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 525 – 02-02-2025



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass Study Notes. This week we look at the Old Testament Prophet Malachi as well as the New Testament Book of Hebrews. We will look at the exciting provisions of the New Covenant. Then we move onto the continuing story of the early life of Jesus in the Gospel of Saint Luke.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Malachi Chapter 3. Malachi is the last of the Old Testament Prophets, and he wrote about the era just after the temple's restoration in Jerusalem. The story of the rebuilding of the temple of God and the re-establishment of the people of God of God after exile is chronicled in the Prophet Nehemiah, a Prophet contemporary with Malachi. Malachi also saw near-term and distant events "telescoped" together, like Isaiah who we discussed last week. As you read, see if you can determine the identity of the messenger referred to in the first verse.

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First Reading:

> *1 "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts. 2 "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. 3 And He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness. 4 Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD, as in the days of old and as in former years." (Malachi 3:1-4)*

Malachi said that God would send His messenger to prepare the way for God the Messiah, designated by "Me" in verse 1. In other words, Malachi said that God would send someone to announce the coming of the Messiah Jesus Christ. No human can stand before the Messiah, because He is the ultimate in holiness. God said that the Messiah would purify the Levitical Priesthood, in the same way that the dross was burned away during the refining process of gold and silver (v.3). The stated purpose of the refinement of the Priesthood was so that they could once again present sacrifices to the Lord (v.4). While this may seem distant to those of us reading who are not of the Levitical Priesthood, the New Testament informs us that all Christians are "a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). So, the Messiah has already begun this purifying work in the hearts of his followers, as we surrender ourselves to Him and allow Him to be Lord of our lives.

It's interesting to note that in the original language the word that was translated as "messenger" was "malak," meaning "angel or messenger," the root of the name of Malachi. Therefore, as a prophet, Malachi was a messenger of God. But, to whom was he referring as the messenger in verse 1? We know from the Gospel of Saint Matthew that the "messenger" (v.1a) was John the Baptist. Jesus said, "This is the one about whom it is written, 'BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU'" (Matthew 11:10). The coming of this messenger was also predicted by the Prophet Isaiah who said, "A voice is calling, 'Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God'" (Isaiah 40:3). John the Baptist, the greatest man that ever lived until that time (Matthew 11:11), had a very important mission. John's mission was to announce the coming of yet another messenger, the Lord Himself, spoken of by Malachi as the Messenger of the Covenant (Malachi 3:1). Jesus was the Messenger of the Covenant people we know as the Jews. The Messenger of the New Covenant, none other than Jesus Christ Himself, will as Malachi said, "sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness" (Malachi 3:3). What do we mean by the New Covenant, and by calling the Jews a "covenant people?" Let's explore those concepts below.

The Jews were a covenant people, meaning that God had sworn various covenants with them. There are five covenants in the Old Testament Bible. First, was the Noahic Covenant spoken of in Genesis Chapter 9 in which God promised never to destroy the earth again with a flood. The New Testament records that instead the earth will be renewed by fire (2 Peter 3:7). The second covenant was the Abrahamic Covenant from Genesis Chapter 12. In this God promised that Israel would be a great nation (Genesis 12:2), that they would be led to the Promised Land (v.1), and that through Israel the entire world would be blessed (v.3). These unconditional promises will be fulfilled through the Nation of Israel, somehow, in the future. The third covenant was the Mosaic Covenant through which God introduced the Law (Exodus 19). The promises of the Covenant were conditioned upon the people's obedience to the Law, something that only Jesus could fulfill. The fourth covenant was the Davidic Covenant in which God promised that David and his descendants would rule over the House of Israel forever. This covenant will be fulfilled through Jesus Christ, who is of David's kingly line of Judah. The last covenant of the Old Testament (and the entire Bible) was the New Covenant spoken of in Jeremiah 31. God promised in the New Covenant that He would forgive the sins of His people (Jeremiah 31:34b) and give them new hearts with a desire to follow Him (v.34). The New Covenant was ultimately fulfilled in the Person of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ gives all believers a new heart through sending His Holy Spirit to live inside us (John 7:38-39, 2 Corinthians 5:17).

We read in Hebrews Chapter 8, the same book we will look at in the second reading, that Jesus was the fulfillment of the New Covenant promises.

> *7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. 8 For finding fault with them, He says, "BEHOLD, DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL EFFECT A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH; 9 NOT LIKE THE COVENANT WHICH I MADE WITH THEIR FATHERS ON THE DAY WHEN I TOOK THEM BY THE HAND TO LEAD THEM OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT; FOR THEY DID NOT CONTINUE IN MY COVENANT, AND I DID NOT CARE FOR THEM, SAYS THE LORD. 10 "FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM ON THEIR HEARTS. AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. 11 AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH EVERYONE HIS FELLOW CITIZEN, AND EVERYONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, 'KNOW THE LORD,' FOR ALL WILL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST TO THE GREATEST OF THEM. 12 FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE." 13 When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear. (Hebrews 8:7-13)*

The life of Jesus is manifested in believers through the Person of the Holy Spirit Who indwells us at the moment of our spiritual birth (John 3:3). Paul said, "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus

from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you" (Romans 8:11). We celebrate our new life by being obedient to the things which Jesus calls us to accomplish. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from the Book of Hebrews, Chapter 2. As you read keep in mind the verses that we just read from Chapter 8, and ask yourself the question: how is Jesus able to come to our aid when *we* are tempted? *Note: The second reading included only verses 14 – 18, verses 11-13 were added to provide the necessary context).*

Second Reading:

> *11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, 12 saying, "I WILL PROCLAIM THY NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING THY PRAISE." 13 And again, "I WILL PUT MY TRUST IN HIM." And again, "BEHOLD, I AND THE CHILDREN WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN ME." 14 Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; 15 and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. 16 For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. 17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted. (Hebrews 2:11-18*)

God helps us, as believers in Jesus and descendants of Abraham (v.16) to resist temptation. Jesus knows about temptation, having suffered terribly in temptations that we cannot comprehend. "For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted" (v.18). Saint James told how temptation comes about. "14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death" (James 1:14-15). How does

God provide deliverance for us from temptation (Matthew 6:13)? Paul said, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it" (1Corinthians 10:13). God helps us to endure our temptation when we turn to Him *before* we yield to the sin (James 1:15a) and stand firm in His promises that we will be delivered. Knowing that Jesus is an empathetic high priest is an important component of being able to turn to Him in the midst of temptation. Since He has experienced temptation and has conquered it, we can ask Him for strength and wisdom to also resist and conquer. While this sense of victory may not happen overnight, we will steadily grow in our ability to receive His help in our times of need. In the meantime, we are growing in our relationship of trust with Jesus when we turn to Him and not to our own strength or willpower.

Here's an illustration about counting on the promises of God to deliver us from temptation. On certain days, very bad weather arose during the times that I wanted to fly my airplane. Since my airplane was a very well-equipped machine that possessed most of the bells and whistles including weather radar, it was fairly easy to launch into weather conditions that were overly challenging. I remember staring up at the overcast sky one day as the ragged clouds almost reached down to the tops of the trees at the airport from which I wanted to "depart," pun intended. I remember thinking of a promise that I had made to myself some years before. All I had to do was to be patient and wait and at some future date, the miserable gray sky would be replaced with a perfect blue (and safe) atmosphere in which I wouldn't kill myself (at least so easily). If I would just wait a few days, the very same patch of sky that held nothing but clouds and rain would one day soon hold beautiful clear sky and sunshine. All that I had to do to keep from getting in trouble in that miserable overcast weather was to keep remembering my promise. All we must do when we find ourselves in a position of temptation is to remember the promises of God. He will make the gray skies of temptation clear for us if we will stand on His promises and trust Him to deliver us.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson today is from Luke Chapter 2. This passage tells us about when Jesus was brought to the Temple to be dedicated to the LORD as a baby. As you read, make a list of all of the different people mentioned along with the roles.

Gospel Reading:

> *22 And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "EVERY firstborn MALE THAT OPENS THE WOMB SHALL BE CALLED HOLY TO THE LORD"), 24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, "A PAIR OF TURTLEDOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS." 25 And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, 28 then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, 29 "Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, According to Your word; 30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation, 31 which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, And the glory of Your people Israel." 33 And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him. 34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed– 35 and a sword will pierce even your own soul–to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." 36 And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers. 38 At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. 39 When they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth. 40 The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him (Luke 2:22-40).*

Joseph and Mary went to the temple to fulfill the requirements of the Law as specified in Leviticus Chapter 12. The requirements were as follows. After the circumcision on the eighth day (Leviticus 12:3) Mary was to wait thirty-three days, then present the Baby Jesus to the priests in the temple and make a sin offering. "When the days of her purification are completed, for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the doorway of the tent of meeting a one-year-old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering" (v.6). "But if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two young pigeons, the one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for her, and she will be clean" (v.8). Mary and Joseph fulfilled the requirements of the Law by making the offering to God through their intercessor, the priest in the temple.

After a prophetic silence of four hundred years, God revealed to Simeon and Anna the identity of the much-awaited Messiah. The identity of the Messiah was confirmed by two witnesses as was required

by Old Testament Law, per the principle in Deuteronomy 19:15. Simeon knew that the Messiah would appear during his lifetime and when He did appear, he made a prophecy about His ministry. Simeon revealed more about the New Covenant prophesied by Jeremiah, that the plan of salvation would be unfolded through Jesus to include the Gentiles (v. 31). He also said to Mary that "a sword would pierce her soul" and a general prophecy about how the Messiah would be received. He said, "This Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed." We know that this was indeed the case; many of Jesus' own people rejected Him. Jesus said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were **unwilling**" (Matthew 23:37, emphasis added). Though God was silent for four hundred years He spoke powerfully through the birth of the Messiah Jesus.

Looking back to our discussion on the covenants it's important to note that although Jesus' parents obeyed the Jewish Law, after Jesus' death and resurrection the Levitical priesthood was set aside. This provision in the New Covenant ushered in something that many may not have expected by the Old Testament Prophets – the era of the priesthood of all believers, which was mentioned earlier. Christ our High Priest has made one sacrifice for sin for all time (Hebrews 10:12), and there is no more sacrifice for sin that can be made (Hebrews 10:26). But as priests once offered other kinds of sacrifices in the temple, so it is clear from 1 Peter 2:5,9 that God has chosen Christians "to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." "But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). We play a vital role in representing God to the world by living lives that are consistent with His holiness.

While the Levitical priesthood was set aside and the New Covenant era of the priesthood of all believers was begun, this setting aside was only temporary. Paul explained this in the following verses from Romans.

> *For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery–so that you will not be wise in your own estimation–that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB." "THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS." From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, (Romans 11:25-30)*

We can rejoice that although God used the disobedience of the Jews to bring many Christians to trust in Jesus, He has not abandoned His plan for Israel. Paul said that in the end times, "all Israel will be saved" (v.26). We can also celebrate that God was patient with us, not wanting any of us to perish and all to come to the knowledge of everlasting life (2 Peter 3:9). Jeremiah prophesied that God would give us a new heart, something that Jesus explained to Nicodemus in John Chapter 3 as being born from above (John 3:3). Paul explained that this new birth came from believing that we are sinners (Romans 3:23), accepting that our due payment for sin was eternal separation from God to pay the debt we owe (Romans 6:23), and then placing our trust in Jesus as a free gift (Ephesians 2:8-9). Praise God for His eternal provision for us!

Reflection Questions

1. How can we lean upon the promises of God if we don't know the promises of God? Read the following verses and in your journal begin memorizing these so you have them in your mental toolkit.

Philippians 4:19 And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Matthew 11:28-29 Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Romans 8:37-39 No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

2. To continue understanding your role as a New Testament believer and the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, look up the following Scripture to see what your proper response is to

this high calling:

(Editor's Note: Reading this online make is easy because viewers can just mouse over the verses to read them.)

- 1 Peter 2:5-9
- 1 Peter 3:15
- Hebrews 13:9-17
- Ephesians 2:10
- Titus 2:11-14
- Romans 12:1-2
- 1 Cor. 6:9-12
- Rev. 1:6
- Rev. 22:3-4

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Talk to God about where you need His help prompted by the reading of any of the above passages.

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