from the text. Sometimes love is tough; we don't always want to hear what the authorities are saying when we are stepping out of line with God's plan for our lives. God, in His kindness, warns us when we are moving in destructive ways, but we are responsible for heeding the warning. God warns us not only through His Word in the Bible but also through other people who embrace and then speak the truth of His Word. He also warns us through allowing certain difficult circumstances to intervene. Sometimes our first instinct is to attack the person who brought us the information that made us feel convicted. Later, when we study the Gospel lesson, we will see how Jesus provided a procedure for resolving conflicts among believers.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans. The context is just after Paul finished explaining his compelling desire for all of Israel to come to faith in the Lord Jesus, including those before his time (Romans 9), those during his time (Romans 10), and those that will come after him (Romans 11). Next in Chapter 12, he explained how Christians were called to live transformed lives and present their bodies as living sacrifices. This is in contrast to what the author of Hebrews said

about the Jewish Law, "Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins" (Hebrews 10:11) since Jesus offered his body not as a victim but willingly on the cross once for all (Hebrews 10:10).

The reading today is from Chapter 13, which opens with an admonition for believers in the Lord Jesus to submit to their government authorities. Paul said, "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God" (Romans 13:1). He continued:

Second Reading:

> *Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. 3 For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; 4 for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. 5 Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. 7 Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor" (Romans 13:2-7)*

It's important to remember that God commands us to obey our government authorities. As we will see in the reading, he puts this admonition on the same level as our need to obey the Commandments. With this context in mind, let's proceed with the second reading.

> *8 Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. 9 For this, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (Romans 13:8-10)*

Paul quoted from the Old Testament and provided the seventh, sixth, eighth, and ninth commandments (Exodus 20:13-17). Paul also included Jesus' statement in Mark 12:31, which summed up the last five commandments. Christians are called to be careful stewards of their resources and to obey the commandments God has already placed on their hearts (Romans 2:15). As you can see, the heart of what God wants for us is to love one another. We fulfill this "law" by treating others with dignity and respect, the way we ourselves would want to be treated. Instead of trying to take advantage of people for our own gain, we should "owe" them nothing except love. What an amazing contrast Christians would be if we lived according to this passage.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson is from Saint Matthew. The context was just after the transfiguration of Jesus (Matthew 17:2) when Jesus began to teach the disciples about God's kingdom values. The disciples asked who was the greatest in the kingdom. They evidently were alluding to the argument recorded in Luke about which of themwas the greatest (Luke 22:24). Jesus settled the matter by setting a child before Himself and saying, "Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:4). Jesus continued to teach them that the kingdom of heaven lies in sharp contrast to the kingdom of this world.

Gospel Reading:

> *15 "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16 But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. 18 Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. 19 Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. 20 For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst." (Matthew 18:15-20)*

Today's Gospel lesson can be applied in two contexts. First, the matter of resolution of an issue between two Christians, whether or not they attend the same church. Second, the procedure set

forth by God for handling issues related to church discipline. The process for resolving either type of dispute is similar. In the reading, Jesus provided a four-step process for resolving conflict. First, Jesus taught that the offended person should talk to the offender privately, "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother (v. 15)." The Greek word translated "show him his fault" is elegchō, which in this context might better read, "to convince and turn them away from their sin." In Galatians, Paul directed that this must be done "in a spirit of gentleness, each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted" (Gal 6:1). Second, Jesus stated that if the private meeting did not result in repentance and satisfaction, the offender was to be approached by a small group, "But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED" (Matt 18:16). The second meeting provided the offender with another opportunity to repent, albeit more forceful than a private meeting. Paul affirmed this doctrine as applicable to the church: "Reject a factious man after a first and second warning" (Titus 3:10).

The third step that Jesus outlined in Matthew was a "public corrective summons." In this announcement, Jesus said, "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church (ekklesia in the original)" (Matt 18:17a). The word ekklēsia means, "a popular meeting, especially a religious congregation.

The fourth and final step that Jesus outlined regarding corrective discipline in the Jewish assembly was a "public corrective exclusion." Jesus continued his discourse in verse 17 and said, "and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector" (v. 17b).

Should this four-step process outlined by Jesus for correction within the Jewish assembly be utilized in the church at large? Yes. It would seem that Jesus intended this four-step process for all believers. In Matthew 18:17, this is the second and last occurrence of the word "church" in the gospels. It is used in a different sense here from that in Matthew 16:18. In the earlier occurrence it makes reference to the body of Christ composed of those who are baptized by the Holy Spirit into Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). However, here it speaks of the local assembly, a body of believers gathered together as a fellowship. Both times the Lord uses the term, He is anticipating the future beginning of the church age after His resurrection from the dead. Second, Paul evidently believed that Jesus' teaching applied to the church, as he offered similar advice. In 2 Thess 3:6 and 1 Corin 5:5, Paul said, "deliver such a one to Satan," which is very similar to Jesus' teaching in the fourth step in Matthew 18:17b. In 1 Tim 5:20, Paul's advice was very similar to Jesus' third step (Matt 18:17a), "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear." Paul's advice in 2 Thess 3:15b to "admonish him as a brother" was very similar to Jesus' first step in restoring a sinning brother in

Matt 18:15. Paul, in describing the process of disciplining an elder, used very similar language to Jesus in 1 Tim 5:19-20. It is evident from the biblical evidence that Paul and the apostles relied upon Jesus' teaching on discipline within the Jewish assembly, and that this teaching was relevant to the yet-to-exist church.

What does this mean for our lives? First, the goal of church discipline is restoration, with the secondary purpose of restraining sin in the church. Paul said, "(W)ith gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will." Church discipline was also for the purpose of restraining sin, as is evident in 1 Timothy, "Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning" (5:20). The same theme is evident in the narrative of Ananias and Saphira in Acts 5 with the conclusion of the account by Luke, "And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things" (v. 11).

Second, Paul and Peter made it clear that a secondary purpose of church discipline was to preserve the church's Christ-like reputation among the Gentiles. Paul spoke to the Philippians, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world" (2:14-15). Peter made a similar statement in 1 Peter 2:12.

Finally, an additional insight from the Epistles is that Paul intended church discipline to keep false teachings from the church. In Galatians 5:7-9, Paul stated the principle that even a little sin in the church spoils the whole assembly. In 2 Thessalonians, Paul stated the principle explicitly, "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us" (3:6). A final insight offered in the Epistles is the restorative goal of church discipline. In 2 Timothy, Paul stated, "with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will" (2:25-26). The insights from the Acts and Epistles help to clarify both the process and purposes of church discipline.

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Reflection Questions

1. How do you handle conflict? What steps of this four-step process could you begin to practice this week?

2. When Christians live under God's kingdom values, our lives should look very different from those who are still ruled by worldly values. This week's Scripture focused on the following themes. Which of these do you already practice? Which do you want to see increased in your life? Use this to guide your prayer life with God this week:

A. Because God tells the truth and warns humans of impending danger connected to sin, we likewise are called to tell the truth and warn others. We saw this in the first reading from Ezekiel.

B. Because God loves us, we too ought to love others. Instead of exploiting people or approaching them selfishly, we move toward them in love. We saw this in the second reading from Romans.

C. Because God's heart is one of restoration, we can become peacemakers in the midst of conflict and sin.

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 124: 08/30/2026

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with a comprehensive introduction to the Prophet Jeremiah and a reading from this great prophet of God, in whom we find many similarities to Peter and Paul. Then move to the second reading from Saint Paul from Romans 12, in which he warns about not being conformed to the world. Finally, we conclude with the Gospel lesson from Matthew in which we see a certain circumstance in which Peter found himself conformed to a false belief taught by the world.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Prophet Jeremiah. Known as the "weeping prophet," Jeremiah was one of the most prolific prophetic writers in the Old Testament, having written both the Book bearing his name and Lamentations. He began writing during the reign of the godly King Josiah, in 627 BC, and continued through the eventual destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BC. A key verse summarizing the situation in Israel during this time appears in the closing chapter of the Book. "For through the anger of the LORD this came about in Jerusalem and Judah until He cast them out from His presence. And Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon" (Jeremiah 52:3)

God was angry with the people for a variety of reasons, but foremost among them was that they had turned away from their worship of the One True God and instead worshiped dead idols. Female deities were frequent objects of worship in the Old Testament. For example, God said:

> "Do you not see what they are doing in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead dough to make cakes for the queen of heaven; and they pour out drink offerings to other gods in order to spite Me" (Jeremiah 7:17-18).

God was angry with them because they were baking cakes and offering cakes to the "queen of heaven," who was the female deity of their day. This goddess was likely someone associated with grace and blessing. The Scripture is clear that all grace flows through the Lord Jesus Christ alone. "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" (John 1:14). God was clear that worship was to be given to Him alone. The Jews were commanded not only to forsake the worship of foreign gods but also not to even **create** an image of any deity, be it of the True or God or any god. Interestingly enough, this law was binding upon them and all New Testament believers (see John 14:15; this goes beyond the Ten Commandments, as in John 13:34). As well, worshiping an image, they were not to even create an image of even the True God and assign worship to it in any manner. God knew that when they built something to honor Him, they would fall into worshiping the image rather than God Himself. The Second Commandment given by God to Moses spelled this out very clearly to them:

> *2 I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 3 You shall have no other gods before Me. 4 You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, 6 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. (Exodus 20:2-6)*

If that were all that was going on, then perhaps God would have relented in His judgment of them through allowing Babylon to overcome the nation and destroy Jerusalem. However, conditions in Israel were even worse than that as we see further on in Jeremiah Chapter 7:

> *30 "For the sons of Judah have done that which is evil in My sight," declares the LORD, "they have set their detestable things in the house which is called by My name, to defile it. 31 They have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, and it did not come into My mind" (Jeremiah 7:30-31).*

Not only did they offer sacrifices in the temple to false gods, but they even sacrificed their own children in a fire. This was the context of the first reading today. As you read, try to imagine the anguish that Jeremiah must have been experiencing because of the extreme misbehavior of God's chosen people.

First Reading:

> *7 O LORD, You have deceived me and I was deceived; You have overcome me and prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all day long; Everyone mocks me. 8 For each time I speak, I cry aloud; I proclaim violence and destruction, Because for me the word of the LORD has resulted In reproach and derision all day long. 9 But if I say, "I will not remember Him Or speak anymore in His name," Then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire Shut up in my bones; And I am weary of holding it in, And I cannot endure it. (Jeremiah 20:7-9)*

In the reading and in light of the context, we see the passion of the Prophet Jeremiah as he pleads with the Jewish people to repent of their sin and turn to the worship of the True God as prescribed in their Law. Jeremiah said that the people derided him despite the fact that what he was telling them was the truth and for their own good (vv. 7-8). He said that it was impossible for him to contain within himself the words which the Lord God had given to him to proclaim. Later in the Gospel lesson we will see the similarity between Jeremiah and the Apostle Peter in his passion for God.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading comes from Saint Paul's letter to the Romans. In this passage, he encourages believers to respond to God with their whole lives.

Second Reading:

> *1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2)*

Paul begins his thought with the word "therefore." Whenever we see this word, we should ask: "what's the 'therefore' there for?" Paul gives some pretty heavy directions to the believers, but they are grounded in the reality of who God is, which he has spent the last 11 chapters discussing.

As you may recall from previous weeks, Paul was addressing both Jewish and Gentile believers in the church at Rome. He just finished expounding on the mysteries of God, who in his kindness has grafted Gentiles into the true vine of faith. This is truly a wonderful chapter in salvation history; deliverance from God's wrath has been paid in full by Jesus Christ's death on the cross. That is the basis of the "therefore". So this is what Paul is saying: as a result of God's mercies, it is only fitting to respond to Him with our whole lives; body, mind, and spirit.

Have you ever seen people who profess to be Christians, but only act like it when they are at church or around other Christians? Then you see them at work or at a gathering, acting in ways contrary to the way of Christ. They may use foul language, mistreat a waitress, or even cheat in order to get ahead. This is problematic because it is inconsistent with the reality of God's mercy in their life. Paul says in this passage that Christianity is a holistic endeavor. God is looking for true worship. We cannot compartmentalize our spirituality to one day a week or around certain spiritual activities. All of life can be a spiritual endeavor if we give ourselves fully to God as a living sacrifice. God is worthy of our bodies being submitted to Him; that includes our behaviors, actions, and what comes out of our mouths.

What are we sacrificing? We are sacrificing doing things according to the "flesh," which Paul likens to the worldly system that has infected every fiber of our being. The world's way operates according to doing what is right in our own eyes, without considering God and His ways. The world's way operates without God in the center. So, Paul is urging his brothers (both Jew and Gentile) not to be squeezed into that dead-end mold. Yes, it may feel like a sacrifice to put God at the center of your

life, but it is what each person was designed for.

How do we get there? By the renewing of our mind. What does this mean? Our minds have been shaped by so many things: our family values, our cultural values, messages from the media, our experiences, and how we have interpreted those experiences. Paul urges believers to be proactive about understanding what influences their perspective—and to exchange what has held them captive by lies for the freedom of the Truth. We know that the only reliable source of Truth is founded upon and consistent with the Bible. Jesus said, "The truth will set you free" (John 8:32). In context, He was pointing to Himself as the truth and to holding fast to His teaching as the only means of freedom from captivity to the enemy's lies (Satan). So, the only real "sacrifice" in this passage of Romans is giving up the destructive lies in one's life and learning to live according to the Truth. That is why studying the Bible, hearing God's heart through Bible teachers, and being around others who walk according to the Word of God is so important for our minds to be renewed. It may feel like we are swimming upstream at first, but God will slowly and surely renew our minds so that we will see that His will is good, pleasing, and perfect. Paul urges his brothers and us, because he knows it's a matter of life and death.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

As we move onto the Gospel lesson, let's reflect upon what we learned from the first reading. Jeremiah's passion reminds us of one particular character in the New Testament. Who jumps out at you as the one filled with passion for his people, one who sometimes acted impulsively without regard for how those around him would respond? Cephas, whose name is translated as "Peter" (John 1:42), whose brother was the disciple Andrew, was just such a man. In his second Epistle, Peter spoke similar harsh words about the false teachers of his day:

> *1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. 2 Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; 3 and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. 4 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment; 5 and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought*

> *a flood upon the world of the ungodly; 6 and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter; 7 and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men 8 (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds), 9 then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, 10 and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority. Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties, 11 whereas angels who are greater in might and power do not bring a reviling judgment against them before the Lord. 12 But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed, 13 suffering wrong as the wages of doing wrong. They count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, as they carouse with you, 14 having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children; 15 forsaking the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; 16 but he received a rebuke for his own transgression, for a mute donkey, speaking with a voice of a man, restrained the madness of the prophet. 17 These are springs without water and mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been reserved. 18 For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, 19 promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved. 20 For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. 21 For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them. 22 It has happened to them according to the true proverb, "A DOG RETURNS TO ITS OWN VOMIT," and, "A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire." (2 Peter 2:1-22)*

Like Peter, I also have a passion for confronting false teaching. Some time ago, a group of Jehovah's Witnesses pulled up to my parents' house while I was visiting there one weekend. I knew how their operation worked: only one of them got out of the car, and the other two also recorded their "credit" for having made a household visit. I sensed in my spirit what was happening, and I began to pray silently for God's guidance. As the man sat down at the picnic table outside, I just happened to have a Bible and a sheet of blank paper on at least one side. I drew three columns on the paper with a horizontal heading across each section to serve later as a title for each category. As we talked, I began to fill in important details about the Person of Jesus Christ in each of the three columns. I filled out the columns like this and explained the biblical support for the first column.

_____	_____	_____
eternal	created by Jehovah	created by Jehovah
uncreated always existed	maker of all other things	maker of some things
God in the flesh	Michael the archangel	spirit brother of an angel called Lucifer

As we talked, the man began getting more agitated as he realized that his theological beliefs aligned with both the second **and** the third columns. I kept asking him, do you know anything about the religious cult about whom I am writing in that last column? The crowning blow came when I filled in titles for each of the categories:

Biblical Christianity	Jehovah Witness	Mormon
eternal	created by Jehovah	created by God
uncreated always existed and made all things	maker or all other things	maker of all things in partnership with God
God in the flesh	Michael the archangel	spirit brother of an angel called Lucifer

Suddenly, the man stood up in a rage, just as my sister decided to stop by for a visit, as she saw me sitting outside at the table. As I attempted to introduce my sister to him, the man screamed some obscenities at me and my sister and ran towards his car. I wonder what kind of call report he wrote down that day (follow this link to see their blank form)!

Many of us can relate to Saint Peter. Of all the disciples, Peter is the one with whom I most identify. Some of us are impulsive in our reactions, especially in situations where we feel the Lord Jesus has been disrespected. Peter, like the Prophet Jeremiah, was a man of passion, the first of whom Jesus entrusted the "keys of the kingdom." Even Peter, the foremost of the disciples, was at least once overcome by the forces of evil that raged especially violently during Jesus' earthly ministry. Satan would stop at nothing to derail Jesus' ministry, even if he likely didn't understand all of the implications of Jesus' prediction of His own death. Matthew recorded the following incident, which is today's Gospel reading.

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Gospel Reading:

> *21 From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. 22 Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You." 23 But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." 24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. 25 For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? 27 For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS." (Matthew 16:21-27)*

Peter, like many of us, was impulsive and frequently acted first, taking stock of his actions later. After having spent the better part of three years with Jesus, he was obviously upset that anyone would harm Jesus, especially the chief priests and scribes. He was clearly the leader of the group of twelve disciples and the first and representative of all twelve to whom the "keys of the kingdom" were later given, meaning that He entrusted them with the dispersion of the Gospel message to the world. His main role was as a witness to the Jews (Galatians 2:8). Sometimes called the "first among equals," he played a leading role in the early church, as can be seen in Acts Chapter 1 when he was the first to gather the ten remaining disciples in order to replace Judas Iscariot, the traitor. Peter, whose heart was changed by the Holy Spirit, was the first of the disciples to confess Jesus as the Messiah (Matthew 16:16-18). He was called a "pillar of the church" in Paul's Letter to the Galatians (Galatians 2:9) and acted as the de facto spokesman of the disciples (see Matthew 15:15, 18:21, 19:27, Mark 11:21, etc.). Peter's *modusoperandi* may have been something that those of us partial dyslexics can relate, "durry up and hoo something!" Peter couldn't bear the thought of losing his best friend and ministry partner for whom he had dedicated his life the past several years. Peter, like Jeremiah and Jesus, had also suffered from the constant persecution of the scribes and Pharisees, and one can only imagine his anger when he was told that these nemeses would kill his Messiah!

Yes, God's purposes had to be fulfilled through Jesus offering Himself as a Savior for our sins. Peter, who was overcome with both his passion and his love for Jesus, was, as Jesus said, also influenced by the Father of Lies (v. 23). The time of Jesus' ministry was an era of extreme demonic activity. Almost a dozen times in the Gospels, Jesus was confronted by a demon-possessed person and cast it out of

them (for example, Matthew 9:33, Mark 7:26, Luke 4:33). Our enemy the devil seems to have a lot of capabilities, but we know for certain that Peter wasn't in any way "possessed by a demon." No, what happened in this incident was that Peter simply repeated a mantra that was implanted in the world by the father of the world (2 Corinthians 4:4), the father of lies (John 8:44), Satan, the devil himself. This lie was that the Messiah would come and set up his eternal kingdom without the need for anyone to deal with their sin, either in a personal or corporal sense, for all of Israel. The people of the god of this age (2 Corinthians 4:4) saw no need to humble themselves before God, repent of their sins, and allow God to give His life as the perfect, once for all sacrifice of sin forever (Hebrews 10:14). For a very brief instant, Peter was conformed to this world, just as Paul warned about in the second reading from Romans.

What does this mean in our lives? First, how have we responded to God's prophetic word? Have we, like Jeremiah, taken the Word and given it to others to watch the works of God unfold in their lives? Second, have we taken the Word into our own hearts and allowed God to transform us as Paul stated in the second reading? Are we offering our bodies as living sacrifices, something with which Jeremiah, Peter, and Paul have firmly conformed? Finally, what lies is **our** culture telling us today? What lies would we, like Peter, repeat in an instant when suddenly confronted with something that went against the world's teachings? What would be our reaction when invited to the wedding of a gay friend? How would we respond to the questions of the deacon board about our action in response to this event? Is it acceptable to love the sinner but hate the sin? These are things which we must reason with in advance such that when the sudden circumstance arises we are, as Saint Peter said, ready to give a response" (1 Peter 3:15).

Reflection Questions

1. In the Gospel lesson we saw how Peter impulsively responded to Jesus' prophecy concerning His coming death, burial, and resurrection. Think back to a time when you found yourself in a situation in which your faith was challenged, and you responded impulsively without thinking about all of the implications of your actions. In light of the Gospel reading, what could you learn from Peter and Jesus in terms of how to respond in the future?

2. Review the past few weeks of your life. In what ways have you been tempted to be conformed to the pattern of this world? What lie is behind the temptation? What truth can you hold onto to help you to be faithful to God in the midst of ongoing temptation? If you are not sure how to answer these

questions, pray to God right now and ask Him to open your eyes to the deceptive nature of sin and help you to be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 121: 08/23/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the first reading from Isaiah, where we see and explain the meaning of the phrase "the key of the house of David." Then we move to the second reading from Romans 11, where you will read many additional verses beyond what was published in the lectionary in order to understand the meaning of God's Word based on its context. Finally, we conclude with the Gospel message from Matthew 16 and study the meaning of a phrase similar to what we saw in the first reading, "the keys of the kingdom of heaven," in which Jesus emphasized Peter's importance as the first among equals among the disciples.

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Introduction to the First Reading:

Before we begin, I will briefly review the format and method of these weekly study notes. The format can be understood through the acronym A-B-C, starting with "C" and working backward: context, big idea, and application. First, we provide the full scriptural context for the text, including verses omitted from the reading. We also provide the historical context, along with the author's background and setting. Second, we study the text in light of its historical context to determine the theological big idea. We develop this in light of a "Christological" focus, that is, upon the redemptive message found throughout the Bible: salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, whether in a future context, as in the Old Testament, or in a present or historical context, as in the New Testament. We do not rely upon an allegorical interpretation, but instead use the historical-critical method and refer to the original languages and parallel passages whenever necessary. Finally, we provide several applications of the text for the present-day Christian. Although there is usually only one main interpretation of the text, there are many possible applications. With these guiding principles in mind, let's move on to the first reading.

The first reading is from the Prophet Isaiah. The reading is a parenthesis in Chapter 22, meaning that it was a pause or temporary transition from the main theme. The theme Isaiah described in the chapter before this parenthesis was the future destruction of Jerusalem, which we know occurred over 125 years later, in 586 B.C. Isaiah wrote just prior to the destruction of the Northern Kingdom by Assyria in 722 B.C. The context of the reading is that an evil man named Shebna, who was the secretary of the treasury under King Hezekiah, built himself a royal tomb so that his name would be remembered after his death. Evidently, this Shebna was misappropriating funds (see 2 Kings 18:18, 19:2, and Isaiah 36:3, 37:2). This reading includes verses 15-18 and verses 24-25, in order for you to read the whole section of Scripture.

First Reading:

> *15 Thus says the Lord GOD of hosts, "Come, go to this steward, To Shebna, who is in charge of the royal household, 16 'What right do you have here, And whom do you have here, That you have hewn a tomb for yourself here, You who hew a tomb on the height, You who carve a resting place for yourself in the rock? 17 Behold, the LORD is about to hurl you headlong, O man. And He is about to grasp you firmly 18 And roll you tightly like a ball, To be cast into a vast country; There you will die And there your splendid chariots will be, You shame of your*

> *master's house.'*
> *19 I will depose you from your office, And I will pull you down from your station. 20 Then it will come about in that day, That I will summon My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, 21 And I will clothe him with your tunic And tie your sash securely about him. I will entrust him with your authority, And he will become a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. 22 Then I will set the key of the house of David on his shoulder, When he opens no one will shut, When he shuts no one will open. 23 "I will drive him like a peg in a firm place, And he will become a throne of glory to his father's house.*
> *24 So they will hang on him all the glory of his father's house, offspring and issue, all the least of vessels, from bowls to all the jars. 25 "In that day," declares the LORD of hosts, "the peg driven in a firm place will give way; it will even break off and fall, and the load hanging on it will be cut off, for the LORD has spoken." (Isaiah 22:15-25)*

God was angry with ungodly Shebna and Isaiah said that he would be deposed (v. 19) and replaced by godly Eliakim the son of Hilkiah (v. 20). Shebna squandered resources to build a tomb to enthrone his name in history (v. 16). The focus of the reading is upon the great contrast between Eliakim, a type of Christ, and Shebna, a type of Antichrist, and by application (and prophesy) between Christ and the Antichrist. Remember that a type is when persons (or statements) in the Old Testament prefigure the person of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. For example, the Prophet Jonah, who spent three days and nights in the belly of the great fish (Jonah 1:17), was a type of Christ, in the same way that Jesus spent three days and three nights in the belly of the earth (Matthew 12:40). Eliakim typified the Person of Jesus Christ (as we see in verses 21-24). Jesus, Isaiah prophesied, would "be entrusted with authority (v. 21), become a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah" (v. 21), and possess the "key of the house of David on his shoulder" (v. 24).

Jesus quoted from this passage, as we will see later in the Gospel lesson when He addressed Peter after this important disciple had confessed Jesus as the Messiah. There is a parallel between the trusted servant Eliakim and Peter the disciple of Jesus who came along much later. Both Eliakim and Peter were trusted servants, the latter so much so that Jesus said he would build His church upon him along with the other ten trusted disciples. There are other parallels that exist in the New Testament. The phrase in verse 22, "the key of the house of David," is very similar to a phrase used in the Book of Revelation. Saint John, the author of the Book said, "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this" (Revelation 3:7). John said that Jesus was the One Who "is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens" (v. 7). Jesus alone holds the keys to the kingdom.

The closing of this section of text is marked by a view of the end-time tribulation period in which the false Christ, the Antichrist typified by Isaiah as Shebna, will be taken down (v. 25, Revelation 19:19-20). Isaiah said that the Antichrist, "the peg driven in a firm place will give way; it will even break off and fall, and the load hanging on it will be cut off" (v. 25). We can trust that the true Jesus will overcome the false Christ but not until God has tolerated the hardness of almost the entire world's heart against believing in the Gospel message. Though God will speak the Good News to the world all at the same time through the voice of an angel (Revelation 14:6), precious few will believe. At the end of time, God will call and redeem all of Israel (Romans 11:26).

One takeaway from the first reading is God's eventual judgment of sin. Shebna, though he was rich and powerful, was not immune to God's judgment and the consequences of trusting in himself to make it through life. This is the essence of what it means to be "anti-Christ"—having a posture of self-reliance. In contrast, the Christ-follower is one who recognizes his or her need for a Savior and invites Jesus into the daily stuff of life to let Christ rule and reign in his or her heart.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

As we move on to the second reading from Romans Chapter 11, we need to discuss a portion of the text before the reading to bring out its meaning. The context is Paul's discussion of Israel's future. Romans 9 dealt with Israel's past, Romans 10 with the present (in Paul's time), and Romans 11 with the future. As you read this first omitted section (Chapter 11 vv. 25-32), keep in mind the study last week regarding the unfolding of the revelation of the mystery of God's plan of salvation for the Gentiles.

> *25 For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery–so that you will not be wise in your own estimation–that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; 26 and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB." 27 "THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS." 28 From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; 29 for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 30 For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, 31 so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. 32 For God has shut up all in*

> *disobedience so that He may show mercy to all. (Romans 11:25-32)*

Paul said that the reason God allowed the Jews to harden their hearts against the Messiah Jesus was to allow for the salvation of the Gentiles in the church. God loved the world so much that He allowed this mystery to accomplish His saving work for the Gentiles, as prophesied in the Old Testament (Isaiah 49:6). Paul, moved by the Holy Spirit, wrote about the unveiling of this phenomenal mystery.

Now let's read the actual second reading.

Second Reading:

> *33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! 34 For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? 35 Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? 36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:33-36)*

Paul marveled at the wisdom and knowledge of God (v. 33). How could God tolerate the hard-hearted Jews in order to provide for the salvation of the Gentiles? The ways of God are unfathomable (v. 33). The implication of this in our own lives is multi-dimensional. As we go through life, there are so many things beyond our control that we do not understand. We know that God has the power to change things—yet sometimes he doesn't act according to what we think is best. This is the crisis of faith. Will we trust that God is wiser and more knowledgeable than we ourselves are? Or will we rail at God for being unloving and incompetent in our lives? While God doesn't cause evil, He does permit it (as in allowing the hearts of the Jews to be hardened). There is a choice that each believer in God has to make at some point in their relationship with God: Am I going to trust God's ways or am I going to trust in my ways above His ways? Throughout the Bible, God uses His divine agents to accomplish His work, be they angels, prophets, animals, or even people like us. As we transition to the Gospel lesson, meditate upon the depth of the wisdom of God in the past biblical record in order to trust Him in the midst of any present-day confusing circumstances in your own life.

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Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading this week is from Matthew 16. Jesus had just shown the disciples His supernatural power through the feeding of the 5,000 and a separate incident of feeding the 4,000. After He did this, Jesus warned them to beware of "the leaven of the Pharisees" (Matthew 16:11), and then He traveled with them to the region known as Caesarea Philippi. It is in this region that many pagans believed to be the seat of the underworld, a place where immoral practices were done on a regular basis to appease the gods from the "gates of hell." There were even niches carved into the rock cliff to display the idols worshipped in this area. It is in this ominous and evil place that Jesus taught His disciples a valuable lesson.

Gospel Reading:

> *13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" 14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." 15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." 20 Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ. (Matthew 16:13-20)*

In the reading, Jesus clearly emphasized Peter as the foremost among the disciples, and this, along with other New Testament readings, indicates that this disciple was something like "first among equals." Jesus told Peter that He would build His church upon both Peter and his confession of Jesus as the Christ. As we delve further into the analysis of the reading, we ask our readers to contemplate how Jesus could place any authority to give the Gospel message to the world on anyone, even Peter. Peter, like many of us, was impulsive and impatient, always wanting to take action but maybe never thinking things through as thoroughly as he would later in his life.

Several significant points jump out of the text. First, Peter, the undisputed leader of the disciples, made the marvelous statement, with the help of God the Father, that Jesus was indeed the Messiah (v. 16). Jesus affirmed Peter's confession and went on to elaborate on it. What did Jesus mean when He told Peter, "upon this rock I will build my church" (v. 18b)? Jesus' meaning is clear when we look one level deeper into the plain meaning found in the original language. Peter, whose name in Greek is "Petros", literally means "rock." However, the foundation on which Jesus spoke about building the church is a different Greek word, "petra," which means a mass or rock. In context, what Jesus said was close to this paraphrase: "Simon, I am changing your name to Petros, and upon this petra (foundational mass of rock) I will build my church." Jesus said that He would build His church upon the foundation (petra, meaning a mass of rock or many large rocks), which, in context, refers to Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ. However, Jesus clearly indicated that Peter was the foremost of these building blocks, the "first among equals." Peter, with his heart changed by the Holy Spirit of God so as to confess Jesus as the Christ, was the foundation of the church. Jesus entrusted this authority to him, as we saw with Eliakim in the first reading. Peter, as first among equals, shared this authority with the other disciples. Peter, the Rock, was the leader of the church among the Jews, the people to whom God first granted the understanding of the mystery of the church, before Paul spread the message to the Gentiles.

Peter clarified this meaning in the First Epistle of Peter. Peter said, "you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). Although Peter used the word "lithos" for stone, he stated how the individual stones are built up into a holy priesthood of believers "through Jesus Christ." The church is the collection of spiritual rocks that are built on the "petra" or foundation that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16) through whom is the only way to eternal life (John 14:6).

Saint Paul used a similar analogy in explaining how God empowered him as the leader and builder of the church among the Gentiles (Ephesians 3:1), in the same way that Peter was the builder of the church among the Jews (Galatians 2:8). Paul said, "According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:10-11). In Ephesians, Paul clarified how Jesus intended the church to interpret this passage by pointing out that our faith has "been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone" (Ephesians 2:20).

Paul used the symbolism of Jesus as the Rock or foundation in First Corinthians:

> *1 For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; 3 and all ate the same spiritual food; 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. (1 Corinthians 10:1-4)*

When Paul said the "they were drinking from the spiritual rock" and "the rock was Christ" (v. 4), both times he used the word "petra." Jesus was the foundation stone, the One Who provided sustenance to the Hebrews as they escaped from the Pharaoh.

Jesus Himself explained the necessity of a sure foundation in Luke Chapter 6:

> *47 Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: 48 he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. 49 But the one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house on the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great. (Luke 6:47-49)*

When Jesus said, "he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock" (v. 48) the word in the original was "petra" The giant rock that was rolled to seal Jesus' tomb was a "petra" (Matthew 27:60). Peter **was** one of the foundational stone**s** (the apostles and prophets), but Jesus **is** the Chief Cornerstone, the Foundation of the Church. "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:40).

A second significant point in the text arises from when Jesus said that He "will give you the keys of the kingdom in heaven," and that whatever he bound on earth would be bound in heaven, and whatever was loosed on earth would be loosed in heaven. Scripture is clear that the keys of the kingdom are salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The binding and unbinding of sin is found in the gift of faith (Ephesians 2:8-9) when a person comes to the knowledge of Jesus Christ as their Savior. Peter and the other apostles were sent out with authority to preach the Gospel (Matthew 28:18-20), which would serve as the entry point to faith. In a certain sense, they were being commissioned to

open the doors of the Kingdom of God to others by their obedience in proclaiming the Good news and making disciples. We then see Peter is Acts 2:14-40 fulfilling this call by preaching a message of repentance and salvation in Jesus Christ. This is in line with Jesus' teaching when He said, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" (John 3:36). Later, Jesus instructed the group of ten disciples (eleven less Thomas) gathered together in the upper room after His resurrection that anyone who believes in Him through the preaching of the Gospel will be saved. The keys of the Kingdom were being entrusted to this group of men who had been with Jesus personally. They were going to be His hands and feet in the world from now on. And the story of the Gospel continues to penetrate lives because we are all commissioned to be his ambassadors, representing God's love and truth to the world with our lives and our proclamation of the Good News (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Finally, Jesus said, "the gates of Hades will not overpower it" (v. 18c), meaning that all of the evil will not be able to overcome the God-ordained movement of the church. The church is on the offensive, storming the "gates of hell" as was so symbolically portrayed by this incident happening at Caesarea Philippi. This is an important statement that no matter how awful the world may become, the power of Satan will never destroy God's church. We can rest in the fact that Jesus has overcome the world (John 16:33, 1 Corinthians 15:57), and through Him alone we can find the power to continue His commission to make disciples and teach (Matthew 28:16-20).

Reflection Questions

1. In the Gospel reading, Jesus asked his disciples a very pointed question: "Who do you say that I am?" At some point, each of us has to answer this question. How does Peter's response resonate with you? Is this the foundation you are building your life on? If so, how does your life reflect this? If not, what foundation are you building your life on? Would you like Peter's response to be your response, too? You can pause and ask God to change the direction of your life so that you can build on the Chief Cornerstone, Jesus Christ.

2. In the Gospel lesson, Jesus said, "the gates of Hades will not overpower it" (v. 18c), meaning that all of the evil will not be able to overcome the God-ordained movement of the church. Where do you see this passage intersecting with your life?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 118: 08/16/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. The readings this week all follow a central theme, God's revelation of the mystery of salvation being given to the Gentiles in addition to the Jews. The Jews were always God's chosen method of bringing light to the Gentile world. We will see that in the first reading from Isaiah 56 and the second reading from Romans 11. Finally, in the Gospel lesson, we will see Jesus' interaction with a Gentile woman and how her faith in Jesus' ability to heal her daughter provided a glimpse into God's plan of salvation for the Gentiles.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Prophet Isaiah. Chapter 56 is in the closing section of the Book of

Isaiah, where God revealed important spiritual truths, including the importance of His Word (Isaiah 55:10-11), as well as some further information about His plan of salvation for the Gentiles. In the section immediately preceding today's reading, God outlined His promises to the covenant people, the Jews. As you read, note that verses 2-5, which were skipped in the mass lectionary, have been added in order to provide the reader with a fuller understanding of the text.

First Reading:

> *1 Thus says the LORD, "Preserve justice and do righteousness, For My salvation is about to come And My righteousness to be revealed. 2 How blessed is the man who does this, And the son of man who takes hold of it; Who keeps from profaning the sabbath, And keeps his hand from doing any evil. 3 Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say, "The LORD will surely separate me from His people." Nor let the eunuch say, "Behold, I am a dry tree." 4 For thus says the LORD, "To the eunuchs who keep My sabbaths, And choose what pleases Me, And hold fast My covenant, 5 To them I will give in My house and within My walls a memorial, And a name better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off. 6 Also the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, To minister to Him, and to love the name of the LORD, To be His servants, every one who keeps from profaning the sabbath And holds fast My covenant; 7 Even those I will bring to My holy mountain And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; For My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples." (Isaiah 56:1-7)*

Several important points arise from Isaiah's prophecy. First, in light of the previous chapters in which God recounted His promises to the Jews, He announced a charge to them to maintain a clear conscience. In verse one, He tells them to "preserve justice and do righteousness" because His salvation would come in the future, and at that point His righteousness would be revealed. For a Jew, keeping the Law meant honoring the Sabbath as well as "keep[ing] [their] hands from doing any evil" (v. 3). This is a calling to all believers to walk uprightly with the knowledge of salvation that they possess, whether Jew or Gentile. This is clear because, in verse three, God began to lay out further details of his plan of salvation for the Gentiles. Second, everyone would be welcomed into God's kingdom who walked in faith with God, including the Gentiles (foreigners) or those who felt unwelcome in it, such as the childless eunuchs. Large families were considered a blessing of God in the Jewish world. God said that he would "give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off" (v. 5c) and that he would "bring [them] to [His] holy mountain and make them joyful in [His] house of prayer" (v. 7). Finally, God revealed through Isaiah that anyone could join the Jewish community

of believers and partake in their worship and celebration of God. He said, "[His] house [would] be called a house of prayer for **all** peoples" (v. 7c, emphasis added).

Although Isaiah provided additional information about God's plan of salvation for the Gentiles through the Jews, this was not a new concept in the Bible. Even in the very first Book of the Bible, God spoke about salvation coming to all people through Abraham, the father of all believers. God told Abraham, "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice" (Genesis 22:18). King David said some three hundred years earlier, "All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, And all the families of the nations will worship before You" (Psalm 22:27). Earlier in Isaiah's record he provided insight into the ultimate method that God would use to bring salvation to the whole world. He said regarding the future Messiah Jesus, "The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them" (Isaiah 9:2). Though the Jews were always a light that pointed to salvation through faith in God, the ultimate light would be the Lord Jesus.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

As we turn to the second reading, we will find additional information about God's plan of salvation for the Gentiles that came through the Jews. In this portion of Romans, Paul uses an analogy of an olive tree to describe God's saving ways. Because the Jews rejected the Messiah, some of the original branches (the Jews) had been broken off. This grieved Paul to no end. But this made room for the wild branch (that of the Gentiles) to be grafted into the pure olive tree (the Life of Christ). Our hope is in God's ability to take what is broken and make it whole again (both Jews and Gentiles). And if He is able to do that at the macro-level, can we not trust Him to do that at the micro-level of our lives?

As you read, please note that a large section of the text was omitted in the mass reading (verses 16-28 shown separated from the rest) but has been included in order to provide the full meaning of the text.

Second Reading:

> *13 But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, 14 if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them. 15 For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?*

16 If the first piece of dough is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too. 17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, 18 do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. 19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." 20 Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; 21 for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. 22 Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. 23 And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. 24 For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree? 25 For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery–so that you will not be wise in your own estimation–that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; 26 and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB." 27 "THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS." 28 From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers;

29 for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 30 For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, 31 so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. 32 For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all. (Romans 11:13-32)

The big idea in the reading is the revelation of the "mystery" (v. 25a) that God has allowed the Jews to be disobedient to Him for a period of time, such that the Gentile believers may be "ingrafted" into God's plan of salvation. Paul affirmed that as the "apostle to the Gentiles" (v. 13) he hoped that through his ministry to them that he may motivate his fellow Jews to trust in Jesus (v. 14). He said that at some future date that all of Israel would be saved (v. 25). As Gentiles without the knowledge of God, we are being shown God's mercy during what some commentators refer to as the "church age." The church was something that wasn't revealed to the Old Testament Prophets, or even to Jesus' own disciples, until close to the end of Jesus' earthly ministry. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew people were distinct from the surrounding nations because of their Law, culture, food,

temple, and worship practices. In the New Testament, Jesus' vision for the church would be for us to be "in the world, but not of it" (John 17:15-16). In the reading, Paul stated how the people of God (both Jews and Gentiles) were now one.

Saint Paul revealed more revelations from God about the mystery of the church. Later in Ephesians, God used the analogy of the love that exists between a man and a woman to show how He loves the church. Paul said that husbands are to "love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for it" (Ephesians 5:25). He continued, "This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:32, emphasis added). Paul said more about the mystery of the church:

> *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 3:4-6)*

How could God allow the hardness of the Jewish people's hearts and set them aside until the last Gentile who desired salvation would find faith in Jesus Christ? This is one of the deep mysteries with which Paul was wrestling. The answer, at least partially, is found in the last verse of the second reading. "For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all" (v. 32). God loves us so much that He is willing to endure the hardness of the Jews' hearts until all of us Gentiles who desire salvation find faith in Jesus Christ. The point Paul makes throughout his letters, and in Romans in particular, is that we can trust God's mercy even if we don't fully understand His ways.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

In today's Gospel lesson, remember that at this point the church age was still hidden, and God's plan of salvation for the Gentiles through faith in Jesus' perfect sacrifice on the cross wasn't in view yet. The context of the Gospel reading is just after Peter (and Jesus) walked on the waters of the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 14:25-31) that we studied last week. After Jesus had calmed the wind and the waves, they crossed the lake and came to the region of Gennesaret (14:34) located on the northwest shore of the lake. A series of events preceding this caused Jesus to leave this Jewish region. This

included the unwillingness of the Jewish people to repent (Matthew 11:20-24), the rejection of Jesus by the people in his own hometown of Nazareth (Matthew 13:53-58), and the arrest and execution of John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1-10). Jesus' movement to this region spoke symbolically of the future ministry to the Gentiles that some of the disciples would have.

We drop in on the story of the Canaanite woman in Matthew, which highlights the hardness of the Pharisees' hearts. This story provides a sharp contrast between the Jewish religious leaders' response to Jesus and the non-religious Gentile response to Jesus. In the previous verses, Jesus was grilled by the Pharisees, and then He showed them for the frauds they are. Then, in contrast, we read a story about the real journey of faith.

Gospel Reading:

> *21 Jesus went away from there, and withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon. 22 And a Canaanite woman from that region came out and began to cry out, saying, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed." 23 But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came and implored Him, saying, "Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us." 24 But He answered and said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." 25 But she came and began to bow down before Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" 26 And He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." 27 But she said, "Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." 28 Then Jesus said to her, "O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed at once. (Matthew 15:21-28)*

The Gentile woman was from a group of people who had always troubled Israel. The Canaanites were first mentioned in the Bible way back in Genesis Chapter 10 (v. 18). They were among the people groups that God promised to drive out during the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt (see Exodus 33:2 and 34:11). They were a people that in Old Testament times lived in the lowland regions west of the Jordan River. Mark called her "a Gentile, of the Syrophoenician race" (Mark 7:26), indicating that she was a Greek. Jews had always been separated from the Greeks (or Gentiles), although the Jews were immersed in a thoroughly Greek culture. As the story plays out, the Gentile woman called out to Jesus with a respectful title, "Lord, Son of David" (v. 22), which indicated that she had some understanding of Jesus. She called Jesus "Lord" three times. The word "Lord" means master, and the one using the term would be implying their submission to His authority in their life. Certainly, she

had heard about his healing powers, but now she used a title that was reserved for the Messiah. She was a persistent woman, and Jesus' disciples implored him to send her away "because she keeps shouting at us" (v. 23c). Then Jesus addressed her and said that His ministry was only to the Jews (v. 24). Next, the woman bowed down before Jesus who then used a metaphor and told her that "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs" (v. 27). The "children's bread" referred to God's covenant people the Jews. This meant that since she wasn't a Jew, she was not technically Jesus' first priority during his short earthly ministry, which was to the Jews, not to the Gentiles. Her answer to him was very surprising and was an indication of the faith that she had in the Lord Jesus. "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table" (v. 27). Jesus rewarded her faith by immediately healing her daughter. The Bible is clear that God commends those with faith; He is a "rewarder of those that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). The Gentile woman was rewarded by having her daughter healed. One can only imagine what became of the woman afterward, since Jesus absolutely made a tremendous impression upon her.

What do the readings this week mean to us in our lives? First, God emphasizes the necessity of faith in the perfect, finished work of Jesus Christ for all people, whether Jew or Gentile, and is no respecter of persons. He "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). God provided the plan of salvation through Jesus and made this available to everyone. "For the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). God said "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation" Romans 10:9-10).

Second, we should love and respect the Jews, who, although their hearts are hardened, are the ones who brought salvation to us through Jesus Christ. We should "not be conceited, but fear; 21 for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either" (Romans 11:20). God has made Israel to be a blessing to the world, and all the way back in Genesis, He cautioned us about how we should treat them. He said, "And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Genesis 12:3).

Finally, with the privilege of faith, we also have a great responsibility to share with everyone the knowledge of Jesus Christ, whether Jew or Gentile. Jesus didn't give us many commands when He left, but He did leave a clear message about our life's priority. This is called the Great Commission:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Reflection Questions

1. How do you personally respond to God's call to salvation?

- Have you made a decision to accept His call and be grafted into the life of Christ?
- What does God's inclusion of Gentiles in the salvation story tell you about His character and heart?
- How does God's longing to see all people saved encourage you to reach out to others with His good news of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ?

2. How does the faith of the Canaanite woman challenge or affirm you in your own faith journey? Have you seen anyone model this type of faith? Who is God using you to encourage with this type of faith?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 115: 08/09/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the first reading from the Book of First Kings, in which Elijah hides in a cave and waits to hear from the voice of God. Then continue the study in Romans in the second reading and conclude with yet another continuing study in the Gospel of Matthew in which Jesus and Peter walk on water.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of First Kings, where Elijah was fleeing from Queen Jezebel, who had threatened his life (1 Kings 19:1-2) after he had killed the Prophets of Baal at the conclusion of a contest with them. Elijah had fled first to Beersheba, where an angel of the Lord had fed him, leading him on a forty-day journey to Mt. Horeb, "the mountain of God" (19:8). The reading skipped the ending of verse 9 and all of verse 10 that provides important contextual information for the

eventual revelation of God's message to Elijah. Therefore, these verses are included in our study.

First Reading:

> *9 Then he came there to a cave and lodged there; and behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" 10 He said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." 11 So He said, "Go forth and stand on the mountain before the LORD." And behold, the LORD was passing by! And a great and strong wind was rending the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. 12 After the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of a gentle blowing. 13 When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. And behold, a voice came to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (1 Kings 19:9-13)*

Elijah mistakenly believed he was the only remaining follower of the Lord (v. 10: "I alone am left"). God later corrected his false belief in the chapter and told him that 7,000 believers remained (1 Kings 19:18; see below). It is important to note that Elijah had just returned from a significant spiritual victory. Sometimes after a victory, we can be the most vulnerable. So God, in His mercy, meets Elijah in his place of need in a cave at Mt. Horeb. This is the same mountain where God met Moses and gave him the Ten Commandments. Now, hundreds of years later, Elijah, another great leader, met God in an unexpected way. God caused the wind, earthquake, and fire, but these things weren't His voice. No, these fearful things brought about by the fall of Adam (Genesis 3) were not the Word of God for which Elijah was waiting; this came in the sound of a "gentle blowing," or as rendered in some versions, "a tiny whispering sound" (v. 12). When Elijah heard this, he knew that this was God's voice. This is what Elijah needed to continue on.

Some life lessons we can learn from Elijah's interaction with God are as follows: God may be seeking to get our attention in the same way. First, God may be asking us, "What are you doing here?" This is a question of purpose, personal meaning, and identity. Only God can give us the answer to this question. Second, God may be telling us where to find Him. In Elijah's case, it was geographical; however, in our case, it may be more a matter of our heart, seeking Him where He has chosen to

reveal Himself – in His Word, the Bible. Finally, He may be showing us Who He is. Surprisingly enough, God chose to reveal Himself in a still, small voice. Our world shouts, but God whispers. What can we do to quiet ourselves and listen?

This is how the story ended with God giving Elijah specific instructions and information.

> *14 Then he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." 15 The LORD said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus, and when you have arrived, you shall anoint Hazael king over Aram; 16 and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. 17 "It shall come about, the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall put to death. 18 "Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him." (1 Kings 19:14-18)*

Elijah thought that he was alone when, in fact, God revealed that there were at least 7,000 in Israel who had remained true to Him. Oftentimes, we may feel all alone as believers in Jesus Christ, especially when we find ourselves in circumstances around nonbelievers for extended periods of time.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

As we move to the second reading, Saint Paul likely felt that way as he poured out his heart to his fellow Jews who stubbornly resisted the Gospel message. This week's reading continues the previous week's study in Romans. Romans chapter 9 through 11 mark a section in which Saint Paul outlines Israel's past (chapter 9), present (chapter 11), and future (chapter 12).

Second Reading:

> *1 I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, 2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, 4 who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, 5 whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. (Romans 9:1-5)*

The big idea is that Paul was a Jew, "my kinsmen according to the flesh" (v. 3), born into the tribe of Benjamin (Philippians 3:5), and is greatly distressed that, as a Jew, his fellow Israelites haven't believed in the Messiah Jesus. We can learn several things from this passage. First, may we be grieved over those we care about who don't know Jesus Christ. Are we willing to make even minor sacrifices to reach the lost with the Good News of the Kingdom? Second, this section about the Jewish people reminds us that God chose this specific people group to be a blessing to the rest of the world. It was through the Jews that God established His covenants (relational commitments), gave the Law (moral, dietary, religious, and code of conduct), set up a place and a venue for worship (the responding to God's worth), and the promises (God's record of faithfulness). Their lineage includes the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), King David, and ultimately Jesus. Finally, Paul emphasizes who the Person of Jesus Christ is: God over all, forever praised. This is clear evidence that the early church had a solid sense of who Christ is (Christology), which includes His deity. His followers worshiped Him as God, and we would be wise to do the same.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson is a continuation of the study from previous weeks, beginning in Matthew with Jesus' parables in Chapter 13. Here, Jesus once again proves by performing mighty miracles that He is God.

Gospel Reading:

> *22 Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away. 23 After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone. 24 But the boat*

> *was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary. 25 And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea. 26 When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid." 28 Peter said to Him, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." 29 And He said, "Come!" And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. 30 But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31 Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32 When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. 33 And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "You are certainly God's Son!" (Matthew 14:22-33)*

As we saw the forces of nature in the first reading, the wind and the waves caused a frightful condition of the lake. This scene then became even more frightening when the disciples saw a man walking across the water (v. 26), evidently not recognizing the person as Jesus until He called out to them (v. 27). By this point, similar to what had happened to Elijah, they knew that they had heard the voice of God (v. 32).

There are actually three miracles in the story. First, Jesus Himself is walking on that water (v. 25). Second, Peter's walking on the water through Jesus' power (v. 29). Finally, the calming of both the wind and the waves (v. 32). Notice how Jesus sought solitude away from the crowds (v. 22). Jesus often did this right before he performed a mighty miracle. He did this just before He fed the crowd that we studied last week. He wanted to be by himself to pray to His Heavenly Father. This is a good reminder to us that if Jesus Himself needed to pray, how much more do we need this time with the Father?

Peter was the disciple with courage. We can sometimes look at Peter sinking in the water as a sign of fear, but he was the only one who got out of the boat! Sometimes God grows our faith by allowing turbulent circumstances and impossible odds. These are opportunities for us to turn our attention to Christ and trust Him to provide for us in the midst of the storm. I bet that Peter had a great time talking about his experience of walking on the water. We, too, will enjoy talking to others about how God has enabled us to do what we thought was impossible.

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Reflection Questions

1. We read in the Gospel lesson how Jesus enabled Peter to walk on water, and also how, as Peter's faith grew weaker, his ability began to fail. Faith is a key element in accepting God's empowerment in our lives. How has God empowered you to "walk on water" in a certain circumstance?

2. In the Gospel lesson, Peter experienced the exhilaration of walking on water, holding the hand of Jesus. If you were going through a time when your faith is being tested, how can Peter's story of walking on water encourage you to keep looking to Christ? Second, how might this experience help you to take a more radical approach in your outreach to the lost in your own life?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 112: 08/02/2026

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we open with the first reading from Isaiah 55 that provides a picture of God's grace. Then we move to the second reading from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans and learn that it is impossible for us to be separated from God once His Spirit lives within us. Finally, we conclude with the Gospel lesson from Saint Matthew, in which we study Jesus' miracle of feeding the five thousand. We pray that your Bible study this week is enriching to you and helps perfect God's work in your life.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Prophet Isaiah, whom Bible commentators call a major prophet because of the length of the Book God inspired Him to write. The context of the reading 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 grafted into His 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.

First Reading:

> *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. (Isaiah 55:1-3)*

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 thirsts" can come to Him. Second, God's grace cannot be earned (v.2); it is unmerited favor. 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.

As we move on to the next reading from Saint Paul, contemplate how this mighty saint may have felt hearing about the present-day attacks by Israel's enemies. Would he rest in God's promises and His "faithful mercies shown to David" (v. 3)?

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Paul's Letter to the Romans and continues the study from last week. Note that we have included verse 36 that was skipped in the reading. This is unfortunate because

the verse contains a quote from Psalm 44, in which the Psalmist recounts how he continued his walk with God despite his tribulations. Despite hardship, "All this has come upon us: But we have not forgotten You. Nor have we dealt falsely with Your covenant" (Psalm 44:17). God allowed these trials to come upon the Psalmist to accomplish His sovereign purposes. "But for Your sake we are killed all day long; We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered" (Psalm 44:22). The Psalmist closes with a call for God's mercy. "Rise up, be our help, And redeem us for the sake of Your lovingkindness" (v. 26). As you read the text, imagine why God inspired Paul to quote from this Psalm.

Second Reading:

> *35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35-39)*

One word that came to mind when we read this passage was "persistence." Paul said that we can persist and overcome our trials through patient persistence in prayer and trust in God, His nature, and His promises. Paul provided a list of things that attempt to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Regardless of what comes upon us, believers in the finished work of Jesus Christ, we can never become separated from the love of God that flows through our Savior. Paul was no stranger to hardship, and it's no wonder that he identified with the Psalmist's plea to God for mercy. He recorded some of these hardships in his Second Letter to the Corinthians:

> *24 Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. 26 I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; 27 I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for*

all the churches. (2 Corinthians 11:24-28)

Paul didn't boast about his hardships; rather, he boasted in the fact that he was weak (2 Corinthians 12:10). He said, "Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (12:10). "

This week is the anniversary of the time some years ago when we received news about a terrible tragedy in our neighborhood. A ten-year-old boy was riding his bike just before dark and ran through a stop sign in front of a truck. He was taken by ambulance to the hospital, then flown to a children's hospital. Despite the treatment, he passed away the next morning. His parents, who are strong Christians, made a statement to the media saying they wanted to let the truck driver know he hadn't done anything wrong and that he was forgiven. Would you have the strength and compassion to make such a statement in the midst of the most awful trial that could ever come upon a young family? "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (vv. 38-39). Or the sudden death of their beautiful son. The family has coped well with this tremendous loss. Sadly, the driver who hit the young boy passed away a few weeks later, likely as a result of the grief of the accident.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson is from Matthew 14 and recounts Jesus' miracle of feeding the five thousand who were gathered to hear Him speak. This is the first recorded incident of Jesus multiplying food to feed a large crowd; the second time happens later in Matthew 15:29-39. The reading opens and closes with something that Jesus was fond of doing: praying by Himself. When you examine the Gospel records closely, you will see that Jesus often retreated to a private place to pray just before performing public miracles. The context of the reading is just after Jesus heard of the death of John the Baptist, whom Jesus called the greatest man who ever lived (Matthew 11:11). As you read, note that we have included verses 22-23 to provide the most insight into the reading.

Gospel Reading:

> *13 Now when Jesus heard about John, He withdrew from there in a boat to a secluded place by Himself; and when the people heard of this, they followed Him on foot from the cities. 14 When He went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick. 15 When it was evening, the disciples came to Him and said, "This place is desolate and the hour is already late; so send the crowds away, that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." 16 But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away; you give them something to eat!" 17 They said to Him, "We have here only five loaves and two fish." 18 And He said, "Bring them here to Me." 19 Ordering the people to sit down on the grass, He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food, and breaking the loaves He gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds, 20 and they all ate and were satisfied. They picked up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve full baskets. 21 There were about five thousand men who ate, besides women and children. 22 Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away. 23 After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone. (Matthew 14:13-23)*

As we saw a picture of God's grace in the reading from Isaiah, so in the Gospel message, Jesus' feeding of the five thousand was also a picture of grace. The bread and the fish are a picture of God's grace as we celebrate Jesus' death on the cross for us through the communion meal. Let's examine the reading more closely to find some significant points about both Jesus and the disciples.

Matthew said that when Jesus heard about the death of John the Baptist, He retreated to a private place to pray. But Jesus wasn't going to have privacy that day as the crowds saw him get into the boat and followed Him (v. 13). In spite of His desire to pray by Himself, Matthew said that Jesus "felt compassion for them and healed their sick" (v. 14c). The word used in the original for "felt compassion" (Greek word "plagchnizomai") is unique to Jesus and found only in the Gospels. It is used to refer to Jesus some 12 times, mostly in Matthew (5 times), but also in Mark (4 times) and Luke (3 times), not in John. Jesus was particularly moved when He experienced large crowds of people in need. In Mark 6:34, He said, "When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion (plagchnizomai) for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things." This was once again the case in today's reading. Matthew tells us that Jesus "saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick" (v. 14b-ff).

The five loaves and two fish were a meager proportion. Imagine slicing five loaves of bread and then attempting to make sandwiches with them using just two fish. This didn't stop Jesus, who fed the

crowd so much that they had twelve baskets left over (v. 20). Notice how the number of baskets that were left over coincided with the number of Jesus' disciples, which also coincided with the number of the tribes of Israel. The number 12 in the Bible is used as a picture of perfection and symbolizes God's power and authority. Although the disciples missed the significance of the number, the count of the leftover baskets will be important to them as they look back on the event. Jesus said later in Matthew, "Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets full you picked up?" (Matthew 16:9).

Notice how both the disciples recognized Jesus authority over the crowds. In verse 15, Jesus' disciples asked Him to "send the crowds away." Then in verse 19, Matthew said, "Ordering the people to sit down on the grass." Their recognition of Jesus' supreme authority is significant because it shows the great faith the disciples had in Him, despite their completely missing the fact that Jesus could provide food for the crowd without the people having to return to town late, when the bakeries were probably already closed. Jesus surprised the disciples with the great miracle, yet they didn't understand it until Jesus explained it to them later (Matthew 16:9).

What does all of this mean for our lives? First, as we saw in the first reading, we need to listen to God, and this comes from reading the Bible. Second, we, like Jesus' disciples, must recognize Jesus' authority, but at the same time, we can rest in the fact that, because Jesus has authority, we can place our faith in Him. We can trust that God will provide for our basic needs, as Jesus did by feeding the crowd, and that He will also provide for our spiritual needs, especially by offering forgiveness for our sins and answering our prayers. Finally, God calls us to recount the blessings He has given us. The disciples didn't understand the significance of Jesus feeding the crowd until He had explained it to them later. It is helpful to us, when we are in the heat of the moment in the trials of our lives, to sense how God may be working in that particular instant. This not only glorifies God but also helps us trust in Him in future situations, as we recall His past provision for us.

Reflection Questions

1. We read in the Gospel lesson how Jesus' disciples underestimated Jesus' power, yet at the same time, they recognized His authority. Power flows from authority. Think of one particular instance in which you underestimated Jesus power in your life. Based upon what you studied today, how would you look at this situation differently in the future?

2. Saint Paul said in the second reading, "38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39). What are some things in your life that work to separate you from God? Based upon your study today, list one or two and how God provides power to maintain your relationship with Him for each of these circumstances.

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 109: 07/26/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we open with the Old Testament reading that describes King Solomon's prayer for wisdom. Our New Testament reading describes God's vision for each follower to be conformed to the image of His Son, Jesus. This is truly wise living. In the Gospel lesson, we continue with more about Jesus' teaching in parables from last week. He provides short stories about wise people who valued the Kingdom of Heaven above all else and inherited eternal

life.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The story is set after the death of King David. Israel was in its "golden era," having subdued its enemies and established itself as a nation. Solomon was David's son by Bathsheba and succeeded David on the throne. We catch a glimpse of his heart as he begins his reign over Israel.

First Reading:

> *5 In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream at night; and God said, "Ask what you wish me to give you." 6 Then Solomon said, "You have shown great lovingkindness to Your servant David my father, according as he walked before You in truth and righteousness and uprightness of heart toward You; and You have reserved for him this great lovingkindness, that You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. 7 Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king in place of my father David, yet I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. 8 Your servant is in the midst of Your people which You have chosen, a great people who are too many to be numbered or counted. 9 So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?" 10 It was pleasing in the sight of the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing. 11 God said to him, "Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice, 12 behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you. (1 Kings 3:5-12)*

These verses show us the beginning steps of King Solomon. Some important observations include:

- God came to Solomon in a dream
- God invited Solomon to ask Him for whatever he wished
- Solomon recognized God's great loving-kindness (fiercely loyal love) before answering
- Solomon also recognized his finiteness and sense of inadequacy for the important role that he was being placed in
- Solomon asked for an understanding heart to judge the people of Israel and to discern between good and evil
- God granted this request and blessed him with wisdom

If you know the rest of the story, you may be confused about how a person could be granted a wise and discerning heart and yet end up being led astray by all of the women (700 of them) he was married to (1 Kings 11:3). I wonder if his great wisdom came through the school of hard knocks. For at the end of his life, he confesses: "The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). No matter how much wealth, power, and status, the wisest man on earth concludes that fearing God is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10).

You may not be a king, but we can all come to God and ask Him for wisdom. James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him." We all have roles in life that are challenging. We can follow Solomon's lead and recognize God's fiercely loyal love and our inadequacy. This should lead us, with humility and desperation, before the true King of kings, as we ask our Heavenly Father for what we truly need: wisdom.

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Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from the New Testament, Saint Paul's letter to the Romans, which is a continuation of what we read last week. Paul is in the middle of declaring the victory that believers have through Christ. But the victory comes through the back door of recognizing our human weakness. This echoes King Solomon's prayer for wisdom in the earlier reading. For it is in our weakness that we find help from the Holy Spirit, who is interceding for us according to the will of God the Father (Romans 8:27).

Second Reading:

> *28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. (Romans 8:28-30)*

In its context, this passage casts an inspiring and hopeful vision for followers of Christ. For it declares that God uses all things for His good purposes. While not all things that happen in this life are good, God is able to use every circumstance (pleasurable and painful) to accomplish His predestined will: to conform us to the image of His Son. He wants us to look like Christ. That's what this life is all about. That is God's vision for us as His followers. The question for us is, how badly do we want His vision for our lives? Are we willing to let God conform us to the image of His Son and work all things together for good, or do we want to just "get enough of God" in order to go to heaven when we die? There is a foundational condition of having all things work together for good: this comes to one who loves God and allows Him to work out His good purposes in his or her life. What this implies is trust and surrender to God's bigger purposes. He knows what is best for us. Someday, we will agree wholeheartedly with Him.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

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In the Gospel lesson this week we continue with Jesus' teaching to His disciples through parables that we looked at the past two weeks.

Gospel Reading:

> *44 "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. 45 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, 46 and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. 47 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind; 48 and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away. 49 So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, 50 and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 51 Have you understood all these things?" They said to Him, "Yes." 52 And Jesus said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old." (Matthew 13:44-52)*

Jesus is away from the crowds (Matthew 13:36) and now teaches His disciples in parables, something He had previously done only when the crowds were present. The main subject is the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus paints a few broad strokes to entice His followers to continue their costly pursuit of becoming disciples of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus likens the Kingdom of Heaven to a hidden treasure and a pearl of great price. In the parable of the hidden treasure, the man isn't searching for it; in contrast, the man in the parable of the pearl is on an active search to locate valuable pearls. Both parables, though, require a sacrifice on the part of the would-be owners of the precious goods. But the sacrifice is insignificant for the joy of obtaining the truly valuable treasure. Jesus is helping us see that the Kingdom of Heaven is worth every seeming sacrifice made to walk with Him in this world. Jesus' kingdom is only partially here, and these parables illustrate the great value of this down payment on the full kingdom, the mystery of life eternal.

The apostle Paul understood clearly the surpassing value of a discipleship relationship to Jesus: "I

consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things" (Phil. 3:8).

The last illustration of the Kingdom of Heaven is very striking. It is that of a dragnet that is tossed out to catch fish. At the end of the age, the fish will be sorted out. The good will go into containers, and the bad will be thrown out. Jesus gives the explanation clearly. The wicked will be sorted out from the righteous and will be thrown into the furnace of fire (referring to a literal Hell). The prospects of an eternity with weeping and gnashing of teeth are almost too much to fathom. But Jesus, in His kindness, gives us insight into eternity. In this life, we have many choices to make, but the most important is where we will spend eternity. Based on our sin, we have only one label that we can claim: wicked. "There is none righteous, not even one" (Romans 3:10). We cannot claim the label "righteous," no matter how good we try to be. But Jesus came to give us the label and identity of "righteous" by bearing the punishment for our wickedness on the cross and giving us His righteousness. "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). So, while we don't deserve the label of righteous, we can choose to have it if we will receive God's gift of eternal life. It's a gift, though. It doesn't count until you receive it. Have you placed your faith in God's gift of eternal life through Christ? Are you counting on this for your salvation?

If so, you are a disciple of the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus said that each one who follows Him into His Kingdom brings out new and old treasures. This means that we have a growing testimony of God's valuable work in our lives. We can speak of the current work that He is doing and the past work that He has done. We are cooperating with His vision to conform us into the image of His Son, for we know that the Son is our most valuable treasure indeed.

Reflection Questions

1. What does it really mean to be a disciple of the "Kingdom of Heaven?" What are one or two ways in which this played out in your life this week?

2. What "sacrifices" have you made to be a disciple of the Kingdom of Heaven? How do these parables help you to know that it is worth it?

3. How does the story of Solomon asking for wisdom illustrate the parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price? In what areas do you want God to help you become wise and discerning about your own life and pursuits? Spend some time in prayer, asking Him for His perspective and wisdom for your life. Let Him know that you want to surrender to His vision for conforming you to the image of His Son.

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 106: 07/19/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we open by briefly looking at the responsorial Psalm from the first reading and then move on to the second reading, in which we study some deep truths from Paul's Letter to the Romans. Finally, we move to the Gospel lesson in which we continue Jesus' teaching of the parables in Matthew 13 that we looked at last week.

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Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Apocrypha. The main idea of the reading is expressed in the responsorial Psalm that follows. This is from Psalm Chapter 86, and we have included verses 5-7:

First Reading:

WIS 12:13, 16-19

There is no god besides you who have the care of all,
that you need show you have not unjustly condemned.
For your might is the source of justice;
your mastery over all things makes you lenient to all.
For you show your might when the perfection of your power is disbelieved;
and in those who know you, you rebuke temerity.
But though you are master of might, you judge with clemency,
and with much lenience you govern us;
for power, whenever you will, attends you.
And you taught your people, by these deeds,
that those who are just must be kind;
and you gave your children good ground for hope
that you would permit repentance for their sins.

First Reading (Responsorial Psalm):

5 For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, And abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon You.
6 Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer; And give heed to the voice of my supplications!
7 In the day of my trouble I shall call upon You, For You will answer me. (Psalm 86:5-7)

God forgives those who call upon Him (v. 5), listen to their prayers (v. 6), and answers them during times of distress (v. 7). It is good to know that God is above our problems (He is not wringing His hands in worry), yet He is not aloof to us in our neediness. There are two terms that help us to understand these important facets of God's character: transcendence (God is above His creation and rules over it) and immanence (God draws near to His creation and desires to be with us). These few verses teach us that He not only has the power to help us, but He is also interested in answering us; God's transcendence and immanence. What an amazing God, powerful and using His power in good and loving ways. His loving power is most clearly seen in the cross, as He gave His Son as a sacrifice for our sin debt.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading also has a theme of prayer, only this passage teaches that the Holy Spirit Himself is praying for us. This passage from Paul's Letter to the Romans also reinforces God's transcendence and immanence.

Second Reading:

> *26 In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; 27 and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:26-27).*

In this reading, Saint Paul revealed a marvelous mystery about God the Holy Spirit. He said that God the Holy Spirit prays on our behalf (v. 26) and intercedes for us (v. 27). God is transcendent over the believer, knowing our real needs and working towards His ultimate goal of glorifying Himself in our transformation. Yet, He also comes alongside us as the Helper who lives inside of us (John 14:6), praying with "groanings" too deep for words. He is not a cosmic policeman trying to enforce the rules. Instead, this passage teaches that God the Holy Spirit is moved by our helpless estate and He desires to accomplish the Father's will in our lives. He prays for things that we ourselves may not yet value and may not see as necessary in our lives. Maybe one important takeaway is to begin listening to God's heart for our lives as we read the Bible, and see if He may be answering His prayers for us when we don't see Him answering our prayers the way we desire. God's vision for our

lives is much bigger than our small hopes and dreams. Saint John of the Cross said it well:

> *How will a person*
> *Brought to birth and nurtured in a world of small horizons,*
> *Rise up to you Lord*
> *If you do not raise him by your hand which made him?*

The text doesn't say whether God changes our existing prayers to align with His will or makes new petitions for us. Regardless, each person of the Holy Trinity intercedes with the other on our behalf. This is extremely important because Paul said, "we do not know how to pray as we should" (v. 27). We know from Jesus' prayer in John Chapter 17 that He prays for us. Because this prayer is recorded in Scripture, we can be certain that Jesus continues ministering on our behalf. Later on in Romans 8:34, Paul assures us that "Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us." Again, God's transcendence (knowing what we need) and immanence (being with us in our need) are important truths that should warm our hearts in our daily lives. We are not alone. God is with us.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson this week includes three parables from the continuing study in Matthew 13. The first is the parable of the weeds and the tares, and this provides some extremely important insights into the nature of the kingdom, both in the near term and looking on into eternity. It also gives important insight into those who will be locked out of the kingdom. As with the parable of the sower we looked at last week, Jesus went on to explain its meaning to His disciples. The second parable is the parable of the mustard seed, and the final one covered this week is the parable of the leaven.

Some specific cautions are in order about the interpretation of these particular parables as well as that genre in general. First, each parable must not be construed in such a way as to make it "walk on all fours" by taking terms literally without fully considering the context. For example, though the word "leaven" (Matthew 13:33) is almost universally a negative term in the Bible, for example, the "leaven of the Pharisees" (Matthew 16:6), it is also a very good thing when used in the context of baking bread. A second word in the reading today about which we take note is the word "birds." In the Old Testament, many, though not all, birds were considered unclean and therefore bad in the

Jewish context. John, the author of Revelation, used this association when he described the future religious and civil empire of the Antichrist Mystery Babylon as the home for every "unclean and hateful bird" (Revelation 18:2). However, as we will read in a moment, Jesus used this word to describe the rapid growth and size of His kingdom, not necessarily the nature of the kingdom (although some will debate this point). A large and fast-growing kingdom is a good thing, though we need to take caution in believing that everyone who appears to be in the kingdom may not be what they appear, as we will see in the parable of the wheat and the tares. We have to focus on the main point of the parable and lay aside the word studies unless they change the meaning of the main point.

In our day and age, we know what we mean when we say, "People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones." We would never say this means that people should literally not throw stones while living inside that type of house, whether or not that was true. Instead, we mean that people should not criticize others for having the same faults they have. That is the main point of this modern parable, which brings us to a second caution about interpreting parables. Parables in the First-Century Jewish context were used to prove one (or sometimes two) main ideas by "laying alongside" a story that was easy for hearers in an oral culture to grasp. Although there is usually only one main **meaning** in a parable, there are multiple **applications**. With these things in mind, let's read the Gospel lesson.

Gospel Reading:

> *24 Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25 But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. 26 But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. 27 The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' 28 "And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' The slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' 29 "But he said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. 30 'Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.'"31 He presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; 32 and this is smaller than all other seeds, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR come and NEST IN ITS BRANCHES." 33 He spoke another parable to them, "The kingdom of*

> *heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened." 34 All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable. 35 This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: "I WILL OPEN MY MOUTH IN PARABLES; I WILL UTTER THINGS HIDDEN SINCE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD." 36 Then He left the crowds and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field." 37 And He said, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, 38 and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; 39 and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. 40 "So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, 42 and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear." (Matthew 13:24-43)*

Jesus taught the crowds and the disciples through three parables. First, let's examine the parable of the wheat and the tares. This is a very important parable that provides essential insights into both the nature of Jesus' holy kingdom and the nature of the place where those excluded from it will be assigned for eternity. Many points arise from Jesus' teaching; here are a few.

- The picture provided by the separation of the wheat and the tares is what will occur in Revelation Chapter 17 at the end of the Great Tribulation, when believers will be welcomed into Jesus' kingdom reign on earth, and all unbelievers will be removed.

- There are two literal destinations, heaven and hell. Hell is a real, literal place that is eternal, and everyone who doesn't go to heaven goes there. Jesus taught more about hell than He did about heaven. In Matthew 13, he clarifies by saying, "The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (vv. 41-42).
  The author of Hebrews said, "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this to face judgment" (Heb. 9:27).

- The weed plants grow, seemingly out of control, alongside the wheat during their natural lives. But when the weeds die they are subjected to the control of the Master who rounds them up to be burned. It is at this point that their true nature becomes evident. Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter" (Matthew 7:21).

- The nature of the seeds is different. Only God knows which one will grow into a wheat plant and which into a weed. The doctrine of predestination is tied directly to God's foreknowledge. Romans 8:29 says, "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified." God wishes that none would perish, but all would come to the knowledge of eternal life (1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9).

- Angels serve God in a unique ministry of gathering souls, bringing them to their rightful eternal destinations. The destination of the person's soul being transported is known to the angels at this point, even before God affords them justice through a trial. (Revelation 20:12). For "nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Revelation 21:27).

- The "church age" is a mystery, one not seen even by the disciples and Old Testament Prophets (Ephesians 5:32).

Second, Jesus told the parable of the mustard seed (vv. 31-32). Anyone who has ever seen a mustard seed knows of its tiny size, but how could a mustard seed grow into a tree, and what does that have to do with the kingdom of heaven? The plant becomes so large that even birds can lodge in it, something that no normal mustard plant could ever hope to achieve. The kingdom of heaven is **like** a mustard seed, and when it is full-grown, it becomes so large that it brings refuge to people in the entire world.

Finally, Jesus told the parable of the leaven. As we said in the introduction, although leaven was

equivalent to sin in the minds of a Jewish audience, the context makes it clear that this wasn't the meaning that Jesus intended. Instead, Jesus said His kingdom would grow and expand in a mysterious way, **like** leaven (v. 33) placed in the dough. The leaven is hidden in the bread, and its work is a mystery. In the same way, the church is a mystery hidden in the world (Ephesians 5:32), and unseen by the Prophets and even the disciples.

What do these parables mean for us today? What are some possible applications? First, since the weeds are not uprooted, we are called to be discerning. We must know the Word of God and be willing to provide our testimony, the hope that we have (1 Peter 3:15). Second, Christians are called to provide salt and light in their workplaces, consisting of a mix of believers and nonbelievers, including a variety of other faith groups. Finally, we can take courage in the fact that God will continue to build His kingdom into a large web, regardless of persecution and the political happenings of the age. The Word will spread as leaven through the dough, and the tiny seed will become as large as a gigantic tree.

Reflection Questions

1. The parables in Matthew 13 give us teachings about the Kingdom of Heaven. Since Jesus was from heaven, He speaks with authority of what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. His goal was to transform people from being citizens of earth to citizens of heaven, even while living here on earth. How does Jesus' vision for Kingdom living compare and contrast with your present vision for life? Where is your life in line with His vision, and where is your life out of line with His vision? Spend some time talking to Him about what you would like to see Him do to move you closer to His vision.

2. The first two readings pointed out God's transcendence (He is above creation) and immanence (He draws near to His creation). What difference does God's transcendence and immanence make in our everyday lives? How might you (and others) know that you are growing in internalizing these truths?