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

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 141: 10/05/2025



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we learn from Habakkuk how the people of God can persevere through suffering. In the second reading, we learn about the importance of using our spiritual gifts and spreading the true doctrine of God. In the Gospel lesson, we study three short lessons from Jesus on discipleship.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Habakkuk, like Amos, who we looked at last week, was a minor prophet, meaning his writings were shorter than those called the major prophets. The book's overall theme is how the people of God are to persist during their suffering by focusing on Him. He wrote a bit later than Amos, in the late seventh century BC (610 – 605 BC). This was after the Assyrians had taken the Northern Kingdom of Israel into captivity in 722 BC and just before the Southern Kingdom fell to the Babylonians in three waves beginning in 605 BC. The context is critical to understand because the Babylonian army

was soon to begin its conquest of Jerusalem, the holy city of the southern kingdom of Judah. The prophet cried out to God, "How long, O LORD, will I call for help, and You will not hear? I cry out to You, "Violence!" Yet You do not save" (Habakkuk 1:2). The Book records God's answer to his plea.

First Reading:

> *Habakkuk 1:2-3 NAS95 2 How long, O LORD, will I call for help, And You will not hear? I cry out to You, "Violence!" Yet You do not save. 3 Why do You make me see iniquity, And cause me to look on wickedness? Yes, destruction and violence are before me; Strife exists and contention arises.*
> *2:2-4 2 Then the LORD answered me and said, "Record the vision And inscribe it on tablets, That the one who reads it may run. 3 For the vision is yet for the appointed time; It hastens toward the goal and it will not fail. Though it tarries, wait for it; For it will certainly come, it will not delay. 4 Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; But the righteous will live by his faith."*

In chapter 2, verse 4 of Habakkuk, a very important principle for believers is stated. "Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; But the righteous will live by his faith." Other versions state this more clearly, such as the NIV, which reads, "See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright– but the righteous will live by his faith." Here we see that one key characteristic of a disciple of God is having faith in Him. Righteous living depends upon faith, but faith must have an object. If our faith is placed in our perceived goodness, the good works we do for the church, or anything other than God, we are "puffed up and our desires are not upright."

Here is an illustration of the importance of placing our faith in the correct object, God. If our mother asked us to go to the store and buy a gallon, she may be amazed if we returned with a gallon of cod liver oil when she desired skim milk! It is essential to have the correct object of faith.

Later in Habakkuk, we found the object of Habakkuk's faith. "The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights (Hab 3:19a, b NIV). Habakkuk's call was to the people of Israel to repent of their sin and return to God, the only true source of possible deliverance from their impending tragedy of the invasion by Babylon. That calling is just as appropriate today as it was to Israel. The righteous shall live by faith in God and not by faith in anything else, including money, success, or good works. For we are saved by grace through

faith and not of ourselves, it is a gift of God, not of works, lest any person should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

We are often unable to understand what God is up to when He allows trouble in our lives. Habakkuk's call to God regarding why He allowed such terrible hardships to happen to the people of God is as essential to his readers as it is to those in our day. When we suffer without seeing any obvious purpose or reason, we too ask God, Why? God's answer to us is, "*But the righteous will live by his faith*" (Habakkuk 2:4c). We are called to live by faith in God's plan, faith that God will work out all things for the good of those who love him (Romans 8:28).

When I wrote this, I was preparing to travel to the Detroit area to the funeral of a friend who died at a middle age. Over and over, I have asked what I could have done to have prevented his death. I pray that somehow God will use this experience to draw me and others closer to Him, and that I will have the boldness to share the love of Jesus Christ with others through this tragedy. The person who died has been on my BLL (big long list) for many years. I carry a huge burden with the passing of each on this list. What helps me get through it is the half dozen or so people formerly on the list who are now walking with God in faith. Through it all, the message of Habakkuk rings true: "the righteous will live by his faith."

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from the Book of Second Timothy. The theme of this section is Paul's calling to young Timothy to continue his bold service of the Lord despite tribulation. This is similar to what we learned from the first reading in Habakkuk.

Second Reading:

> *6 For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. 7 For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. 8 So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, 9 who has saved us and called us to a holy life– not because of anything we have done but because of his own*

> *purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, 10 but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. 11 And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. 12 That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day. 13 What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 1:6-13 NIV)*

Paul reminded Timothy to use the spiritual gifts God gave him during his ordination service (v. 6, "laying on of my hands"). He said in verse 13, "What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus." The caution to adhere to a pattern of sound teaching is a frequent admonition in the New Testament. Doctrine is essential, especially as we will see in today's Gospel lesson, because teaching false doctrine leads others away from the true faith in Jesus. Such a practice, knowingly or not, will lead to much greater condemnation for non-believers engaged in it. This leads us to the Gospel lesson for today from Saint Matthew.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Though today's Gospel lesson covered only chapter 17, verses 5 – 10, we will cover the entire section from verses 1 – 10 to take the context into account.

Gospel Reading:

> *1 JESUS SAID TO his disciples: "Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. 2 It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. 3 So watch yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. 4 If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him." 5 The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" 6 He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you. 7Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? 8 Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait*

> *on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? 9 Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? 10 So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.' " (Luke 17:1-10 NIV)*

This section of Luke contains teaching on discipleship. It consists of three short lessons and concludes with a parable. In the first lesson, we see Jesus' admonition about the seriousness of sin, especially for the person who leads others into sin. Jesus is saying that sin is severe enough that we should be willing to take drastic actions to overcome temptation. Any teenage boy can attest that girly magazines are a compelling attraction when hormones are raging. However, what Jesus is saying here is that the person who causes others to sin, in this case, the publisher of the pornographic magazine, will receive greater condemnation. The parallel section in Matthew adds this verse, "Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!" (Mt 18:7 NIV). Next, Jesus continues with a second lesson. Here we find that being willing to forgive is a second key characteristic of discipleship to Jesus. He said, "If your brother sins, rebuke him; if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him." That was a hard saying to His disciples because their answer was to ask Him to increase their faith. Forgiveness can be a hard thing to do. The call to forgiveness is evident in our Lord's Prayer, recited weekly in Mass, in Matthew Chapter 6.

Jesus' third lesson is about faith, which we found in Habakkuk's first reading. After Jesus spoke about the need to forgive, the disciples asked Jesus to increase their faith. Jesus said, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you." His use of a mustard seed is significant because it was one of the smallest seeds his disciples would have been familiar with. Jesus' statement meant that even the smallest faith was of great value. If we plant and water a seed, this tiny object may sprout regardless of how much faith we place in it. The seed comes from God, and His concern is how we use it. God doesn't call everyone a spiritual giant; He asks us to use our small faith for His purposes. As we saw in Habakkuk, the just shall live even by their tiny amount of faith, the size of a mustard seed. Even such a small faith may move mountains.

Next, Jesus moved on to a parable, as He had done throughout this section of Luke. This parable was about a master who posed a hypothetical question about his servant. "Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready, and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that, you may eat and drink'? Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told?" The message

was clear. As disciples of Jesus, we must serve without strings attached. Our obedience is not a matter of merit, but of responsive duty, though God does honor our Christian service. Although we will be rewarded in heaven for our obedience to God, He calls us to obey Him now, as a servant is called to obey his master. The servant will be rewarded, "after that you may eat and drink" (v. 8), but a servant's work is a duty that does not earn them exceptional merit with their master. God is a faithful Master who will honor us for our service. When we make "sacrifices" to obey God, we should not pat ourselves on the back or look for special paybacks from God. We merely live in light of the new life He has given us in Christ.

Something exciting happened at a church dinner some years back that helped me gain insights into these passages. Since our name fell in a particular range for this event, we were supposed to bring a large dessert. My wife baked up one of her most amazing treats, peach berry cobbler with freshly made whipped cream. I dropped her off at the church door, and she carried the still-hot cobbler downstairs and the whipped cream dish. When we got inside, the organizers told her to find a table with a dessert and place it there. Frankly, I was concerned that we would not get any of this lovely treat, but I began resigning myself to the fact that we would not be able to enjoy any delicious delicacy. My wife set out to find a table without dessert, but could not find one that already had one. Next, I told her to place the dessert on our table and get on with the dinner as I turned away to speak to someone behind me. As we were about to decide what to do, I suddenly heard a loud crash. As I turned around, I saw the delicious cobbler splattered all over the floor! I was shocked and stood there in disbelief for a minute as our hosts rushed around trying to figure out how to clean up the mess on the floor. I didn't have any cobbler that night!

As we went through the dinner and the following service, I reflected on my heart's intentions during this event. My wife's motives were pure; she wanted to bring the best dessert for whoever received it. Mine were not so pure; I intended to save some for myself all along. God evidently had other intentions by showing me a lesson in allowing the eventual disaster. Serve God with a pure heart, without strings attached, *and He will honor you*.

Reflection Questions

1. The mustard seed, though one of the smallest seeds, can, with proper soil and watering, sprout and grow into a large bush, whether or not we have faith that it will succeed. It's specially designed by God to do just that. Read Hebrews 12:2 and Ephesians 2:8-9 below.

> *Eph 2:8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith– and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God–not by works, so that no one can boast.*

> *Heb 12:2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Who provides the seed of faith for which you are called to sow to produce God's fruit in the Kingdom?

2. Refer to your answer above. How can your faith be improved, enlarged, or expanded, with the source of your faith determined? Considering its source, is it productive to feel guilty if we don't have "enough faith"? What would be a more appropriate response?