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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 48: 05-04-2025



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass Notes. This week, we will examine how the apostles were energized through God's power in the Book of Acts. In the Gospel reading, we will discover how Jesus restored Peter's position after his denial of Him during his trial. We will also examine a reading from the Book of Revelation and provide some good context to help frame the reading.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Acts. The context is just after the story of Ananias and Sapphira, both of whom attempted to lie to the Holy Spirit of God and were struck dead. God used this event to reveal the necessity of purity in the early, vibrant, and growing church during a time when "many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles" (Acts 5:12). These events revealed how the church was both pure and potent, like God. Just before

today's reading, the apostles were gathered in an area of the Jerusalem temple called Solomon's Portico (v. 12). All of the commotion brought the attention of the high priest, who arrested the apostles and put them in prison (vv. 17 – 18). Next, "during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out" (v. 19). At daybreak, the apostles reentered the temple portico and began teaching again (v. 21). Then the high priest convened "the counsel and all the senate of Israel" (v. 21b) meaning the Sanhedrin. At this point, the officers found the apostles missing from the prison while its doors remained secured (vv. 21c – 24). During this same time, the apostles remained to teach in the temple (v. 25). Next, the officers brought the apostles voluntarily to appear before the Council (vv. 26 – 27), where today's reading begins.

First Reading:

Note: Verses 33 – 39, which were omitted from the reading, were included below.

> *Acts 5:27-41 NAS95 27 When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them, 28 saying, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." 29 But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. 30 "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. 31 "He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. 32 "And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him." 33 But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and intended to kill them. 34 But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people, stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men outside for a short time. 35 And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men. 36 "For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. But he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. 37 "After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census and drew away some people after him; he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered. 38 "So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown; 39 but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God." 40 They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them. 41 So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.*

An essential point in the reading is about Peter, who denied Him three times during Christ's arrest and was willing to die rather than forsake his Lord again. This indicates the power of the Holy Spirit working to energize him in his role of leading the emerging church. Later in the Gospel reading, we see how Jesus forgave and restored Peter to his position. Peter was energized by the power given to him by God. After the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2), the apostles ministered boldly and powerfully to all who would listen. Their ministry emphasized "teaching," notice that this word appears twice in verse 28. This gives evidence to the importance of the teaching going on in the church, precisely what the Jews had earlier warned them not to do. The apostles were confronted by Rabbi Gamaliel, "a teacher of the law" (v. 34a), who was none other than the Rabbi who taught Saint Paul (Acts 22:3). This teacher possessed great wisdom, to such extent that the Council accepted his profound advice (v. 40). Perhaps Gamaliel recognized the miracle that occurred when the apostles were delivered from with the locked prison. Whatever happened after the Council accepted the Rabbi's advice, even though the apostles were not charged with a crime, they were still flogged in clear violation of the Jew's own law. This was done because they had disobeyed the previous order from the high priest not to teach (v. 28).

What are some ways that we can apply this reading to our lives? We cannot and should not expect miracles like they happened in the early church. We should not expect to be delivered from conflicts arising either with civil or religious authorities. We can, however, expect to experience miracles in other ways. We can expect to see God working miraculously in our lives and in the lives of those around us to whom we are ministering. We can expect miraculous answers to our prayers in ways we may not expect. We can also expect miraculous delays in God answering our prayers. How among us hasn't proclaimed, I am glad that God didn't answer that prayer right away or in the way I expected? Second, Just because a religious group grows and succeeds doesn't mean it is a movement of God. Gamaliel mentioned the cults of Theudas and Judas of Galilee from his time. Many examples in our era include the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Islam. Any movement of God will survive, at least to the extent that His purposes are accomplished through the particular movement. God's purpose through the church will not be thwarted, and He will continue building movements of His Spirit until the Lord Jesus returns. Third, we are called to obey God rather than humans. We can expect to experience cases when we must follow God's commandments and not man's commandments. This may mean that we will bump up against the civil authorities when they establish laws that are clearly against biblical absolutes and principles. Finally, we must remember the urgent call of evangelism as elicited in these passages and in the closing words of our Lord to His apostles in the Great Commission. Our primary ministry should be to "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" (Mt 28:19-20, emphasis added).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from the Book of Revelation. The context is after the message given in chapters 2 and 3 to the literal seven churches of Asia Minor in existence at that time. In these messages, we find many similarities between the various churches of our era. The conclusion of the messages to the churches marks the beginning of the revelation to John regarding the things which "what must take place after these things" Revelation 4e), meaning after the conclusion of the church age. John receives these messages "in the spirit" while appearing before the throne of God in heaven (Revelation 4:2). These messages continue until the end of the Book. Chapter 5 opens with the gradual unsealing of a divine "scroll," which we can regard as the title deed of all the earth. This title deed is gradually unfurled, and as this is done, a series of judgments are revealed, including judgments associated with seals, trumpets, and bowls. The scroll marked with the seven seals can be considered the overall container for all the judgments. The "unfurling" of the scroll by the sequential breaking of the seals reveals the seal judgments that release the trumpet and, finally, the bowl judgments. This symbolic expression is a handy metaphor that God used to display the pouring out of the judgments upon the world in a way that early and predominantly Jewish Christians immersed in Roman society would understand. People in this society would understand how an important document, like a deed, would be sealed by a person in authority concerning that document and how each seal would have to be broken in order for the full content of the document to be revealed. In this case, the title deed scroll is marked on both sides (Revelation 5:1), indicating that perhaps not all of the content is secret except for the material behind the portion obscured by the rolled-up area held in place by the seals. John was sad that nobody was worthy to open the seals on the scroll, but the "elder" revealed to him that the Lord Jesus alone was worthy, "the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David" (v. 5). Next four spiritual creatures, seemingly types of angels, along with 24 elders (likely 12 from Israel and 12 representing the church) exclaimed a victory song about Jesus and the priestly power of His believers. "And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth" (Revelation 5:9 – 10). This leads us to verse 11, which is the opening of today's reading.

Second Reading:

> *Revelation 5:11-14 NAS95 11 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and*

> *blessing." 13 And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." 14 And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshiped.*

The big idea in the reading is that the Lord Jesus, the "Lamb that was slain" (v. 11) is worthy of worship, whether it comes from angelic beings (four living creatures), people, or every created thing (v. 13). The Scripture is clear that "EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD" (Romans 14:11, Isaiah 45:23). In the reading the text uses the term "myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands" (v. 11) was meant to portray the largest number that could be expressed in the Greek language. The fact that God has so many creatures worshiping Him should remind us that He is worthy of our worship! The reading said that Jesus is worthy "to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing" (v. 12). As a divine human, Jesus is worthy of our worship, not just ours but all of creation. We need to keep Jesus' rightful position as the only One worthy to open the seals in the forefront of our minds as we remember our weaknesses and those of the servants of the Lord throughout the Bible. Jesus came for the first time as a sacrificial Lamb, which is the Gospel's good news. However, when He returns, He will be the bearer of bad news for those who don't believe. Jesus is the only One who can unveil the judgments of the seals, trumpets, and bowls. Saint Paul said, "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom" (2 Timothy 4:1).

John's vision of the exalted Lord Jesus leads us to the Gospel reading, where we will see Jesus while He is still on earth, just after His resurrection.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from John. After Jesus' resurrection, Thomas missed the first meeting of the apostles when they gathered in a locked room, only to be surprised by Jesus' entrance. However, eight days later, Jesus appeared again when Thomas saw and believed. Jesus told Thomas, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed" (John 21:29). Today's reading opens with another appearance of the Lord to the apostles this time along the Sea of Galilee.

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Gospel Reading:

> *John 21:1-19 NAS95 1 After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested Himself in this way. 2 Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. 3 Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will also come with you." They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing. 4 But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5 So Jesus said to them, "Children, you do not have any fish, do you?" They answered Him, "No." 6 And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch." So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish. 7 Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped for work), and threw himself into the sea. 8 But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net full of fish. 9 So when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire already laid and fish placed on it, and bread. 10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have now caught." 11 Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples ventured to question Him, "Who are You?" knowing that it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise. 14 This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead. 15 So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My lambs." 16 He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." 17 He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep. 18 "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." 19 Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me!"*

There are two main reasons why John includes this story in the Gospel. The smaller story is about Peter's three statements, and the larger one is John's description of who Jesus is after His resurrection from the dead. Let's unpack the smaller story about Peter first.

As you may recall, one of Peter's last encounters with Jesus before His death was when he denied Jesus three times. Jesus warned Peter that this would happen (Luke 22:34), but despite this, Peter still failed to stand up for his friend. You can imagine that Peter felt pretty awful letting Jesus down during His time of need (Luke 22:62). Although Peter had an encounter with Jesus in the upper room in Jerusalem, the issue of his betrayal had not explicitly been addressed, which is why today's story is so important. In the reading, we see how Jesus asked Peter three times "if he loved him." This corresponded to the three times Peter denied the Lord Jesus on the night of His betrayal by Judas Iscariot. In Jesus' kindness, He allowed Peter to express his loyalty to Him, reinstating their relationship publicly. Interestingly, Peter and some other disciples had returned to their fishing career, which was then interrupted by Jesus' appearance along the shore to appoint them to career ministry. Similarly, when Jesus first encountered Peter, He called them out of the fishing industry into becoming a fisher of men. Jesus was now reinforcing Peter's primary calling. Peter was now called to "shepherd" (or lead) the early church. Jesus used this occasion to publicly reinstate Peter into a right relationship with Him and reestablish his ministry leadership.

The more significant reason why this Gospel story is vital for the early church is that John wanted believers to know that Jesus manifested Himself as a real person multiple times after His resurrection. He did so in ways that showed both His humanity and His divinity. We see Jesus' humanity in that He was a real person they could see (not a ghost) and ate food with the disciples. Even after Jesus' resurrection, we see Jesus still serving His disciples by preparing them breakfast beside the Sea of Galilee. We see His divinity in how He directed the disciples to cast their net on the other side of the boat and obtain a miraculous catch. On top of that, another miracle was that the net didn't break even with such a large number of fish (v. 11). We see a sign of Peter's reverence for Jesus in that he dressed himself before he jumped into the water to be with the Lord. Another expression of Jesus' divinity was His prophecy of how Peter would eventually die a martyr's death (v. 18). You can imagine that this gave Peter some comfort and boldness in later years because he knew that Jesus had placed this mark upon his life. We saw this very clearly in the first reading in which he appeared before the Council (Acts 5:27). Peter could have thought in later years something like, if I am going to die a martyr's death, why be timid in my ministry? Additionally, since Peter knew that Jesus had predicted his martyrdom, a certain amount of comfort comes from "knowing that Jesus knows." We see in this a very intentional sense of God's sovereignty over Peter's eventual death. We, too, can find comfort in difficult circumstances by knowing that God is sovereign over everything that comes along.

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Reflection Questions

1. Jesus offers this exact reinstatement to everyone who has denied the Lord. His death was the payment for the penalty that we all deserve to pay for the times in our lives in which we have denied God's ownership over our lives. What do you see in Jesus' treatment of Peter that you can apply in your relationship with Him? List a few ways you tend to be like Peter and how you can receive Jesus' forgiveness.

2. What importance does Jesus's humanity and divinity hold for believers today?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 45: 04-27-2025



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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we open with a reading from the earliest history of the church, the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, relating their ministry in the very first weeks of the newly created Church after Pentecost and the Holy Spirit's descent upon those earliest believers. The second reading is from the last Book of the New Testament, the Revelation of Jesus, as given to the last of the apostles, John. John records the vision he received of the Lord Jesus, which serves both as a warning to the Church of Jesus Christ and as an introduction to the revelation of the final events in earthly history and into eternity. The Gospel reading, interestingly enough, is from the same author who recorded the Revelation. The chapter in this week's assignment includes the miraculous appearance of Jesus and significant teaching about faith and believing in Him.

Introduction to the First Reading:

By the fifth chapter of Acts, the early Christians (and the number had grown to the thousands, Acts 2:41, 47) were demonstrating the love that Jesus said would be the mark of His disciples (John 13:34). They met together for worship and gave generously to the needs of others in the Christian family. Today's reading tells of the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit working through His chosen people.

First Reading:

> *Acts 5:12-16 NAS95 12 At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico. 13 But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem. 14 And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number, 15 to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them. 16 Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed.*

"Signs and wonders" were miraculous events that not only brought healing to many but, more importantly, served to authenticate the authority of the apostles, those who were sent by God to do His work and to lay a foundation for the establishing of His church on earth, the body of called-out believers (that's what the New Testament word for church means). The early Christians "were all with one accord," meeting near the Temple. Jesus had prayed (John 17) that His followers would be united to be as one as He and the Father were One. Nothing has hurt the church's image so much as its disunity over centuries and even today.

Verse 13 is perplexing. Perhaps it suggests that non-believers did not associate with believers, though they highly respected them. Maybe they knew about the couple, earlier in chapter 5, who tried to deceive the apostles, claiming to give the gains from selling their property to people in need while keeping a part for themselves. They were stricken to death immediately, and the church learned the seriousness of deceitfulness and lying. That could explain why non-believers stayed away.

The remaining verses testify to the miraculous healing power of the apostles. Throughout the Book of Acts, these men of God gave testimony that the power was not theirs but the work of Jesus, whom the religious leaders had rejected. Succeeding chapters will reveal the great price true believers often had to pay to remain true to their faith. Yet, they counted it as nothing compared to what they had in Jesus and would ultimately enjoy with Him (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

John is the last of the apostles who had traveled with Jesus, witnessed His crucifixion, and fellowshipped with Him after His resurrection. In exile, John received a vision of the Lord Himself. What he writes is so important that Jesus told him, "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it." That in itself is enough reason to study this Book, for it reveals the concluding events in God's ultimate plan of redemption. The details of John's vision are complex and confusing, and a thorough knowledge of the rest of God's revelation (the Bible) is helpful in understanding the unfolding of the plan. John addresses his writing to "the seven churches that are in Asia." Those geographical sites in Asia Minor were in what is now Turkey, real places in real-time.

Second Reading:

Note: Verses 15 – 16, omitted from the reading, are included below.

> *Revelation 1:9-19 NAS95 9 I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, 11 saying, "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea." 12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; 13 and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. 14 His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. 15 His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. 16 In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. 17 When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18 and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. 19 "Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.*

John is in exile "because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" (verse 1). The other apostles have all been killed, but John remains to hear this final revelation of Jesus. He hears a voice instructing him to write what he is about to see and hear in a book and send it all to seven existing churches where the Gospel has been preached and received. What he sees in his vision is overwhelming. First, he sees someone "like a son of man" in the middle of seven lampstands. The description of the man clearly pictures the Lord Jesus, perhaps in a glorified, majestic state. "Son of man" is the title Jesus most often refers to himself. Each of the descriptions of this man is of interest and undoubtedly reflects something of His divine nature and activity. Of special interest is the reference to "a sharp two-edged sword" out of His mouth. It reminds us of the statement in Hebrews 4:12, "The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword . . . discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." The reference is not just to the written Word of God, the Bible, but any word from God.

John's reaction was similar to Isaiah's in Isaiah 6 when he saw the Lord "high and lifted up" and Job when he finally encountered God in person (chapters 40 & 41). God's presence causes one to fall upon his face in an abject sense of his unworthiness and recognition of the worthiness of God.

The response of the "Man" to John in verse 19 is insightful. It likely provides a key to understanding the relation he is about to record. He is to write about three topics: 1) what he "has seen," no doubt the revelation of the Son of God; 2) "the things which are," referring to the character and the action of the seven churches to which he is to send the letters (chapters 2 & 3), and 3) "the things which will take place after these things." Chapter 4 begins the revelation of what is yet to come in God's completed plan.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Chapter 20 of John's Gospel is a highlight. It begins with discovering the empty tomb, confirming the miraculous resurrection of the Lord Jesus! It includes several appearances of Jesus to His disciples and some significant statements to be considered. John concludes the chapter by telling us that Jesus performed many other signs. He has chosen only certain ones to bring his readers to faith in Him.

Gospel Reading:

> *John 20:19-31 NAS95 19 So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." 22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained." 24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." 26 After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors*

> *having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." 28 Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." 30 Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this Book; 31 but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.*

The first event in today's reading must have been a shock to the disciples who were meeting privately, probably in secret, in a closed room. It was the same day of the resurrection, and Peter and John had already observed the empty tomb. Mary had had a personal encounter with the risen Jesus, initially thinking he was the gardener. Apparently, the disciples were confused, not understanding Jesus' earlier teachings about these events. All of a sudden, Jesus appears in their midst. He acknowledges their fear and encourages them, saying, "Peace be with you." The following words in this first of several significant statements in this encounter are surprising: "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." They will likely not fully understand this instruction until they have further teaching before His return to heaven and the events of the Day of Pentecost. Then, they disperse over the world to preach the Gospel.

Another noteworthy word from Jesus bestowed the promised Holy Spirit on them. From this point on, they would carry the message of the Gospel with the clear offer of the forgiveness of sins to all who will hear them and respond to the truth in faith, acknowledging Jesus as Lord.

We're all familiar with the doubts expressed by the disciple Thomas. Like many of us, "seeing is believing" to Thomas. He was absent on this occasion, and when others told him about what had happened, he simply could not believe it. A week later, Thomas is given the opportunity he thought he needed to believe; the proof stands before him. Immediately, he recognizes the truth; his doubts depart, and he worships, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus then offers another critical statement: "Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." How blessed we are today to know of the work of Jesus to be our sacrifice for sin and give us the faith to believe when we have not seen with our eyes, but realizing instead that "believing is seeing."

Finally, John says that Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples that John does not

write about. He chose only seven great signs that prove Jesus' claim to be the Son of God, and he recorded them "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that believing you may have life in His name."

Reflection Questions

1. In what ways does John's message in Revelation resonate with you during your own trials and tribulations (revelation 1:9)? How does reading his revelation of the Lord help you through these things?

Challenge: Have you read the Book of Revelation? This Book promises a blessing to those who read it (Revelation 1:3). We urge you to read through this vital Scripture, taking into account the Old Testament references noted in your Bible.

2. In what ways does Thomas' experience give you hope as one who may have never seen the Lord Jesus? (We qualify this because of some of the events we have heard about in Islamic regions where the Lord has appeared in dreams and visions).

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 42: 04-20-2025

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. On this joyful day of celebration, we remember how God raised His Son, our Savior, Jesus, from the dead. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, we have eternal life through faith in His finished work on the cross. Accordingly, this week's readings answer some of the most critical questions humans have ever asked about eternal life. The first reading is a message from Saint Peter that explains the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection that has been provided for all humankind. The second reading from Saint Paul's Letter to the Colossians provides the implications of what believing in Jesus looks like in the believer's life. Finally, we conclude with the glorious story of Jesus' resurrection from the Gospel of Saint John.

Throughout my earlier years, our family always held a special celebration of Jesus' resurrection on this important day of Easter Sunday. Our festivities included a delicious dinner with extraordinary people, including my grandmothers, grandmas, aunts, uncles, and brothers and sisters. Back then, I understood that Jesus' resurrection from the dead was significant. As I grew into adulthood, I came to a much fuller understanding of the meaning of Easter Sunday. I am learning how to live in the reality of Jesus' resurrection for every day of my life. I pray that through this study, you, too, will come to a deeper appreciation of what Jesus did for us and live in His resurrection power throughout the days ahead.

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Introduction to the First Reading:

This week's first reading is from the Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 10. The context of this section is Saint Peter's address to Cornelius, the gentile Centurion from Caesarea. A Centurion was a Roman military leader who led 100 men. The story of what we are about to read happened a few days after Peter had seen a vision of a huge sheet lowered to the ground containing a variety of animals, including ones that the Jews were forbidden from eating according to the Old Testament Law. God revealed to Peter that he was no longer bound by these dietary food laws and, by extrapolation, that the proclamation of the Gospel was being opened to the Gentiles. God told Peter, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy" (Acts 10:15b-ff). At the same time that Peter had his vision of accepting Gentiles, Cornelius, a God-fearing Gentile, had a vision in which an angel of God spoke to him about salvation. He sent messengers to Peter in Joppa with orders to bring him to his home in Caesarea. Because Peter had been convinced by this vision of associating with Gentiles, he agreed to travel to Cornelius' home. When Peter arrived, Cornelius fell at his feet and worshiped him, but Peter stopped him. Peter then said, "Stand up; I too am a man" (v. 26). He addressed the crowd that Cornelius had gathered by saying, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him, and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean" (v. 28). Then Cornelius explained that he had seen a vision of an angel who told him to send for Simon Peter at the home of one Simon the tanner who lived by the sea (v. 32). It was at this point that we join Peter's address to Cornelius along with his relatives and close friends (Acts 10:24).

Now, let's read the text, noting that some omitted verses were included to provide the full context.

First Reading:

> *Acts 10:34-43 NAS95 34 Opening his mouth, Peter said: "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, 35 but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him. 36 The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all) — 37 you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. 38 You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. 39 We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. 40 God raised Him up on*

> *the third day and granted that He become visible, 41 not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. 42 And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. 43 Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins."*

Peter said quite an earful; his message encapsulated almost the entirety of the Gospel. He told the gentile Cornelius and his family the Good News regarding the forgiveness of sins offered to anyone who believes, Jew or Gentile alike (v. 34), through faith in Jesus Christ (v. 43). Peter, fresh from his vision of the animals coming down in the large sheet, affirmed that God was no respecter of persons; this salvation was available to everyone (vv. 34-35). Peter provided Cornelius with a high-level narrative of his eyewitness testimony concerning the events of Jesus Christ. He said that Jesus:

- Was anointed by God with power (v. 38),
- Ministered to the people by healing and opposing the devil (v. 39),
- Was crucified by the Jews in Jerusalem (v. 39b),
- He was raised by God on the third day (v. 40),
- Was made visible to select witnesses after His resurrection (v. 41) and
- Provided the disciples with specific instructions regarding preaching the truth about Jesus being the divinely appointed Judge of the living and the dead (v. 42).

Peter confirmed that Jesus fulfilled the testimony given by all of the Old Testament prophets. Finally, Peter announced the best news of all, that **anyone** who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of their sins (v.43). What, though, does "believing in Jesus" mean? Many believe that Jesus existed or that He was a good teacher. When the Bible talks about believing in Jesus, it means having a personal, experiential trust that we put in Jesus for our salvation. We all know we have done evil things and thought wrongly about people. These wrong behaviors and mindsets are what the Bible calls sin. Because we chose to sin, we owe a debt to the Holy God, our Creator, who designed us for Himself. By sinning, we declared cosmic treason. This sin debt will need to be paid. The question is, who will pay? We have two payment options: 1. an eternity in hell, or 2. belief in Jesus' payment for our sins. All of the best deeds in the world do not cancel out our sin debt. The Bible is very clear about this, for it says, "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Death, meaning eternal separation from God, is the payment for sin. And that is why Jesus' death on the cross is so essential. Here is where He made the payment for my sin and your sin. This payment is offered to us as a free gift of eternal life. Therefore, belief in Jesus is accepting this gift of Jesus' payment for your sin debt and trusting in Him for eternal life. This is why the celebration of Easter (Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday) is such a glorious memorial in the Christian church.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Understanding Peter's testimony in the first reading, that anyone who believes in Jesus receives the forgiveness of their sins, provides a convenient gateway to the second reading, where humans cannot attain God through their efforts. This reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Colossians, chapter 3. This book is one of the biblical books known as the "Prison Epistles" because Paul wrote it while in prison in Rome. The reading today opens with the word "therefore" in verse one. Whenever we see that word (as you may have noted in previous editions of Mass Notes), we must ask, "What is the 'therefore' there for?" The "therefore" in 3:1 refers to what Paul said in the previous chapters. To give the passage more context, we will explore this in further detail below.

Paul's overall purpose in the Epistle was to correct heresy, which was taught in the church. The heresy had four elements that Paul addressed in chapter 2. These false beliefs included the denial of the sufficiency and preeminence of Jesus Christ (2:8), the exaltation of Jewish ritualism (2:11, 16-17), the teaching of the extreme denial of the flesh as a way of getting closer to God (known as "asceticism," 2:20-23), and the ungodly practice of worshiping angels (2:18). All four teachings contradict the Scriptures. Paul corrected their misunderstandings early in the second chapter by making clear statements to help them stand amid false teaching. Paul said, "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men,

according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For in Him, all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Colossians 2:8-9). This statement addressed elements of all four of the heresies that were being taught and practiced by certain members of the church.

With this context in mind, let's read from Saint Paul's Letter, the second reading in the Mass today. As you read, remember the sufficiency we as believers have through faith in Jesus Christ.

Second Reading:

> *Colossians 3:1-4 NAS95 1 Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.*

Paul said, "If you have been raised up with Christ, which has a threefold meaning. First, he meant this in the sense that **if** we have believed in Jesus' death and resurrection, then we are, in a sense, crucified with Him and, therefore, "raised " on the cross with Him. Paul said in Galatians, "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Galatians 2:20). Second, we have been "raised up" in the sense that, when we believe, we have been "born from above," something that Jesus tried to explain to Nicodemus in John 3:3. The third meaning that Paul had in mind regarding being "raised up" with Christ is that in a spiritual sense after we die we will be "raised up" to a much greater authority to reign with Jesus Christ. Paul said, "If we endure, we will also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us" (2 Timothy 2:12).

Here is another important insight from the reading. Paul said in verse 4, "When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory." Notice the repetition of the word "revealed." We discussed one aspect of Christ's revelation last week in the Palm Sunday readings when we discussed His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. However, in this reading, Paul wasn't referring to Christ's exaltation as King when he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. Instead, he referred to Jesus' Second Coming, when He will return in glory to judge the world. As we said last week, Jesus came the first time as a humble, unblemished Lamb (Revelation 13:8). However, Jesus will return the second time as the glorious Lion of the Tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5). He will return

as the Almighty Warrior on a white horse, not a donkey (Revelation 19:11). Jesus **was revealed** as the King of the Jews when he entered Jerusalem on a donkey. He **was revealed** as the King of the universe when he rose from the dead, and this is what we celebrate today. Finally, Jesus will be revealed when He comes again in glory with all of His believers in tow, us, His saints (Revelation 19:14, 1 Corinthians 1:2, Acts 9:13, Acts 9:32, Acts 26:10, Romans 16:2).

As we conclude the second reading and discussion, rephrasing the flow of thought may be helpful before the first few verses. After the three verses of the reading, a capstone statement provides my summary of the reason why we must set our minds on things above:

> Remember the correction given to us regarding the false teaching that depends on self-effort,and realize we **have been** crucified with Christ, been born from above, and **will be** exalted to participate in reigning with Jesus Christ. Since God **has** granted us all these incalculable gifts, **THEN** let us "*Set [our] minds on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For [we] have died and [our lives are] hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then [we] also will be revealed with Him in glory*" (vv. 2-4). God calls us to do the latter (vv. 2-4) because the teachers of the theological heresies were attempting to bring Jesus down to their level by falsely thinking they could reach heaven by practicing man-made religion.

I hope that this illustrates the importance of reading the context of the verses of the reading. The big idea is that humans cannot attain fellowship with God in heaven through religious rituals, ascetic practices (like starving the body), or the worship of angels (see Luke 4:8, Matthew 4:10, and Revelation 22:8-9 where the practice is expressly forbidden). The only way humans can attain eternal life and fellowship with God is through faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, believing that Jesus atoned for our sins (Romans 10:9-13).

Alternative Second Reading:

This week's reading included an alternative to the second reading. This optional passage was from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. The context is Paul's confrontation of a particular church member who was having an immoral relationship with his stepmother. In verse one of this chapter, he said, "It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife" (1 Corinthians 5:1). Paul

was upset with the church because rather than disciplining the one that was involved with this sin, the church acted as if this was an acceptable practice for a believer in Jesus. The Corinthian church failed to exercise these proper steps of church discipline that could have eventually led to the restoration of the man who was trapped in this sexual sin. This would have included first calling the person to repentance and separating him from the church. Paul's confrontation is intense, but it is based on the power of the Gospel, Jesus' sacrifice for sin.

> *1 Corinthians 5:6-8 NAS95 6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? 7 Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. 8 Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*

The root of the issue was that this young church was flaunting the freedom that they had in Christ. Paul explains this using imagery from the Old Testament Feast of Passover. In verse 6, Paul referred to the Jewish religious practice of purifying their home from yeast (leaven) during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exodus 12:15). Every Jewish home would have to get rid of yeast and bake unleavened bread during this season. He uses this imagery to metaphorize the purity that God requires in the church. Paul's point was that the "leaven" of the man's sin permeated throughout the church in the same way yeast permeates the dough (v. 6). It was bad enough that the church tolerated this sin amongst them, but they even boasted about it (v. 6).

As we celebrate Jesus' resurrection today on Easter Sunday, this passage helps us to recognize God's calling to live holy and pure lives. This is especially true in our culture, which is filled with temptations to be drawn into sexual sins, something with which the ancient Corinthians also struggled. Today, we can celebrate that Jesus fulfilled once and for all the repetitive, annual practice among the Old Testament Jews to sacrifice their Passover lamb (Hebrews 10:10). We can turn to the victorious One in prayer to deliver us from our temptations (Matthew 6:13), even difficult things such as sexual sin. Jesus calls us to "confess our sins one to another" (James 5:16), meaning that we can turn to a fellow Christian to ask for their intercessory prayer on our behalf when we encounter struggles we cannot overcome through prayer and obedience. Paul calls believers to celebrate the feast sincerely and truthfully before God and our community. What better day to contemplate making profound changes in our lives than Easter Sunday?

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

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As we move onto the Gospel reading from Saint John Chapter 20, we will see the "reason for the season" of Easter. We have looked forward to celebrating this glorious day throughout the Lenten period. Before you read, say a short prayer asking God to show you what the resurrection means for your life.

Gospel Reading:

> *John 20:1-9 NAS95 1 Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone already taken away from the tomb. 2 So she ran and came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." 3 So Peter and the other disciple went forth, and they were going to the tomb. 4 The two were running together; and the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first; 5 and stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings lying there; but he did not go in. 6 And so Simon Peter also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he saw the linen wrappings lying there, 7 and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. 8 So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed. 9 For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.*

The narrative continues beyond what was covered in the reading (which is not covered next Sunday):

> *10 So the disciples went away again to their own homes. 11 But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; 12 and she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. 13 And they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." 14 When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, "Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away." 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means, Teacher). (John 20:10-16)*

Can you imagine being one of the disciples who watched Jesus die on the cross? Then, all of a sudden, news reaches you that Jesus' body is not in the tomb. You run to the tomb on Sunday and

realize it is empty. What are the options? Maybe someone had taken the body, or maybe Jesus' prediction that he would rise again did come true. It would have been confusing, mind-blowing, and extremely scary for those who sought to kill Jesus who were still feeling emboldened to snuff out any memory of Jesus.

Mary Magdalene believed in this and was the first to see the risen Lord alive. She received confirmation that since God raised Jesus from the dead, she would one day be raised herself.

We can also have the assurance of salvation, which leads to eternal life, by trusting in what the Scripture says about how a person makes it to heaven when they die. The first reading brought up the idea of "belief in Jesus." Let's recap what this means, for this is the foundation of our faith. First, God says that all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). God says that because of our sin, the payment we will receive without some outside intervention is death, meaning eternal separation from God (Romans 6:23). In that same verse, God says that the outside intervention has been given as a free gift: Jesus died on the cross for the payment of our sins. This good news can also be found in the famous verse often printed on cardboard signs held up at sporting events. "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). Saint Paul said, "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" (Romans 10:9).

Does this sound like something simple to achieve? It is simple, but it's not necessarily easy. If it were easy, everyone who had ever heard the Gospel would become a believer. Peter said in Acts 2:38 that belief is intricately tied to repentance. When we believe in Jesus, it is because we are convicted of our need for a Savior. This leads us to repent of (or turn away from) our sins. This means that we have come to agree with God about our sins and recognize them for what they are: deadly (Romans 6:21). The Bible says that even one single sin would keep us from entering heaven – forever (James 2:10). So, repentance of sin, turning away from the destructive forces that once ruled our lives, is an on-going part of exercising faith in Jesus. One teacher said, "If your faith hasn't changed you, it probably hasn't saved you." This is not to imply that works are necessary for salvation. But it is to say that true faith is manifested in our lives being oriented around the values that Christ had because He is our life (Colossians 3:4). Jesus' death and resurrection were given as a gift to all, to cover our sins and provide us with the right to be accepted into heaven. As we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday, keep in mind the simplicity of this Gospel message that Jesus gave to the world.

Reflection Questions

We covered a great deal of ground today in our study. The main point that we ask you to consider in light of your research is, what difference does the resurrection of Jesus Christ make in **our** lives? Contemplate this question in light of the following contexts.

1. What difference does Jesus' resurrection make as I move about in many relational networks where I rub shoulders with people who don't all believe that faith in Jesus is the only pathway to God? How does my life reflect the power of Jesus' resurrection and become an apologetic for His life-transforming presence?

2. What difference does Jesus make if you find yourself unhappy this Easter? How does the knowledge that Jesus rose from the dead give you hope through these difficulties?

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for Palm Sunday. This week, we open the reading with the procession of the palms. Then we move to the first reading that gives us a glimpse of the Suffering Servant, the Messiah. The second reading shows the humility of Jesus, who came to fulfill the Old Testament prophecy of the Messiah having to suffer. Finally, we conclude with the Gospel account of Jesus' passion, our Messiah, Who paid the penalty for our sins.

Reading at the Procession of the Palms

> *Luke 19:28-40 NAS95 28 After He had said these things, He was going on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. 29 When He approached Bethphage and Bethany, near the mount that is called Olivet, He sent two of the disciples, 30 saying, "Go into the village ahead of you; there, as you enter, you will find a colt tied on which no one yet has ever sat; untie it and bring it here. 31 "If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' you shall say, 'The Lord has need of it.'" 32 So those who were sent went away and found it just as He had told them. 33 As they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?" 34 They said, "The Lord has need of it." 35 They brought it to Jesus, and they threw their coats on the colt and put Jesus on it. 36 As He was going, they were spreading their coats on the road. 37 As soon as He was approaching, near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of the disciples began*

> *to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen, 38 shouting: "BLESSED IS THE KING WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" 39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples." 40 But Jesus answered, "I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!"*

The time around, Passover was a season of Messianic expectancy, and there were many pilgrims in the city for the celebration. One of the issues that was fresh in the people's minds was Jesus' raising of Lazarus from the dead, just shortly before this last Passover (John 11:1-45). This would have played into His sudden popularity and the people's desire to see Him. In messianic form, Jesus directed His disciples precisely, and when they followed His orders, everything worked out exactly as Jesus had said. Jesus asserted His authority over Jerusalem by riding into the city on a colt (v. 30, Mark 11:4), not a mighty stallion as would have been done by kings. This was in fulfillment of a prophecy of Zechariah (Zechariah 9:9). Evidently, according to Saint Matthew's narrative, Jesus rode on the colt, and the donkey (its mother) walked alongside.

The procession of the palms dealt with Jesus' first coming. As we look forward to the celebration of Jesus' resurrection on Easter Sunday, let's look briefly at Jesus' second coming. The Book of Revelation revealed some of the details about Jesus' physical return to the earth at the end of the Great Tribulation period. Jesus entered Jerusalem during His First Advent on a donkey. Read what the Scripture says about how He will return the second time.

> *11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. 12 His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. 13 He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. 15 From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. 16 And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS." (Revelation 19:11-16).*

Jesus came the first time as a humble, unblemished Lamb (Revelation 13:8). However, Jesus will return the second time as the glorious Lion of the Tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5). He will return as the Almighty Warrior on a white horse, not a donkey as happened the first time. At His First Coming, many people missed His appearance. According to John, He will not be missed at His Second Coming. John said, "BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him,

even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen" (Rev 1:7). When the "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" (v. 16b) returns, He will come in judgment to a people living "as in the days of Noah" (Matthew 24:37) expecting things to continue as they always had in the past. Since God has given us this warning, we must ask ourselves, "How now shall we live?" While ignorance seems bliss, it does not lead to eternal life.

This Sunday, as we celebrate Jesus' triumphal entrance in Jerusalem at His First Advent, we can celebrate that we are among those who did, in a sense, welcome Jesus to Jerusalem as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We can celebrate that we are not among those who missed His first coming. As we hold our palms, we can proudly celebrate our belief that King Jesus will one day return to the earth he created. In our waving of the palms, we can lift them as white flags of surrender to the King who deserves our whole lives.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading after the procession of the palms is from Isaiah 50. The context is just after Isaiah told us about how God disciplined the northern tribes of Israel (Isaiah 50:1-3). We see that God judged Israel's sinfulness and provided a way for salvation in this prediction of the Messiah. The picture painted in the verses leading up to today's reading is one of temporarily setting aside this group of God's chosen people until they come to believe in God's sending of the Messiah. The prophecy shifts to the personalization of the Messiah's suffering, which we will also be reading about in greater detail during the Gospel narrative covering the Passion of Jesus Christ.

First Reading:

> *Isaiah 50:4-7 NAS95 4 The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of disciples, That I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple. 5 The Lord GOD has opened My ear; And I was not disobedient Nor did I turn back. 6 I gave My back to those who strike Me, And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting. 7 For the Lord GOD helps Me, Therefore, I am not disgraced; Therefore, I have set My face like flint, And I know that I will not be ashamed.*

In this reading, the Prophet Isaiah speaks of himself as a "type" of Christ. Christ the Messiah has been given the Word of God, something that "sustains a weary one with a word" (v. 4). The Messiah is obedient (v. 5), even giving His back to those who strike Him and His "cheeks to those who pluck out [His] beard" (v. 6). God darkened the skies during the spiritually dark event of Jesus' suffering, and Jesus "set [His] face like flint" and wasn't ashamed (v. 7) to fulfill God's will in giving His life for us. Later in the Gospel lesson, we will read about the fulfillment of the suffering of God's servant (Is. 50:6 "scourged" and "spat upon") in great detail.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The predicted suffering from Isaiah is also the backdrop for the second reading, which was probably sung as a hymn in the early church about the great lengths that Jesus went to to fulfill the Father's plan for our salvation.

Second Reading:

> *Philippians 2:6-11 NAS95 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

This passage continues the sharp contrast the Bible portrays between Jesus' first Advent and His second coming. In the first Advent, He came as a humble servant. In this act of the incarnation and His death, He not only served His Father, but he served us. Humankind desperately needed a Savior, owing a sin debt beyond the ability to repay. So He became the suffering Servant "for the joy set before Him" (Hebrews 12:2), paying our debt on the cross. By obeying the Father, He will come again in exaltation and power (as we saw in Revelation earlier). The second coming will be very different from the first Advent. In addition to every eye seeing his second coming, this passage informs us that every knee will bow voluntarily or involuntarily. The choice is ours to make. We can voluntarily bow our knees to the Messiah now or harden our hearts against Him, only to

involuntarily bow when He returns.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel Reading is Luke's account of the passion, which includes the betrayal, arrest, trial, torture, humiliation, crucifixion, and burial of Jesus.

Gospel Reading:

> *Luke 22:14 – 23:56 NAS95 14 When the hour had come, He reclined at the table, and the apostles with Him. 15 And He said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; 16 for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." 17 And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He said, "Take this and share it among yourselves; 18 for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes." 19 And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 20 And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood. 21 "But behold, the hand of the one betraying Me is with Mine on the table. 22 "For indeed, the Son of Man is going as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!" 23 And they began to discuss among themselves which one of them it might be who was going to do this thing. 24 And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest. 25 And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.' 26 "But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. 27 "For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves. 28 "You are those who have stood by Me in My trials; 29 and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you 30 that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 31 "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; 32 but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." 33 But he said to Him, "Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!" 34 And He said, "I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me." 35 And He said to them, "When I sent you out without money belt and bag and sandals, you did*

not lack anything, did you?" They said, "No, nothing." 36 And He said to them, "But now, whoever has a money belt is to take it along, likewise also a bag, and whoever has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one. 37 "For I tell you that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me, 'AND HE WAS NUMBERED WITH TRANSGRESSORS'; for that which refers to Me has its fulfillment." 38 They said, "Lord, look, here are two swords." And He said to them, "It is enough." 39 And He came out and proceeded as was His custom to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples also followed Him. 40 When He arrived at the place, He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." 41 And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to pray, 42 saying, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done." 43 Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him. 44 And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground. 45 When He rose from prayer, He came to the disciples and found them sleeping from sorrow, 46 and said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not enter into temptation." 47 While He was still speaking, behold, a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was preceding them; and he approached Jesus to kiss Him. 48 But Jesus said to him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" 49 When those who were around Him saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" 50 And one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. 51 But Jesus answered and said, "Stop! No more of this." And He touched his ear and healed him. 52 Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders who had come against Him, "Have you come out with swords and clubs as you would against a robber? 53 "While I was with you daily in the temple, you did not lay hands on Me; but this hour and the power of darkness are yours." 54 Having arrested Him, they led Him away and brought Him to the house of the high priest; but Peter was following at a distance. 55 After they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter was sitting among them. 56 And a servant-girl, seeing him as he sat in the firelight and looking intently at him, said, "This man was with Him too." 57 But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know Him." 58 A little later, another saw him and said, "You are one of them too!" But Peter said, "Man, I am not!" 59 After about an hour had passed, another man began to insist, saying, "Certainly this man also was with Him, for he is a Galilean too." 60 But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." Immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed. 61 The Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, "Before a rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times." 62 And he went out and wept bitterly. 63 Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking Him and beating Him, 64 and they blindfolded Him and were asking Him, saying, "Prophesy, who is the one who hit You?" 65 And they were saying many other things against Him, blaspheming. 66 When it was day, the Council of elders of the people assembled, both chief priests and scribes, and they led Him away to their council chamber, saying, 67 "If You are the Christ, tell us." But He said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe; 68 and if I ask a question, you will not answer. 69 "But from

now on THE SON OF MAN WILL BE SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND of the power OF GOD." 70 And they all said, "Are You the Son of God, then?" And He said to them, "Yes, I am." 71 Then they said, "What further need do we have of testimony? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth." 1 Then the whole body of them got up and brought Him before Pilate. 2 And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King." 3 So Pilate asked Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And He answered him and said, "It is as you say." 4 Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no guilt in this man." 5 But they kept on insisting, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching all over Judea, starting from Galilee even as far as this place." 6 When Pilate heard it, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. 7 And when he learned that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who himself also was in Jerusalem at that time. 8 Now Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus; for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some sign performed by Him. 9 And he questioned Him at some length; but He answered him nothing. 10 And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing Him vehemently. 11 And Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate. 12 Now Herod and Pilate became friends with one another that very day; for before they had been enemies with each other. 13 Pilate summoned the chief priests and the rulers and the people, 14 and said to them, "You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined Him before you, I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him. 15 "No, nor has Herod, for he sent Him back to us; and behold, nothing deserving death has been done by Him. 16 "Therefore I will punish Him and release Him." 17 Now he was obliged to release to them at the feast one prisoner. 18 But they cried out all together, saying, "Away with this man, and release for us Barabbas!" 19 (He was one who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection made in the city, and for murder.) 20 Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again, 21 but they kept on calling out, saying, "Crucify, crucify Him!" 22 And he said to them the third time, "Why, what evil has this man done? I have found in Him no guilt demanding death; therefore I will punish Him and release Him." 23 But they were insistent, with loud voices asking that He be crucified. And their voices began to prevail. 24 And Pilate pronounced sentence that their demand be granted. 25 And he released the man they were asking for who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, but he delivered Jesus to their will. 26 When they led Him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, coming in from the country, and placed on him the cross to carry behind Jesus. 27 And following Him was a large crowd of the people, and of women who were mourning and lamenting Him. 28 But Jesus turning to them said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, stop weeping for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. 29 "For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.' 30 "Then they will begin TO SAY TO THE MOUNTAINS, 'FALL ON US,' AND TO THE HILLS, 'COVER US.' 31 "For if they do these

> *things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?" 32 Two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with Him. 33 When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. 34 But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves. 35 And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One." 36 The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine, 37 and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!" 38 Now there was also an inscription above Him, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS." 39 One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" 40 But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41 "And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." 42 And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" 43 And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise." 44 It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour, 45 because the sun was obscured; and the veil of the temple was torn in two. 46 And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT." Having said this, He breathed His last. 47 Now when the centurion saw what had happened, he began praising God, saying, "Certainly this man was innocent." 48 And all the crowds who came together for this spectacle, when they observed what had happened, began to return, beating their breasts. 49 And all His acquaintances and the women who accompanied Him from Galilee were standing at a distance, seeing these things. 50 And a man named Joseph, who was a member of the Council, a good and righteous man 51 (he had not consented to their plan and action), a man from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who was waiting for the kingdom of God; 52 this man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 53 And he took it down and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid Him in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever lain. 54 It was the preparation day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. 55 Now the women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed, and saw the tomb and how His body was laid. 56 Then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.*

We read this account of Jesus' crucifixion every year, but sometimes its meaning can get lost in the routine. We need to understand the implications of the death of Christ in our own lives. Jesus endured a horrible death for one important reason: to bring sinful human beings back into the right relationship with the Father. Saint Paul said, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23) and "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a). Jesus paid the penalty required by the Father for our sin. Saint John said, "and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). Propitiation is a word that means, "The offering, which appeases the wrath of one against whom an offense has been committed"

(American Tract Society Dictionary). The appeasement of the Father's wrath through Jesus' death on the cross is God's invitation to you to have the right relationship with Him. While it is a free gift (meaning you don't have to earn it), you must unwrap it. This means you must receive the gift through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. John said, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13).

If you have not received Jesus into your life, you can do that by praying to Him. There are no magic words, tell God about your belief that Jesus died for your sins. Ask Him to empower you to accomplish His work in your life through the Holy Spirit living in you. If you pray this prayer, you enter into a relationship with God the Father through Jesus. As with any relationship, we extend specific sensitivities to the other person. When you discover what the other person values and loves, you will cooperate with their plan, especially when you know they have your best interests in mind. That is how it is with God in our relationship with Him. You study the Bible to get to know who He is. You go to church to find out more about His heart. You give up destructive habits that lead you away from God. Another vital part of relating to God is learning to walk in step with His Spirit. Every believer has been given the gift of the Holy Spirit, Who lives inside us. Walking in step with the Spirit is cooperating with God daily; all these things are how we grow in our relationship with God.

Reflection Questions

1. What is one thing from these readings that helps you trust how Jesus works in your life?

2. How have you personalized the story of Jesus' crucifixion?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 33: 03-30-2025



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we open with a reading from Joshua. The successor to Moses, Joshua, was one of only two of the original multitude that left Egypt and entered the Promised Land. His leadership accomplished the Land's conquest with victories, defeats, and noted events. The Apostle Paul's Second Letter to the church in Corinth is the source for the second reading. These verses reveal God's excellent plan of reconciliation (a significant theological term) in its twofold aspect: for ourselves and through us for others. The final reading from Luke's Gospel includes stories of losses, a sheep, a coin, and a wayward son. The emphasis is on what we call the "Prodigal Son." We can learn a lot from all three readings about God and His loving relationship with His people.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The Bible's first five books are sometimes called the Law. The sixth book introduces the historical books, capturing the continuing story of Israel from their entrance into the Promised Land (under General Joshua) to their captivity and removal from the Land. In this first history book, Israel is taken into the Land, experiences ultimate victory (with significant defeats along the way), and comes into a period of rest. Chapters 1-4 detail the crossing of the Jordan River and the initial arrival in the Land of Canaan. Today's reading reports on a divine encounter with God and the renewal of certain rituals.

First Reading:

> *Joshua 5:9-12 NAS95 9 Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." So the name of that place is called Gilgal to this day. 10 While the sons of Israel camped at Gilgal they observed the Passover on the evening of the fourteenth day of the month on the desert plains of Jericho. 11 On the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate some of the produce of the Land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. 12 The manna ceased on the day after they had eaten some of the produce of the Land, so that the sons of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate some of the yield of the Land of Canaan during that year.*

God appears to Joshua in this passage to encourage him. Having completed the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, Joshua is fully aware that only he and Caleb were among the original survivors of the Jews in Egypt. The long wilderness journey was a result of the sin and disobedience of God's people, particularly their refusal to enter the Land when they first arrived there. What a tragedy! Hundreds of thousands of Israelites died on the journey. In verse 2, God seems to be telling Joshua that now the reproach of Egypt's opposition and the people's sin were all in the past. The name "Gilgal" sounds like "roll" in Hebrew. So, their formal reproach was "rolled off." This was a new, fresh start for His people.

Two startling events occur next. First, the people observe Passover. The Passover celebration is a vivid reminder of the people's deliverance from Egypt. You can read about it in Exodus 12. God sent the death angel to kill the firstborn of the Egyptian families and their cattle. The Israelites were *passed over* if they splashed a bit of the blood of a slain lamb on the doorposts and lintels of their houses. It's a magnificent illustration of the ultimate sacrifice that Jesus would make as the Lamb of God when He gave His life for the salvation of all who will, by faith, accept His work on their behalf

and commit their lives to Him.

The second startling event occurred on the very next day. You will recall that for their entire wilderness journey, the people were provided manna (and later quail) for their daily food. It was a marvelous provision for the people, but how tedious it must have been to have the same diet daily! So, the people are finally in the Promised Land, which was said to be a land of "milk and honey." On this day, they could eat the fruit of the Land they were given. After that, the manna ceased, and from then on, they could enjoy the produce of their new homeland.

How excellent is God's provision for those who trust Him? Beyond physical food, He offers a personal relationship with Him made possible by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. Trust Him!

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Paul's first Letter to the Corinthians dealt with numerous problems in the young church: disunity, sin, and false teaching, to name a few. This second Letter, in part, is a defense of his apostleship, for some questioned his authority. He also writes to encourage the faithful and to strengthen their faith. The earlier portion of chapter 5 includes essential teaching regarding the current trials of life for the Christian, but the fantastic expectations for the future. Although we may struggle and ultimately die, he notes that "to be away from the body [is to be] at home with the Lord" (v. 8). Then, today's passage takes us into some profound but precious truths.

Second Reading:

> *2 Corinthians 5:17-21 NAS95 17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. 18 Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our*

behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Paul's statement that anyone in Christ is "a new creature" is astounding! He goes on to explain why that is true. The person "in Christ" has confessed Jesus as lord and has, by faith, accepted His finished work on the cross as sufficient to cover his sin and make him right with God. Elsewhere, Paul wrote, "I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." So, the believer is not only "in Christ," but Christ is in him. The born-again Christian (John 3:3) discovers that the things of his old life are no longer of dominant interest. Everything is seen in a new light; everything has changed.

As mentioned earlier, the following verses reveal God's excellent plan of reconciliation (a significant theological term) in its twofold aspect: for us and through us for others. The term is more easily understood if we think of the frequent practice of reconciling our bank statements. The bank reports our balance is X number of dollars, but our checkbook may show a different number. We have to bring those figures into balance; that's called reconciliation. Verses 19 and 20 tell us how it happened when we reconciled with God. He did it through Christ. We had a debt to pay because of our sins. ("All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God," Paul wrote in Romans 3:23). Jesus paid that debt by accepting the punishment due us and satisfying God's demand for justice so that he is "not counting [our] trespasses against [us]." So, we can be reconciled with God when we accept God's gracious provision.

Paul continues to show us that, having been reconciled to God, we are now responsible for taking that message of reconciliation to those who have not yet been restored to God by faith. He says that the message has been "committed" to us. He calls us "ambassadors for Christ." When we share God's truth with others, we officially represent God; we are authorized and commissioned to do so. It is not a responsibility we can shirk or take lightly.

The final statement in today's reading is mind-boggling. The whole matter of reconciliation (or salvation in the broader sense) is because of the willingness of Jesus to "be sin on our behalf." It's beyond human imagination: the perfect, sinless, holy Son of God, who experienced life as we do but without sin, was willing to take our sin, bear it and its penalty for us so we can experience God's righteousness. If you have not yet accepted God's gracious gift, do so now and begin living as that new creature we spoke of earlier.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Luke 15 includes three parables, all about losing things. Parables are stories with familiar images and characters that illustrate essential truths—truths made clear by telling a simple story. Often, no interpretation is necessary; the application is obvious. At other times, Jesus uses parables that His disciples understand but are unclear to hearers who are not sincerely looking for truth. In this instance, Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees and scribes, complaining that Jesus "receives sinners and eats with them." They were the audience that Jesus taught using these three stories.

Gospel Reading:

Note: Verses 4–10 omitted from the reading are included below for context.

> *Luke 15:1-32 NAS95 1 Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. 2 Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." 3 So He told them this parable, saying, 4 "What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? 5 "When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 "And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' 7 "I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. 8 "Or what woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? 9 "When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!' 10 "In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." 11 And He said, "A man had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them. 13 "And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. 14 "Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. 15 "So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 "And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him.*

> *17 "But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! 18 'I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men."' 20 "So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21 "And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 "But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; 23 and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate. 25 "Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 "And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. 27 "And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.' 28 "But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him. 29 "But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; 30 but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.' 31 "And he said to him, 'Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 'But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.'"*

The first parable is simple to understand. For a shepherd to lose one of his flock is disastrous. He will go to almost any length to find that single sheep. When he sees it, he rejoices and calls his friend together to rejoice with him. Jesus makes an interesting application to the story. He likens it to the rejoicing in heaven when a single sinner repents and is reconciled to God.

The second story concludes similarly: "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." In this story, a woman loses one of her ten coins, perhaps the total of all her assets. Like the shepherd, she seriously searches, checking every nook and cranny of her house until she finds the missing coin. She also calls her friends to come and celebrate the find.

One can readily conclude from these two stories that God is in the search-and-rescue business. As Peter put it, God does not want "anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). All of heaven's beings rejoice when a rescue is successful and a lost one repents and returns to God.

But Jesus tells one more story in great detail that emphasizes God's great love for a lost one. It is commonly referred to as the story of The Prodigal Son.

The reader is probably familiar with the story. The younger of two sons asks his father for his inheritance. He doesn't give a reason, but the succeeding events indicate that he wanted out from the confining influences of home so he could live life as he wanted to. Surprisingly, perhaps, the father gives him what he asks and does the same for his older brother, who remains at home and continues his usual life working at the homestead with the father. The younger son goes far from home geographically and in every other sense. He spends his inheritance on "loose living," wasting it on selfish desires. His wastefulness burst his dream of fun and fulfillment and became acute during a famine in the Land he had fled to. Life became a nightmare, and he was disgraced to take a job feeding pigs (exceedingly distasteful to faithful Jews).

"When he came to his senses," he realized that the servants in his father's house had it much better than him, so he vowed to return home, humble himself, and beg to live as a servant. He had come to a full appreciation of what he had lost and that it was his sinful pride, greed, and desire for the "good life" that had brought him down to the gutter. We can't be sure about what he expected of his father. Indeed, he hoped for acceptance back onto the farm as a lowly servant, but he probably would not have anticipated his father's response to his return.

What follows is a fantastic illustration of God's unfathomable love and grace. It seems that the father had been on the lookout for his son, and he hastened to greet him, to welcome him, and to present him with multiple tokens of his love and forgiveness. And like the first two stories, a celebration follows the son's return, and there is a banquet, gifts, forgiveness, and rejoicing. Oh, but there's a catch—not everyone rejoices. Now, we are re-introduced to the elder son, who, perhaps, is the real prodigal. He has been faithful in his work of the father, but apparently, his heart is not open to receive or forgive his brother. The elder brother had enjoyed his home and work and had his inheritance. Why should he be upset? Why couldn't he rejoice at the return of his brother? Perhaps Jesus was drawing a verbal picture of some in His audience that day. Was He thinking of the Pharisees and scribes, who, like the older brother, were deceived in their self-righteousness?

The three parables clearly illustrate the value of every human being. Like the sheep, the coin, and the son, God highly values the lost ones, and he deeply loves those who have not yet repented and accepted His gracious offer to reconcile them to Himself.

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Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Which of the sons in the story of the prodigal son do you identify with most, the elder or the prodigal himself? Why?

2. How do you feel about the father's reaction upon the return of his youngest son? Do you think the youngest got what he deserved or didn't deserve? In what ways does the father's love for his son(s) emulate the characteristics we see of God the Father in the Scriptures?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 30: 03-23-2025



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. Why do bad things happen to "good" people? In the Gospel reading today, Jesus addressed a related question posed to Him by the crowd, except with a twist.

Their question was whether, when bad things happened to people, were they worse sinners than the ones who avoided the same fate? We will see how Jesus cut to the heart of the matter, the people's universal need for repentance and faith for the forgiveness of sin. This week, we also look at a story of Moses in the Book of Exodus and a passage from 1 Corinthians which relates another story from Exodus.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Exodus. The context of the reading is Moses' calling by God to lead the Hebrews out of their captivity under the Pharaoh. In Chapter 1, after the Israelites had settled in Egypt under Joseph's guardianship (in the seven-year famine), "there arose a new king in Egypt who did not know Joseph" (Exodus 1:8). After Moses saw the injustices done against his people, he killed an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrews (Exodus 2:12). After Moses fled from the Pharaoh who found out about it, he helped Jethro's daughters water their flock (Exodus 2:17). Afterwards, Jethro, "the priest of Midian," gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses as his wife (v. 21). Thereafter he had his first son Gershom there in the land of Midian during this time of his first "exodus" because of his flight from the Pharaoh. All of this is leading up to today's reading in chapter three, which begins the period known as "The Exodus," during which Moses, under the direction of God, led the Hebrew people out of Egypt. In today's reading, we see Moses' first recorded experience with a divine revelation from God, which happened during his stewardship of his father-in-law's flock.

First Reading:

Note: Verses 8b – 12 omitted from the reading are included below.

> *Exodus 3:1-15 NAS95 1 Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not*

consumed. 3 So Moses said, "I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up." 4 When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." 5 Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 6 He said also, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. 7 The LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. 8 So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. 9 Now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them. 10 Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt." 11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?" 12 And He said, "Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain." 13 Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?" 14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" 15 God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations.

In the reading, we see Moses receiving direct revelation from God, first in the form of a sign (a bush burning but not consumed) and then in the form of the voice of God calling him by name (v. 4). This was the formal calling of the prophet Moses for the specific purpose of delivering the people from their oppression in Egypt (v. 10). Moses questioned God as to how he, as a humble man, could ever accomplish such an excellent task (v. 11). In contrast to the proud characteristics often exhibited in leaders such as the Pharaoh, we see in Numbers 12:3 how Moses was called the most humble man on the earth. God answered Moses by giving him a sign, saying that once he led the people out of Egypt, he would worship Him again at this same mountain (v. 12). Again, Moses questioned God, asking what he should tell his people about the Person from whom he received his commission to deliver them from their oppression. God answered, "I AM WHO I AM" (v. 14) and told them that "I AM has sent me to you" (v. 14). Finally, God connected His "I AM" name, the self-existent One, to the lineage of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (v. 15). In addition to the introduction of the "I AM" designation for God, in verse 2 we also see the use of the word "LORD." This word, when used in all capitals, denotes the Hebrew word (without vowels) "YHWH," the "tetragrammaton," often

translated as Yahweh. The first occurrence of this word is found in Genesis 2:4 and then in 15:6, which says about Abraham, "And he believed the LORD, and it was counted to him for righteousness." "YHWH" reflects God's divine being, His self-existent nature, something made clear in His words to Moses. This bounding of the reading by opening and closing it with the word "LORD" (v. 2, 15) and the introduction of the heretofore unknown name for God of "I Am" indicates a powerful expression of the sovereignty of God in directing the affairs of Moses to accomplish God's purposes. Moses was to be God's chosen agent to affect the freeing of the Hebrew Nation, through which God would pour pronouncements of blessings to those who obeyed and curses for those who didn't.

We can learn plenty from the reading that we can apply to our lives. God works through the lives of frail, imperfect people like Moses. Although Moses sinned in the killing of the Egyptian (Exodus 2:12), God used him despite his sin. If God can use a humble man like Moses to accomplish His purposes, we should assume that God would use ordinary people like ourselves in working out His plan. Second, when God places a specific calling upon our life, He expects our obedience, but it's okay to seek answers to our questions. In our day and age, we can seek guidance from various sources when we sense that God has placed a specific calling upon our lives. These include direct statements from Scripture, principles from Scripture, counsel from godly people (especially those with whom we collaborate in praying), and sensing the circumstances God has placed in our lives. In the reading, we saw how God used Moses' circumstances to lead him to the exact spot he needed to be.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

In this reading, Paul sheds light on these allusions from Israel's past for those of us who are reading this as Gentiles, without the history of the Jewish people as our backdrop. He explained the water, manna, and the people's unbelief using a quote from the Old Testament Book of Exodus, which we read in the first reading. Paul's readers would have been familiar with the Old Testament events surrounding the Exodus. Keep in mind the context of chapter 10 in that it follows Paul's explanation of the legitimacy of his apostleship, having just confronted the Corinthians over a grave matter of sin in their church (see 1 Corinthians 5:1).

Some background on the manna is helpful to understand the big picture and the application to Jesus Christ. The word "manna" in Hebrew means "what is it." As you can imagine, this was an

extraordinary way for God to provide for His people. God seems to work in very unexpected ways. In the desert, the Hebrews collected the manna for the first five days of the week, then went bad overnight. However, on the sixth day, God provided a double amount of a special type preserved for two days to provide for a Sabbath rest day. In the spiritual sense, Jesus is our special manna, providing our eternal Sabbath rest (Hebrews 4). Yet, like us, the people God led out from among slavery during the Exodus sinned. Yet, this wasn't an isolated instance of grumbling. It says in Exodus, "The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness" (Exodus 16:2). Despite their hard hearts, God heard the people and answered by telling Moses that He would "rain bread from heaven for you" even in the case when they did not obey Him (Exodus 16:4), which He knew they wouldn't. Moses explained to them that their complaints weren't against him but against God (Exodus 16:8). God made a special provision to provide for the Sabbath by making the manna quantitatively different (a double portion) on the day before as well as qualitatively different – it would not spoil during the Sabbath rest day. God then announced the miracle to Moses through the appearance of the Shekinah glory, which the people saw (Exodus 16:10, c.f.). In the meantime, in the evening before the raining of the manna from the sky began, God sent quail to the people (Exodus 16:13). The text concluded with the people seeing the manna and not recognizing what it was until Moses explained it to them (Exodus 16:15).

Second Reading:

Note: Verses 7 – 9 omitted from the reading are included below.

> *1 Corinthians 10:1-12 NAS95 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. 5 Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. 6 Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. 7 Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY." 8 Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. 9 Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. 10 Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 11 Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. 12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.*

Paul wanted New Testament believers to understand the spiritual heritage and to learn from the mistakes that led to disbelief and rejection of God's provision for their lives. Had the people not been so hard-hearted, they could have better understood God's provision through the spiritual "manna" that was Christ (v. 4). Yet the Hebrew people in the desert continued to sin, and the sin had dire consequences for them. The heart of the matter was this. "Now, these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall" (vv. 11-12).

There are many spiritual parallels in this reading between the provision of God through the manna and the person and work of Jesus Christ, who called Himself "the bread of life" (John 6:35). Although the people grumbled against God, He still provided food for them. The parallel in the New Testament is that although most of the people didn't accept Jesus as their Messiah, God still offered salvation through Him. The manna was a unique provision done only by God and could not come about by any natural means. In the same way, Jesus was God's supernatural provision and did not come about naturally but was instead born through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Another point in the reading concerns Paul's use of the term "spiritual rock" (v. 4). When Paul said, "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 escaping from the Pharaoh during the Exodus. Jesus Himself explained the necessity of a sure foundation in Luke Chapter 6. " Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: 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. 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).

Finally, Paul stated, "*these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. 12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall*" (vv. 11 – 12). The meaning of this is self-evident. We should take great pains to 1. Become familiar with Scripture so we have the principles to apply, and 2. Apply them to our lives by learning from those that went before us. Why do we continue to sin when we know so much? Perhaps a better question is, why does God continue to use sinners like us? We know that He does, but this doesn't lessen the call of holiness that God has placed upon our lives.

As we transition to the Gospel lesson, we will learn about the ultimate consequence of the unforgivable sin, the forsaking of repentance of sin, and belief in the forgiveness offered only through faith in Jesus Christ.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is chapter 13 of Saint Luke. The context is after Jesus' lengthy discourse on the truths of the Gospel's good news in contrast to the heresies and legalism taught by His antagonists, the Pharisees. Jesus told them to "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (Luke 12:1b). The Pharisees thought that they had contrived the secret code for living a faith-filled life, which at its root was hypocrisy (Luke 12:1). In contrast to the Pharisees' law code derived in secret, Jesus taught publicly. Jesus said, "But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known" (Luke 12:2). He told them not to fear those that could kill their bodies (i.e., the Pharisees), but to fear the One that could after they were dead cast them into hell (i.e., God). They were not to fear the Pharisees and their hypocritical legal code, a portion of which we will see in today's reading.

Gospel Reading:

> *Luke 13:1-9 NAS95 1 Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. 2, And Jesus said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? 3 "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. 4 "Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? 5 "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." 6 And He began telling this parable: "A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any. 7 "And he said to the vineyard-keeper, 'Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?' 8 "And he answered and said to him, 'Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; 9 and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.'"*

Jesus confronted the people's false doctrine that bad things happened to bad people because of their

sins. He did this by giving them the truth of the Gospel. The big idea in the reading is that the people whom the tower fell weren't worse sinners, but that **every one** required repentance and finding faith in Jesus Christ as the only means of forgiveness for their sin. Jesus told them, "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (v. 3), meaning spiritual, not physical death. Scripture tells us, "It is appointed for men to die once, and after this comes judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). Jesus was clear that He was the only way to God, and He said this using the same language about Himself that we saw in the first reading, meaning Jesus is God. He said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). Jesus closed the reading by revealing God's patience in waiting for His people to bear fruit, meaning to repent of their sin and come to the knowledge of eternal life (vv. 6 – 8). Scripture tells us that "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Although there may be points of light in all religions, the only way to God is through faith in Jesus Christ – exclusively by becoming a Christian. This may not jive with the politically correct culture in which we find ourselves today, but the fact remains that this is the truth of God.

We shouldn't dismiss the fact that God judges sin, whether in the life of a believer or a non-believer. In our day, God operates according to the New Covenant in which he prunes believers during their earthly lives (John 15:2) while storing up His judgment for unbelievers mainly until the end of their lives (John 15:6, "cast in the fire and burned"). Even during the Old Testament times, God revealed His grace for the unbelieving world by lavishing His material blessings upon them, although their eternal destination was hell. This is very clear from both Psalm 37 and Psalm 73. God calls us to remember those who went before us, such as the story of Ananias and Sapphira in the Book of Acts (Acts 5:1-11), or Paul's teaching about some being sick and others dying because of their unholy behavior in the love feast and communion meal (1 Corinthians 11:30). A key point that we need to see is that there are consequences for sin, but not in perhaps the ways we can imagine or according to the ways the people (including the Pharisees addressed in the adjacent verses) contrived.

As Christians, just because we do everything right doesn't mean that we will be blessed in the earthly sense, which we might expect, including material blessings and protection from sudden death. Instead, God allows challenges in our lives to lead us to a fuller relationship with Him, including the death of loved ones to accomplish His purposes. Our Christian lives are not like baking a cake. We can't just put together the exact right ingredients using a measured formula, follow the recipe strictly, and have the cake turn out perfectly well every time. Sometimes, God throws a monkey wrench into our plans to achieve His purposes. Moreover, we may not even know or understand these purposes during our natural lifetimes. Unlike the Pharisees, who taught salvation by works and outward obedience to their laws, God calls us to walk in faith alone while behaving in

ways as directed by the Holy Spirit. This includes closely understanding the biblical principles taught in the New Testament and the Ten Commandments of the Old. However, we should not live formulaically, doing things for God and expecting Him to "bless" us on our terms. He will indeed bless us, but His definition of blessing is much broader than our limited perspective. May we learn to walk by faith, not by our feelings or sight.

Many of us have had nice young men dressed in white shirts wearing nametags and backpacks knock on our door. The Mormons, although very well-intentioned, teach a doctrine similar to that confronted by Jesus in the Gospel reading today. Would you recognize false doctrine when it knocked on your door? As we ponder what Jesus said about those who perish, we have to remember that we are not just talking about the false doctrine of Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Muslims, but anyone who holds the doctrine that good works cause salvation rather than flow from it (Ephesians 2:8-9). Jesus taught us not that we shouldn't judge but rather that when we do judge, we are to use a righteous standard (John 7:24, Matthew 7:2). Jesus was clear that belief in Him is the only way to God and that many would not travel this road. Less we think that those in our community are immune, we can say that many who claim Christianity truly live as practical atheists except they go to church on Sunday while negating Christian principles and practices during the week including prayer, fellowship with other Christians, study Scripture, following God's calling for them (Ephesians 2:10). Jesus told this group, "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles? And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS'" (Matthew 7:21-23).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. We saw in the Gospel reading how Jesus upended the people's beliefs about sin and salvation. How can you be part of bringing a message of hope and light to people who are approaching God with an expectation of God being a genie on demand (and often being disillusioned with God's unexpected ways of interacting with them)? Are there areas of your own life that you need to work through disillusionment with the Lord's unexpected ways so that you can be freed up to minister to others authentically in their struggles with surrendering to God?

2. The "bigger" idea in the Gospel reading is evangelism, reaching out to those trapped in false belief systems with the truth of the Gospel. What are two practical ways in which you can begin to

reach out to those holding false beliefs? If you pray for God to change a person's heart (an essential first step), will you be confident speaking to them about Jesus? What verses will you have them read to begin showing them the truth of the Gospel?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 27: 03-16-2025



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with a reading from the first book of the Bible, Genesis, the book of Beginnings. Today's study reveals God's gracious plan to make Abraham the progenitor of a physical line of the chosen people and the spiritual line of God-followers. The second reading is from one of the Apostle Paul's favored letters—that is, it's favored by many Bible readers because of the promise of joy and confidence to those who trust God wholeheartedly. The Gospel reading from Luke takes us into a very intimate occasion in the life of Jesus that demonstrated visually and orally His unique character as the very Son of God.

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

Introduction to the First Reading:

So much is packed into this passage of Scripture that it could take several pages of commentary to explain it all clearly. Note that this choice servant of God is known first as Abram ("exalted father"). His name is later changed to Abraham ("father of many nations"; Gen. 17:5). It begins with the reassuring promise of God that He will protect Abram; He will be "a shield" to him. And he promises him a great reward. In what we refer to as the Abrahamic Covenant, introduced in Genesis 12 and reaffirmed in chapters 13, 15, and 17. God had promised Abram that he would be "a great nation" and his "offspring" would be blessed. And that raises a great question in Abram's mind. This passage answers the question and gives us a preview of the history of the nation to be born of Abram.

First Reading:

Note: The reading omitted verses 1-4 and 16 that are included below.

> *Genesis 15:1-18 NAS95 1 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great." 2 Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 And Abram said, "Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir." 4 Then behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir." 5 And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." 6 Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness. 7 And He said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it." 8 He said, "O Lord GOD, how may I know that I will possess it?" 9 So He said to him, "Bring Me a three year old heifer, and a three year old female goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon." 10 Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, and laid each half opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds. 11 The birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away. 12 Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him. 13 God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. 14 "But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions. 15*

> *"As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age. 16 "Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete." 17 It came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces. 18 On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates:*

Abram is perplexed. How could he have offspring, he asks, "since I am childless"? Not knowing the miraculous plan that God had in mind, Abram proposes that God use Abram's servant Eliezer as his heir. But God responds that his heir "will come forth from your own body." Then God gives this faithful follower an object lesson. He instructs him to look at the stars and count them. That's impossible, of course; the stars are innumerable. "So shall your descendants be," God tells him. In response, Abram offers a statement that reveals the depth of his trust in God. It is a statement that is referred to elsewhere in Scripture (Romans 4:3, 9, 22; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23): "Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness." This is a critical faith statement. It is not on the basis of any action of Abram that he is declared righteous, but it is on the basis of his faith, his trust in God. That same principle of faith remains true today. It is not by our holy deeds that we are considered righteous before God but because of our faith in the saving work of Jesus who paid the sacrifice for our sin.

In confirmation of God's promises to Abram, there follows a demonstration of God's commitment to fulfill His promises to Abram. The ceremony of sacrifice that is pictured is the affirmation of God that He alone will fulfill the covenant He is making with His servant. Not only that, but God also gives Abram a preview of what is to happen to his progeny, events that we will read about in the later chapters of Genesis and the early portion of Exodus. The 400-year captivity of Israel (the descendant nation from Abram) in Egypt is clearly foretold. And the promise of their ultimate release is predicted, as well.

The ceremony pictured in these verses included symbols of God's presence (a smoking oven and a flaming torch) which were to give Abram assurance that God Himself is making this covenant with him, and it is certain of fulfillment. It concludes in this passage with the promise that the land from the River of Egypt (the Nile?) to the Euphrates River in Mesopotamia will be the homeland of God's chosen people.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

In the first two chapters of Philippians, Paul rehearses some of the factors of his relationship with the people of the church at Philippi and what he hoped and prayed for them in terms of their spiritual growth and steadfastness. He wanted them to live in a manner "worthy of the gospel of Christ" (2:27). He also taught some very important spiritual truths that should have encouraged his readers to work together for unity among themselves and to recognize the great personal sacrifice of Jesus for them. They should understand, also, the exalted place that Jesus has been given as a result of His obedience to the Father, even to the point of death.

Second Reading:

> *Philippians 3:17 – 4:1 NAS95 17 Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. 18 For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, 19 whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. 20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; 21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself. 1 Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.*

In today's reading, the writer offers a significant contrast. He wants his readers to follow his example and that of others who "walk according" to the pattern of his life. And he warns them of the many who walk as "the enemies of the cross of Christ." He is distressed by such conduct; it brings him great sorrow. But the followers of Christ must be warned. These evildoers are characterized by unwholesome appetites and unseemly pride in their wrongdoing. Perhaps the danger of their behavior is suggested in the last characteristic, "who set their minds on earthly things." What God has created and given us here on this earth is not inherently bad, but an unhealthy attachment to earthly things is fatal. As John wrote in 1 John 2:16, "For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world." His conclusion is the key: "The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever." Paul makes it clear that the "end" of them "is destruction." Believers must concentrate on the eternal, not the temporal that distracts us from God and will not

last. Rather, the Christian has much more to look for.

Paul goes on to note the contrast between the "enemies" of Christ and the true believers. The Christian's citizenship is not in this temporary, passing world. It is in heaven, and it's not just something we hope to enter someday; it is the place where we should continually and eagerly be looking "for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ," who will descend from our spiritual homeland to come for us. And then the changes that Paul promised in 1 Corinthians 15 will occur. He says our current "humble state" will be transformed "into conformity with the body of His glory." We surely don't fully understand all that that means, but it will occur, not by anything we can do but by His power. After all, He has the power to subject everything to Himself, and He eventually will do so.

Once again, Paul reveals his deep passion for the Philippian believers. He calls them "beloved brethren," and he again speaks of his longing to see them, whom he considers "my joy and crown." In light of the glorious promise for the alien Christians whose citizenship is in heaven, their future and eternal abiding place, Paul gives a final challenge to those he loves so dearly, "Stand firm in the Lord."

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The four Gospels present Jesus in a variety of settings, with each writer including those events and sayings that fit best into his argument. The four together give us a complete picture of what God wants us to know about Jesus' life and ministry. After all, according to the writer of Hebrews, God "in these last days has spoken to us by His Son" (Hebrews 1:2). Jesus provides the very best picture of who God is because He who was and is God "became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). In today's passage, Luke gives us a unique picture of Jesus, different from every other representation of Him in the Bible.

Gospel Reading:

> *Luke 9:28-36 NAS95 28 Some eight days after these sayings, He took along Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. 29 And while He was praying, the*

> *appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming. 30 And behold, two men were talking with Him; and they were Moses and Elijah, 31 who, appearing in glory, were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. 32 Now Peter and his companions had been overcome with sleep; but when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men standing with Him. 33 And as these were leaving Him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles: one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah" –not realizing what he was saying. 34 While he was saying this, a cloud formed and began to overshadow them; and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. 35 Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!" 36 And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent, and reported to no one in those days any of the things which they had seen.*

In the paragraph just preceding these verses, Jesus had spoken of the cost of being His disciple. The disciple "must deny himself and take up his cross daily"; "whoever wants to save his life will lose it." To follow Jesus is to be willing to serve Him unashamedly and faithfully. Knowing that there will be some who will faithfully follow, He concludes this teaching by promising that some of His hearers "will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God." That was said many years ago, and yet we still have not seen God's kingdom established on earth in the fullest sense that He has promised it. So, what could He have meant?

Today's passage may well be the fulfillment of that promise, as we shall see. A little more than a week after that pronouncement Jesus took three of his most intimate disciples—Peter, James, and John—with Him to a mountain to pray, which was a common practice for Him. Apparently, the disciples fell asleep while Jesus prayed. (Interestingly, the same thing occurs on a later occasion in the Garden of Gethsemane on Jesus' last night before His crucifixion, Luke 22:45.) When they awoke, they saw what must have seemed like a dream to them. They saw Jesus with different facial expressions and clothes that were dazzling white and gleaming. Two men were talking with Him, and somehow the disciples recognized the two as Moses and Elijah, long dead and revered Old Testament prophets. They were "appearing in glory," and the three disciples "saw His glory." It was Moses in Exodus 33 who asked to see God's glory, but God indicated that no one could see His glory and live.

There must have been something about the appearance of these three that was supra-natural. It was an appearance beyond anything earthly normal. It's also interesting to note the topic of discussion between Jesus and the two prophets; they "were speaking of His departure." Jesus had told His disciples on more than one occasion that he would be leaving them, and He had indicated the

method (His death, burial, resurrection, and return to heaven). Peter, in his usual impetuous way, was eager to keep them from leaving, so he suggested building "tabernacles," probably the kind of booths that were associated with the Jewish festival. He was interrupted by a cloud that came upon them, frightening them. Then they heard a voice, the very voice of God. "*This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him*!" As God had spoken at Jesus' baptism, so He speaks once again, confirming that Jesus is the Holy One, the anointed one of God, the one above all others who should be heard and obeyed. It seems abundantly clear that these three close disciples of Jesus had the unique privilege of having just a glimpse, a peek of what the Kingdom of God is like. The qualified king, the representatives of the old covenant, and the disciples of the new, all are represented. Glory shone around as it will in that glorious future kingdom. Watch for it! Be prepared!

Reflection Questions

1. In the second reading, Saint Paul talked about "stand[ing] firm in the faith" (Philippians 4:1). List at least three specific ways in which you are living as a citizen of heaven, for eternal values rather than worldly pleasure and standing firm in your faith?

2. In what ways do you recognize Jesus as God Himself as seen by Peter, James, and John, in the great transfiguration scene? God said to listen to Him. In what ways are you doing this in your life? In what ways are you acting upon the information you are receiving from God?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 24: 03-09-2025

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. Today we learn about the nature of faith and the importance of knowing God's word so that when we need it, we have it to combat temptations we encounter in our lives.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Deuteronomy, the last Book of what is called the Pentateuch, the first five Books of the Bible. Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land (see Numbers 20:12), so God gave him instructions about what the people were to do when they entered the land. As always, understanding the context is important because some forty years have passed since God delivered the Israelites from their captivity in Egypt. Only the people who were twenty years and younger were allowed to enter because of their sin of unbelief (Numbers 14:29). This was a time of much grieving because many memorials would likely have been held for the numerous people who had died during the era of wandering in the desert. The chapter opens with an introductory statement which sets the tone for today's reading. "Then it shall be, when you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance, and you possess it and live in it" (Deut 21:1). Finally, God opened the way for the people to enter the Promised Land.

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First Reading:

> *Deuteronomy 26:4-10 NAS95 4 "Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the LORD your God. 5 "You shall answer and say before the LORD your God, 'My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; but there he became a great, mighty and populous nation. 6 'And the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, and imposed hard labor on us. 7 'Then we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction and our toil and our oppression; 8 and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with great terror and with signs and wonders; 9 and He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. 10 'Now behold, I have brought the first of the produce of the ground which You, O LORD have given me.' And you shall set it down before the LORD your God, and worship before the LORD your God;*

God architected the people's entry into the Promised Land at a time to correspond with the harvest, at which point the manna would cease (Joshua 5:12). God provided instructions to the priest that the first thing that was to be done was to make an offering to Him (v. 4). God affirmed the legacy of the father of the Israelite nation, "a wandering Aramean," likely referring to Jacob, who sojourned for a long period in that region (Syria) under the control of his father-in-law Laban (v. 5). During the Nation's time in Egypt, the population of Jews greatly multiplied, a trend which began way back when Jacob had first entered Egypt (v. 5e). This is affirmed in Genesis, "Now Israel lived in the land of Egypt, in Goshen, and they acquired property in it and were fruitful and became very numerous" (Genesis 47:27). The Egyptians then began to resent and distrust the people and took them as their slaves (v. 6). God, however heard their cries and began the process to move them out in the Land that he had promised to Abraham. The closing verse of the reading marks a bookend of God's instructions to make a kind of "first fruits" offering to the Lord upon entering the Land.

Today's message served as a reminder to the people who were about to enter the Land about the nature of God's fruitfulness. When the people entered the Land, they would find it very fruitful, just as the Lord had promised them (Exodus 3:8, Numbers 14:8, etc.).

In our day it is perhaps easy for us to overlook the fact that everything comes from God when His actions are more behind the scenes compared to His bold and obvious acts in leading the people out of captivity in Egypt and eventually into the Land. As we approach Easter Sunday, we also have the opportunity presented to us by God to reflect upon the nature of God as our supreme provider. God

has given us fruitful blessings beyond comparison by sending His Son to atone for our sins once and for all. Like the fruit of the harvest that waited for the Jewish people for which they had done nothing to earn, we can celebrate how God gave us Jesus as a totally free gift which we cannot earn and not deserve. We will learn more about this gift in the next reading.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Today's second reading is from one of the most important texts in the entire New Testament Bible. The context of the tenth chapter of Romans deals with the current situation of the Nation of Israel. This section of Romans is sandwiched between chapter nine dealing with Israel's past situation, and chapter 11 which deals with Israel's future. Chapter 10 opens with a message concerning the Nation, "*Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation*" (Romans 10:1). This is God's present-day message for all people, not just Israel. Many in the Nation of Israel in Paul's day misunderstood the message of faith, a condition that continues until the present time. Paul said in the second verse, "*For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge*" (Romans 10:2). In today's reading, Paul will explain the basis of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Second Reading:

> *Romans 10:8-13 NAS95 8 But what does it say? "THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, in your mouth and in your heart" –that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, 9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. 11 For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; 13 for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."*

Here, Paul quoted from a crucial Old Testament text in Deuteronomy, which explained the conditional nature of the Mosaic Covenant. It is important to understand the biblical citation at any time when all capitals appear in the text. This section in the Law first provided the list of blessings that God has promised to the Nation, but then concluded with the condition, "*If you obey the LORD your God to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this book of the law, if*

you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and soul" (De 30:10). The Law then went on to say that the Law was undeniably right within their reach, "*But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it*" (De 30:14). Paul quoted from the Greek version (Septuagint) of this important text to say that God's message of the New Covenant is right here among them through his message. Whoever trusts in the Lord through the belief that God raised Jesus from the dead will be saved, whether they are a Jew or a Gentile. "Whoever will call on the name of the LORD will be *saved*" (v. 13), period.

Paul wrote his message to a church that was being tossed by the false Gospel that salvation came through works and not by faith alone which produces the fruit of good works. In fact, he dedicated the entire Book of Galatians to refute the controversy brought about by the Judaizers who taught this false doctrine. Paul summarized the matter in the second chapter of that Book, "*nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified*" (Galatians 2:16).

What does Paul's message mean to the church in our time? Everything, since this same false message has continued from the time when Paul first wrote against it. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is a free gift (Ephesians 2:8-9), one that is brought about from reading the word of God. Paul made the source of our Christian faith clear just a few verses past today's reading, "*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ*" (Romans 10:17). As believers in the resurrection and the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, we can trust in our salvation as an accomplished fact of God from which will flow the fruit of our good works. Our salvation does not come from works any more than the Creator comes about from its creation. This is a crucially important core truth about salvation that makes today's reading one of the most important texts in the entire Bible.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The context of the reading from Saint Luke is right after Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist (Luke 3:21), which marked the opening of His ministry when He was around 30 years of age (Luke 3:23).

Gospel Reading:

> *Luke 4:1-13 NAS95 1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness 2 for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry. 3 And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." 4 And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE.'" 5 And he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. 6 And the devil said to Him, "I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. 7 Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours." 8 Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'" 9 And he led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here; 10 for it is written, 'HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU TO GUARD YOU,' 11 and, 'ON their HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.'" 12 And Jesus answered and said to him, "It is said, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.'" 13 When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time.*

Luke recalled how Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit of God to be tempted by Satan in the desert for forty days during which he fasted. These temptations were many (see verse 13, "every temptation"), however, since Jesus was hungry the first one recorded here dealt with Satan's offer of food (v. 3). Satan's question to Jesus began with the word "if," through which the master deceiver doubted Jesus' identity as the Son of God. Jesus replied to each inquiry of the devil by answering with the Word of God. "If you are the Son of God," then make the stones into bread (v. 3). Also, "If you are the Son of God," throw Yourself down from the height of the temple (v. 9).

Today's reading teaches us how we are to resist temptation, whether we understand that it comes from the devil or not. By placing God's word into our hearts through reading and memorization of it, we can "answer" each temptation with the word of the Lord in our hearts.

I remember once when I was a teenager our family went on a summer vacation trip to the Washington, DC area with its rich history. One day we visited an old well that was famous for some events during the Civil War in which people tossed coins into it expecting a blessing. As I peered into the well, I saw a large amount of money sitting just a few feet below the edge and within an easy hop into the now-dry ditch. I looked around and seriously considered jumping in at a time when nobody was watching. However, a thought began to reverberate through my mind as I began to carry out my plan. "Though shalt not steal" (Exodus 20:15). I had evidently heard this from my Catechism classes. But, I thought, this isn't stealing, these people are just throwing their money into

this hole. Still, the words echoed through my heart, and I finally turned away from my folly. Looking back on this many years later I realized how knowing just a bit of God's word had protected me from carrying out something truly stupid!

Carrying God's word in our hearts takes hard work and isn't something that comes about by accident. Instead, we have to endeavor to prepare before we face temptation such that when it comes, we will be prepared to answer it with God's word in our hearts. If we don't have the word in our reserves, we will never be able to rely upon it when the need arises. That is the heart of what Luke taught us in today's reading.

Reflection Questions

1. In the first reading we saw how God prepared the Nation of Israel before their entrance into the Promised Land by asking them to first prepare a sacrificial offering from the goodness of His provision from the fruit of the harvest. In what ways can you prepare your heart to celebrate Easter Sunday in such a way, so that when it comes you can see things differently in light of God's provision?

2. In the second reading we learned about God's teaching regarding faith. Once a person understands the Gospel message faith is indeed truly mixed with works (please refer to James 2:18 on your own). In what ways have you ever, perhaps trusted in works instead of faith for your salvation at some point in your life?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 84: 03-02-2025



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we learn about the power of words to reveal a person's heart. We discover how as believers we can look to a future time when we will overcome death. Finally, we continue the study of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Saint Luke.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Apocryphal book of Sirach.

First Reading:

> *1 SIR 27:4-7*
> *When a sieve is shaken, the husks appear;*
> *so do one's faults when one speaks.*
> *As the test of what the potter molds is in the furnace,*
> *so in tribulation is the test of the just.*
> *The fruit of a tree shows the care it has had;*
> *so too does one's speech disclose the bent of one's mind.*
> *Praise no one before he speaks,*
> *for it is then that people are tested.*

Today's reading profoundly reveals how a person's words reveal their heart. It closely parallels James' words in James Chapter 3. Words are very powerful, and the writer shows how one's words easily reveal our faults, so it is perhaps better to keep silent. Words are the fruit of a person which discloses the inner workings of the heart. My fifth-grade teacher, Mr. Dow, who has since gone away to heaven, had many sayings. I remember that he used to tell me, better to be silent and be thought a fool than to speak and remove all doubt! His words and those in the first reading make good advice for us today.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading continues the study from the past several weeks in the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians. The context is the teaching on the return of the Lord Jesus to the earth to capture and reward His church. Paul said about this a few verses before today's reading, "*Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed*" (1Corin 15:51-52). When Jesus returns, those who are alive on the earth and who are believers in Him will not die but rather will be translated into heaven to rule and reign with Him forever (1 Thess 4:17). With these things in mind let's proceed with the reading.

Second Reading:

> *1 Corinthians 15:54-58 NAS95 54 But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. 55 "O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH,*

> *WHERE IS YOUR STING?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; 57 but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.*

In the first verse of the reading Paul quoted from Isaiah 25:8 which reads, "*He will swallow up death for all time, And the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces, And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth; For the LORD has spoken*." The context of Isaiah was the restoration of Israel after their exile to Babylon as a result of their sin. Paul quoted the Septuagint version of Isaiah and applied it in an eschatological context. Paul looked forward to God's ultimate restoration of His people in glorified bodies like what Jesus displayed after His resurrection (1 John 3:2, "we shall be like Him"). Next, Paul quoted from Hosea 13:14, a passage in which God is chastising Israel for their sin and telling them that they will not be ransomed from physical death. Here, Paul used an Old Testament quotation to show the uselessness of trying to outrun the penalty of sin, because all sin leads to death (verse 56, Romans 6:23a, "for the wages of sin is death"). Israel had forsaken the Lord and was paying the price for it through exile and ultimately death. Thankfully, the reading does not end there, with an all-important "but God" idea in verse 57. "[B]*ut thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*." As believers in the Lord Jesus through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9), we have achieved victory in an eternal sense the moment we believed. Through our faith, we can stand strong in the Lord, "steadfast, immovable" (v. 58a) while living with God's promise that our work for Him will be worthwhile (v. 58).

When I wrote this, I was dealing with the impending death of both my father and my father-in-law. Both men were professing believers in the Lord Jesus. Through their testimony, I have stood strong in my faith and know that after they passed, they will be forever with the Lord in heaven. All of the other believers in my family can look forward to the day when they will be reunited with these two godly men.

Living with these biblical truths greatly helps us as we age and watch as our family and friends pass away. The hope that we have in Jesus helps us to safeguard our hearts from the hopelessness experienced by people in this world who have no such hope.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading from Saint Luke is Jesus' continued teaching known as the Sermon on the Mount in which he addressed "a large crowd of His disciples, and a great throng of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon" (Luke 6:17).

Gospel Reading:

> *Luke 6:39-45 NAS95 39 And He also spoke a parable to them: "A blind man cannot guide a blind man, can he? Will they not both fall into a pit? 40 A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher. 41 Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 42 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye. 43 For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. 44 For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush. 45 The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.*

Jesus taught His disciples and the crowds some important truths about the nature of His kingdom, a kingdom which was already there (Luke 17:21), and yet to come, as we saw in the second reading. First, the truths of the kingdom must be taught by teachers of the real truth (vv. 39 – 40). Jesus, Peter, and Paul were very clear about what was happening in their times about false teachings and about what would happen in the future. Jesus said, "*Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves*" (Matthew 7:15). Paul said, "*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths*" (Timothy 4:3-4). Peter said, "*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 Peter 2:1). Someone once said about the post-millennial spirit of our age, "the only truth that counts is true truth."

Second, believers are called to approach others (and God) with great humility by first examining themselves and getting right with God by repenting of their sins and seeking reconciliation with people whom they have offended (vv. 42-43). The good work of God is produced by a person with a

humble heart, such a person is known for the good works that flow from their relationship with God (v. 44). As we saw in the first reading, a person is known by the words they speak (v.45).

It is perhaps easy to judge the false nature of a group of people called a "cult" whose teachings are so absolutely unbiblical that anyone inside the Christian church can easily understand their insidious nature. However, when false teaching happens under the guise of the Christian church it can be much harder to recognize and deal with. When Jesus spoke His Sermon message, He was beset by the false teachings of the cult of the Pharisees. They taught that the way to reach God was through strict observance of the Law as they interpreted it, a religion of "do." Jesus came along and contradicted their false teachings with a different message, a message of "done." Jesus taught them that God had already secured their salvation, all that was necessary was for them to believe it. These contrasting messages, the false religion of "do" versus the true religion of "done," continue in modern times. Jesus secured eternal life for His believers, none of whom will be lost (John 18:9). Through our faith in Jesus Christ we can say, *"Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1 Corinthians 15:57). When "blind guide" attempt to mislead us in the church, we can turn to the truths revealed about God's granting of eternal life to us through faith alone as a result of God's grace. For, "*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).

Reflection Questions

1. In the second reading we saw how Paul quoted from the Old Testament where God had poured out curses upon His people Israel for turning away from their covenant with him. However, Paul showed how the Gospel of Grace eclipsed this temporal punishment and pointed the way to an eternal kingdom with eternal life in a perfect human body. How does this contrast between the two covenants help you to understand the struggles you face in your own life? In what ways do you feel that God has in some way given you over to death? How does reflecting upon and growing in your faith in Jesus help you to understand how to achieve victory over these thoughts?

2. Doing the work of God is evidence of our salvation through faith in Christ Jesus as our works flow from our hearts that are changed by God Who also placed His Holy Spirit in us as a testimony to the truth. However, in what small ways have you perhaps bought into certain aspects of the false Gospel of "do" versus the true Gospel of "done" in which we feel that in some ways we have earned the

right to eternal life? In what ways do enduring hardships point us more deeply to the work done by Jesus on the cross for us and oppose the false construct offered by the Pharisees who vainly worked to earn their salvation?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 81 – 02-23-2025



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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we look at several readings that get at the concept of dying to ourselves so that God may work out His plan in our lives. This is counter-cultural and something that we can only do through God's empowerment, for which we cannot even expect a reward during our natural lifetimes.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The context of the reading from First Samuel is evil King Saul's continuing effort to locate David and murder him. The reading is a self-explanatory narrative of yet another of Saul's many unsuccessful attempts on David's life. Earlier, the Prophet Samuel had anointed David as king in place of Saul (1 Samuel 16:13). After this, the now king David became Saul's armor bearer (1 Sam 16:21) and personal harp player (1 Sam 16:23) which helped comfort the soon to be dethroned king who was tormented by evil spirits from God (v. 23). We included the intervening verses from the reading which were omitted since it made the story clearer.

First Reading:

Note: The reading covered only 1 SM 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23, the intervening verses have been included.

> *1 Samuel 26:2-25 NAS95 2 So Saul arose and went down to the wilderness of Ziph, having with him three thousand chosen men of Israel, to search for David in the wilderness of Ziph. 3 Saul camped in the hill of Hachilah, which is before Jeshimon, beside the road, and David was staying in the wilderness. When he saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness, 4 David sent out spies, and he knew that Saul was definitely coming. 5 David then arose and came to the place where Saul had camped. And David saw the place where Saul lay, and Abner the son of Ner, the commander of his army; and Saul was lying in the circle of the camp, and the people were camped around him. 6 Then David said to Ahimelech the Hittite and to Abishai the son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, saying, "Who will go down with me to Saul in the camp?" And Abishai said, "I will go down with you." 7 So David and Abishai came to the people by night, and behold, Saul lay sleeping inside the circle of the camp with his spear stuck in the*

ground at his head; and Abner and the people were lying around him. 8 Then Abishai said to David, "Today God has delivered your enemy into your hand; now therefore, please let me strike him with the spear to the ground with one stroke, and I will not strike him the second time." 9 But David said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him, for who can stretch out his hand against the LORD'S anointed and be without guilt?" 10 David also said, "As the LORD lives, surely the LORD will strike him, or his day will come that he dies, or he will go down into battle and perish. 11 "The LORD forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the LORD'S anointed; but now please take the spear that is at his head and the jug of water, and let us go." 12 So David took the spear and the jug of water from beside Saul's head, and they went away, but no one saw or knew it, nor did any awake, for they were all asleep, because a sound sleep from the LORD had fallen on them. 13 Then David crossed over to the other side and stood on top of the mountain at a distance with a large area between them. 14 David called to the people and to Abner the son of Ner, saying, "Will you not answer, Abner?" Then Abner replied, "Who are you who calls to the king?" 15 So David said to Abner, "Are you not a man? And who is like you in Israel? Why then have you not guarded your lord the king? For one of the people came to destroy the king your lord. 16 "This thing that you have done is not good. As the LORD lives, all of you must surely die, because you did not guard your lord, the LORD'S anointed. And now, see where the king's spear is and the jug of water that was at his head." 17 Then Saul recognized David's voice and said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And David said, "It is my voice, my lord the king." 18 He also said, "Why then is my lord pursuing his servant? For what have I done? Or what evil is in my hand? 19 "Now therefore, please let my lord the king listen to the words of his servant. If the LORD has stirred you up against me, let Him accept an offering; but if it is men, cursed are they before the LORD, for they have driven me out today so that I would have no attachment with the inheritance of the LORD, saying, 'Go, serve other gods.' 20 "Now then, do not let my blood fall to the ground away from the presence of the LORD; for the king of Israel has come out to search for a single flea, just as one hunts a partridge in the mountains." 21 Then Saul said, "I have sinned. Return, my son David, for I will not harm you again because my life was precious in your sight this day. Behold, I have played the fool and have committed a serious error." 22 David replied, "Behold the spear of the king! Now let one of the young men come over and take it. 23 "The LORD will repay each man for his righteousness and his faithfulness; for the LORD delivered you into my hand today, but I refused to stretch out my hand against the LORD'S anointed. 24 "Now behold, as your life was highly valued in my sight this day, so may my life be highly valued in the sight of the LORD, and may He deliver me from all distress." 25 Then Saul said to David, "Blessed are you, my son David; you will both accomplish much and surely prevail." So David went on his way, and Saul returned to his place.

The reading details how King Saul set out to locate and murder David, but God delivered Saul into David's hands who did not take advantage of the opportunity and kill him because of his respect for "the Lord's anointed" (v. 11). David seized the opportunity only so far as to gather evidence of his

innocence in harming Saul by taking his water pot and spear, which he then offered to return to him utilizing some long-range yelling across the canyon (v. 14). The whole affair resulted in Saul making a public confession of his sin by way of screaming a reply to David whose voice he recognized. Saul said, "*I have sinned. Return, my son David, for I will not harm you again because my life was precious in your sight this day. Behold, I have played the fool and have committed a serious error*" (v. 21).

This chronicle revealed some very important attributes of the godly King David. Although David was the king whom God had already ordained to replace Saul, David waited for God to resolve the issue of the dueling kingship. David respected the position of King and God's ordination of the office, and he left the deposition of the king in the hands of God rather than taking advantage of the many opportunities he had to remove Saul and step in as the rightful ruler and King of Israel. Additionally, King David was patient in waiting for God to formally induct him into the position of King.

In the context of the theocratic kingdom, the king of Israel served not only as an all-powerful civil ruler but also held a defacto religious position through their direct appointment by God. There is a clear distinction between the former kings of Israel in the rulers of our day because the religious and civil powers are more clearly separated. In terms of application, in our day, which of us hasn't seen the evil goings on of our civil rulers and wished that we could take advantage of some easy opportunity to remove these rulers from power, even if by recounting or a recall election? Which of us hasn't looked upon a religious leader with disgust because of abuse of their position and some moral failures? Yet, even today God has made it clear that we are called to respect those people who are placed in positions of authority while not approving their wickedness. Saint Paul said in Romans,

> *"1 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. 2 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" Romans 13:1-4).*

This reverence for authority, both of civil and religious leaders, is the primary lesson that we can take away from the reading. Second, we can learn from David and seek to become like him as he was

"a man after God's own heart" (Acts 13:22) who waited with great patience and virtue for God to work out His plan in his life.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

This week's second reading continues from First Corinthians last week which ended at verse 20. This portion of Chapter 15 picks up after Paul explains how our natural bodies are planted as seeds that then emerge as spiritual bodies after we die in the Lord (1 Corinthians 15: 36-44). Paul said about our natural bodies, "it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body" (v. 44). We pick up with the reading in verse 45.

Second Reading:

> *1 Corinthians 15:45-49 NAS95 45 So also it is written, "The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. 46 However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. 47 The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. 48 As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. 49 Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.*

The reading opened with Paul's quotation of Genesis, the creation account of how God created man. "Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7). The central idea in the reading was the continuation of the concept of the spiritual seed we mentioned in the introduction. The natural body is planted as a spiritual seed to accomplish God's work on the soil of the world. It is only after the seed dies in the course of the world that it then blossoms into a spiritual one and bears much fruit by bringing others to do so.

Paul's teaching in the reading closely parallels the Lord Jesus' Parable of the Grain of Wheat in John 12. "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). In essence, one must die to ourselves and allow God to work through ourselves to produce spiritual fruit. After the seed of our natural body dies on earth it then blossoms into the fruit of eternal life which comes through our faith in the Lord Jesus.

We saw in the first reading how David, in a way, died to himself when he didn't take advantage of a blatant opportunity to kill Saul, even though Saul sought to murder him. We know how Jesus during His first reign set aside the independent use of his divine power while looking forward to the day when He would receive His new body upon resurrection from the dead and the day in which He would return to the earth to rule and reign forever. In our lives, we too are called to die to ourselves and can do so knowing that our earthly bodies will be replaced with eternal ones in heaven with God. Through our faith in Jesus and through what we have learned in the Scriptures we can set aside our rights and privileges and die to our desires, even when it appears obvious to nonbelievers that we should claim our rights.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Today's Gospel reading continues from last week in Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount.

Gospel Reading:

> *Luke 6:27-38 NAS95 27 "But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29 Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. 30 Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. 31 Treat others the same way you want them to treat you. 32 If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount. 35 But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. 37 Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned. 38 Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure–pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return."*

Jesus' heavenly perspective challenged those who heard Him engage in many unheard-of practices

in a culture of Roman oppression and occupation. And yet even the common sense of that era would have ruled against doing good for one's enemies, the most obvious case being the Roman soldiers who forced the Jewish citizens to assist them in various ways or face prosecution. Imagine standing in a marketplace in Jerusalem minding your own business when you are approached by a soldier demanding you to carry his armor some distance to an adjacent city? Or one of them demanding a bribe from you to alleviate you of the burden. This was the culture in which Jesus presented this message.

Jesus challenged those listening to love their enemies (v. 27), bless those who cursed or mistreated them (v. 28), not retaliate against someone who struck them (v. 29), give to the needy (v. 29), and treat others the same way that they wanted to be treated, i.e. the Golden Rule. By following these prescriptions, they would receive a heavenly reward. Jesus went on to challenge those listening even further, extending even to their thought lives regarding not judging people in their minds. In closing, Jesus reminded the people that their blessings to other people will be repaid (v. 38), however not in exactly the way they may have imagined in an earthly sense. Rather, the repayment Jesus is describing is one of spiritual value, like we saw in the second reading with the sowing of an earthly body maturing into a spiritual one.

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount isn't as much a calling to behave better, to become a better person by pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps. Rather, he is challenging us to maximize our production of spiritual fruit by setting aside our earthly rights to things like responding to unfair criticism. Instead, He calls us to hold our words in the hope that our behavior may be so counter-cultural that the offending party will seek to find out what is so different about us. In this way, our quiet behavior may result in the worldly parties seeking the truth of the Gospel for themselves.

My brother-in-law once owned a breakfast/brunch-type restaurant in which he had invested a great deal of money in new equipment after taking on a large business loan. One day he went to the store to begin his work day only to find out that his key wouldn't work, he had been locked out of his restaurant after the locks had been changed. Come to find out the store was being taken over by the employees who thought that they had better ideas on how to run the operation. My Christian brother could have sued, but with the equipment being in a rented building and the landlord in cahoots with the new "owners," there was little possible value in the legal case. His attorney told him that he would likely win the case against his former employees, but then be unable to collect anything of any real value, and then the restaurant equipment would have to be destroyed to be removed. In the end and after much prayer, my brother-in-law chose to take the high road and allow the employees to reopen the restaurant without his interference.

How many of us could have followed Jesus' instruction in today's Sermon and acted in such a counter-cultural way as my brother-in-law?

Reflection Questions

1. Can you think of a time when your rights were violated, and you were rightfully allowed some form of retaliation but instead chose not to? What was the long-term impact of this upon the others in that case?

2. In the seed-bearing analogy, God has planted us in the world to die to ourselves so that we can produce spiritual fruit. What are some specific circumstances in which you have recently died to yourself, and how does knowing about Jesus' life and ministry help to deal with your feelings regarding these matters?