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

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 2-8-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 2-8-2015. This week we open with the first reading from the Old Testament Book of Job where we see Job's cry to God about the futility and brevity of life. Although his ancient message is somber it provides us with tremendous wisdom in our day. Then we move to the second reading from First Corinthians and close with the Gospel lesson from Saint Mark that continues from last week.

The first reading is from the Book of Job that recorded events which happened during the Patriarchal Period (the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). This Book records a story about a man named Job who was a victim of an invisible spiritual battle with Satan. Job was a godly man that God has blessed with a large family as well as many material possessions (Job 1:1-3). At some point Satan approached God and told Him that if He removed these blessings from him that Job would curse Him. God allowed Satan's challenge, yet after his family and possessions were taken from him he still praised God (Job 1:20-11). Next, Satan approached God and told him that if his good health were taken away from him that this would cause him to curse God. God then allowed Satan to bring about "sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head" (Job 2:7). Even though Job's wife urged him to "curse God and die" (Job 2:7), Job persisted in his reverence of God and went about scraping his wounds with a potsherd (2:8). The next scenes alternate between Job's lament to God (Job 3), the false wisdom of his friends (Job 4 – 5), his response to his friends (Job 6), and then the section of today's reading in which he again cries out to God. Job's friend Eliphaz was the first to speak and incorrectly made the case that people who are innocent do not suffer. Job's response was to tell Eliphaz and the others gathered with him, "For the despairing man there should be kindness

from his friend; So that he does not forsake the fear of the Almighty" (Job 6:17). Second, he said, "My brothers have acted deceitfully like a wadi, Like the torrents of wadis which vanish" (6:17) and he continued in this same vain in the subsequent verses. Even during this time of terrible affliction Job affirmed the just nature of God, saying "But as for me, I would seek God, And I would place my cause before God; Who does great and unsearchable things, Wonders without number" (Job 5:8-9). We pick up in Chapter 7 with today's reading, noting the previously mentioned condition of Job's skin that appears in verse 5.

1 "Is not man forced to labor on earth, And are not his days like the days of a hired man? 2 As a slave who pants for the shade, And as a hired man who eagerly waits for his wages, 3 So am I allotted months of vanity, And nights of trouble are appointed me. 4 When I lie down I say, 'When shall I arise?' But the night continues, And I am continually tossing until dawn. 5 My flesh is clothed with worms and a crust of dirt, My skin hardens and runs. 6 My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, And come to an end without hope. 7 Remember that my life is but breath; My eye will not again see good." (Job 7:1-7)

Job lamented to God that his days were in vain, and no better than those of a bond servant (vv. 1 – 2). Even when he attempted to rest at night even this solstice was taken from him (v. 5), probably in part because of his painful sores (v. 5). The reading culminates with wisdom in verse 7 where Job observed that his "life is but breath" and because he had lost hope (v. 6) he felt that his "eye will not again see good" (v 7b). It is because of verses like this that this Book of the Bible is categorized as a Book of wisdom. Job is wise to understand that in the large scope of the world, his life is short and that when a person loses hope they have nothing good to look forward to. In reality Job should have hoped that God would resupply his wealth. If you read ahead you know how the story ends with God restoring to Job two times that of what he had before (Job 42:10), along with seven new sons and three daughters. The double portion of children were evidently granted to him because if you think about it the first portion of his family was already awaiting for Job to join them in heaven.

What does the reading mean to us today? First, we must recognize as did Job that our lives are but a vapor (James 4:14). We must make the most of our service to God regardless of our circumstances during the brief time that He has granted to us. Whether we receive physical blessings from God and regardless of our health, we are still called to glorify the Lord Jesus in our hearts. Second, there is a true, unseen spiritual battle that rages on around us. Saint Peter said, "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Saint Paul urged Christians to "Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11). Even though Job never knew the cause of his tumultuous trials, we can learn from this Book that when we experience trials they may arise from a spiritual source.

A third point is that we are to be on alert for the false doctrine presented by Eliphaz that the innocent do not suffer. The innocent most certainly do suffer, and this is to serve God's purposes.

Job, himself an example of an innocent man suffering, had a very humble spirit who even after he was afflicted he still maintained his integrity before God. In contrast, Job's friend Eliphaz sat with him and attempted to show his superiority over Job by proclaiming Job's guilt because he knew that somehow innocent people couldn't suffer. If the innocent cannot suffer, he mused, then Job must not be innocent! The best example of the innocent suffering is the Lord Jesus Himself. In general, all of humanity is far from innocent, because "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God "Romans 3:23). However, regardless of our perception of our own level of innocence, suffering is allowed by God as a supreme mystery in order to bring about His perfect will in our lives.

A forth point is that spiritual warfare can result in both physical illness as well as the manifestation of psychological illness and suffering. Although Job was not aware of either the cause of his physical loss or bodily affliction, both were from a spiritual cause – Satan himself. Finally, we are called to live humbly as servants and see ourselves as no better than common day laborers or bondservants in the ancient world. Again we see the example of the Lord Jesus who came not to be served but to serve (Mark 10:45).

The second reading is from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. The context is Paul's teaching on the calling for believers to follow his pattern of self-denial and service to the Lord. Paul is providing a defense of his ministry during which he mostly provided for his own means even though as a ministry worker he was due wages in this position (1 Corinthians 9:9). Paul paid his own way through his tent making business (Acts 18:3). "Tentmaking" is a term that has arisen since then which refers to a minister that makes a living off a different occupation while at the same time working as a minister without a salary from that position. *Note: We have included all of the intervening verses between verses 16 and 23 in order to provide the full meaning and context.*

16 For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. 17 For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me. 18 What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel. 19 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. 20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; 21 to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. 22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. 23 I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it. (1 Corinthians 9:16-23)

Paul said that the reward for his ministry wasn't money but the privilege of preaching the Gospel without financial support (v. 18). Paul said that he willfully set aside his right to be paid as a minister

and therefore became "enslaved" to this form of "tentmaking" ministry in order to remove any possible offence that anyone might have in him being paid (v. 19). Second, Paul forced himself to confirm to the Jewish customs within biblical limits, without being bound to the Law (vv. 19 – 21). He became as a Jew to win the Jews, and continued this principle by becoming as a weak person to win the weak person (v. 22).

If we look back and compare these passages with what we learned from the first reading, Paul had a godly attitude towards winning others to the Lord Jesus Christ, much in the same way that Job had a humble way of responding to his friends as well as to God during his affliction. Had Job's friends acted to become weak in order to win the weak, they would have been commended by God instead of cursed (Job 42:7).

The Gospel lesson is from Mark Chapter one which continues from last week. The context is Jesus teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum, a fishing village on the north side of the Sea of Galilee, and the home of Saint Peter.

29 And immediately after they came out of the synagogue, they came into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. 30 Now Simon's mother-in-law was lying sick with a fever; and immediately they spoke to Jesus about her. 31 And He came to her and raised her up, taking her by the hand, and the fever left her, and she waited on them. 32 When evening came, after the sun had set, they began bringing to Him all who were ill and those who were demon-possessed. 33 And the whole city had gathered at the door. 34 And He healed many who were ill with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He was not permitting the demons to speak, because they knew who He was. 35 In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there. 36 Simon and his companions searched for Him; 37 they found Him, and said to Him, "Everyone is looking for You." 38 He said to them, "Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for." 39 And He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out the demons. (Mark 1:29-39)

Several points arise from the text. First, even this early on in His earthly ministry the Lord Jesus has the power to heal the sick. His healing of Peter's mother was in fact so complete that upon her being raised up from her sick bed she immediately began to serve them (v. 31). Jesus fame became evident because after the Sabbath day had concluded the people brought those sick or possessed by demons to be healed even at night (v. 33 – 34). This continued throughout the night and Peter's home became a regular hospital for those afflicted both physically as well as spiritually. Second, in a related point, Jesus' ministry was the occasion of an intense spiritual war that brought about both spiritual suffering and outright demonization of the people. The text doesn't say whether the cause of Peter's mom's affliction was spiritual, but regardless the outcome of Jesus' healing of her was for the glory of God. This is the same theme that we saw in the first reading with God allowing Job's suffering for the ultimate glory of Himself. This was also the case in the second reading with Paul

suffering in being a tentmaker working without financial support for his ministry in order to remove any stumbling stones in the way of potential believers. In both cases God allowed suffering for the purpose of expressing His glory.

A final point in the reading is Jesus' conscious and intentional prayer ministry before God. Even after spending much of the night healing people in the vicinity of Peter's home, early in the morning while it was still dark Jesus set out to find an isolated place at which to pray (v. 35). Jesus made it a habit throughout His ministry to seek an isolated place at which to pray. By means of application, if Jesus felt that prayer was at least as important of a ministry as was his divine healing, how much more important should prayer be in our lives as a source or our own divine power in our lives and for the intercession of others?

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. What is one point that you can take away from your study this week? We suggest starting next week with a conscious effort to remember that this world is under the control of dark, spiritual forces until it is delivered back into the hands of Jesus as His Second Coming. We are to "Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11). Putting on the armor of God means a variety of things, but foremost it is both knowing and holding to the promises of God that we find in the Bible. One such promise is that "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). With what are you being tempted?

2. In the second reading we read that Paul said, "21 to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. 22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. 23 I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it" (1 Corinthians 9:21-23). Think about the application of this verse in your own life and complete the sentence below.

I will become as _____ in order that I may win _____ to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/020815.cfm

First Reading JB 7:1-4, 6-7

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Second Reading 1 COR 9:16-19, 22-23

Gospel Reading MK 1:29-39

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 2-1-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 2-1-2015. This week we open with the first reading from the Book of Deuteronomy in which we study a prophecy about the coming Messiah that was fulfilled by Jesus Christ. Then we move to the second reading from First Corinthians where we study Saint Paul's teaching on marriage of Christians. Finally, we return to the Book of Mark for the Gospel lesson where we see Jesus heal a demon-possessed man.

The first reading is from the Book of Deuteronomy. At this point in history, the people of God (the Hebrews) were entering the Promised Land after 400 years of slavery in Egypt. They were in need of structure and direction, so that their new life in the Promised Land would be fruitful and safe. It had

been many generations since this people group had been able to make their own decisions and govern themselves. Therefore, God gave them a strong leader called Moses and some thorough instructions, recorded here in the book of Deuteronomy. This Book primarily records the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai. There are several big ideas behind God's giving of the Law. First, the Law established a new covenant with the Hebrew people called the Mosaic Covenant. This Covenant between God and the Hebrew people included promises that were conditional in nature. The Mosaic Covenant consisted of ordinances which included moral laws, civil laws, and ceremonial laws for God's chosen people, the Jews. The Law also expanded the already existing promises granted by God in the Abrahamic Covenant into a new covenant referred to as the Palestinian Covenant. Although the promises made in this Covenant were unconditional, the Jewish people will not fully obtain them until the Lord Jesus returns to rule and reign on the earth. A second aspect of God's giving of the Law provided a means for God to hold people judicially accountable when they break the law. Saint Paul explained this in Romans Chapter 4 by saying, "when there is no law there is no transgression" (Romans 4:15). Finally, since Moses was himself a prophet, the Law also included prophecy, as we will read about in the first reading as follows below. *Note: We have included the last two verses in Chapter 18 that were omitted from the reading in order to provide the full meaning and context.*

15 "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him. 16 This is according to all that you asked of the LORD your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, or I will die.' 17 The LORD said to me, 'They have spoken well. 18 I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. 19 It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him. 20 But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.' 21 "You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?' 22 "When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him." (Deuteronomy 18:15-22)

As the Hebrew people were on the brink of newfound freedoms, this passage guided them so that they would discerning of those who claimed to speak for God. The reading pointed out several things. First, God promised to Moses that He would raise up a Prophet like himself (v. 17) and provided stern words about the importance of listening to the future Prophet. God warned that there is accountability for failing to listen to the true Prophet (v. 10 "require it of him"). Second, in verse 21 God also provided a test for any person that claimed to be a prophet. If a person claims to be a prophet, they must not speak on behalf of a false god and whatever they say must come true. If the self-proclaimed prophet fails either of these two tests, he must be put to death.

The Old Testament is full of prophecies from God-ordained prophets who spoke on behalf of God and

called people back to their covenant relationship with God. We know from the New Testament that the final Prophet whom Moses predicted in verse 15 was none other than Jesus Christ Himself. The proof for this fact is found in three places in the New Testament, once in the Gospel of John and twice in the Book of Acts. Nathaniel said in John's Gospel, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote–Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (John 1:45). Peter quoted Deuteronomy 18:15 in Acts 3:22, and Stephen in his famous speech he made just before being martyred said about Jesus, "This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, 'GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN" (Acts 7:37).

Let's discuss briefly the importance of recognizing false prophets in our own day through the application of the prophetic test given in Deuteronomy 18. First, the New Testament authors warned about the coming of false prophets. John said, "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). 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). If false prophets will abound, how are we to respond to these false prophets? We have a story in Acts 17 that illustrates the answer to this question. It says: "Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:11).

Paul was so bold in another letter as to say that even if he came back to them and changed the message of the Gospel or they had a special appearance from an angel, not even that should persuade them from the sure foundation that was already laid. He said, "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!" (Galatians 1:8-9).Therefore, our response is very clear. We must be diligent to study God's Word so that we can test what people are saying and discern whether they are a true prophet (speaking the Word of God) or whether they are a false prophet (speaking presumptuously). These are strong words, but as we study God's Word we will be able to reject false teaching when we encounter it.

The second reading is from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. The context is Paul's teaching on the value of a person's singleness during this period in the church when it was undergoing explosive growth and at the same time, persecution – especially from the Jews. These verses have often been used to elevate singleness over marriage. But as you understand the context of unbearable famine and persecution for the church, we see that Paul was putting a temporary moratorium on weddings, in order to help them endure the unusual circumstances that these believers were facing. *Note: Verses 36 – 38 were included in order to provide the full meaning and context.*

32 But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; 33 but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, 34 and his interests are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. 35 This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord. 36 But if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin daughter, if she is past her youth, and if it must be so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let her marry. 37 But he who stands firm in his heart, being under no constraint, but has authority over his own will, and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin daughter, he will do well. 38 So then both he who gives his own virgin daughter in marriage does well, and he who does not give her in marriage will do better. (1 Corinthians 7:32-38)

The fact that the Old Testament and other places in the New Testament affirm the beauty and value of marriage needs to give perspective to the interpretation of this passage. For example, Paul recommended that young widows remarry (1 Timothy 5:11-15) and Jesus Himself affirmed the Old Testament teaching that a man shall leave his father and mother to be united to his wife (Matthew 19:5). In the present crisis (mentioned in 1 Cor. 7:26), Paul was giving them apostolic teaching that applied wisdom to their dire situation. First, Paul said that if a person is single they can be wholly dedicated to the service of the Lord, whereas a married person is also concerned with the affairs of their mate and family (vv. 32). In times of persecution and famine, it is much easier to be single than married. The simplicity of life when one is in survival mode is complicated when a spouse and children are brought into the picture and their vulnerabilities can be exploited by persecutors. Second, he said that if a person desired to marry that there was nothing wrong with their desire (v. 35). What he was saying was that at this time in the church it was strongly advantageous for a person engaging in ministry to remain single, like he was. This is the path that Jesus and others in the New Testament chose, including Saint Paul. Finally, Paul said that fathers should not unduly guard their daughters in such a way as to prevent them from fulfilling their desires to marry (vv. 36 – 38). During that cultural context, the father's approval of the marriage meant everything. This is of course still the case in many cultures in the world.

What does this mean for today? Since the rest of the counsel of Scripture affirms the sanctity of marriage, we must not look at marriage as a better or worse state of affairs. There are advantages and disadvantages to both singleness and marriage. If you are single, you currently have the gift of singleness (1 Cor. 7:7). If you are married, you have the gift of marriage. Will you let God use either state of affairs to further His work in your life?

The Gospel lesson is from Mark Chapter one which continues from last week.

21 They went into Capernaum; and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and began to teach. 22 They were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having

authority, and not as the scribes. 23 Just then there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, 24 saying, "What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are–the Holy One of God!" 25 And Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" 26 Throwing him into convulsions, the unclean spirit cried out with a loud voice and came out of him. 27 They were all amazed, so that they debated among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him." 28 Immediately the news about Him spread everywhere into all the surrounding district of Galilee. (Mark 1:21-28)

Several points arise from the text. First, early on in His ministry Jesus is widely accepted in the synagogue in Capernaum as a rabbi, or teacher. The text says, "He entered the synagogue and began to teach. They were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (vv. 21b – 22). This is an extremely important point because later on when the religious leaders began contesting His teaching they pointed out that He was just a carpenter from Nazareth. They said, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?" And they took offense at Him" (Mark 6:3). This hearkens us back to the passage from Deuteronomy, which gave a prophecy about a great Prophet and criteria for discerning whether someone was speaking on behalf of God. Jesus passed the tests (and then some), but the religious leaders failed to hold up their end of the bargain. They refused to listen to the words of the Prophet and will have to stand to give an account for their rejection of God's Messiah. Jesus spoke with authority because He was The Authority!

A second important point from the text is what the demonic spirit within the man in the synagogue said about Jesus. The demon recognized Jesus as being from Nazareth and the "Holy One of God" meaning Messiah (v. 24). Although the Jewish leaders rejected Jesus as Messiah, the demonic spirit was compelled to testify as to His identity. One day, "every knee will bow and tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father" (Philippians 2:10-11). Finally, God used the testimony of the demonic spirit in order to further the spread of the Gospel (vv. 27 – 28). Each one of us will have to decide how to respond to the authority of Jesus. Will we reject His authority or surrender to it?

As believers, we too can speak with the authority of God, following Jesus' example and being filled with His Words. Anytime we recite Scripture we possess the authority of God and have power within the range allowed by God's sovereignty to unset spiritual darkness. Keep this in mind the next time you encounter spiritual darkness including false teaching. You can apply the test for a true prophet that we learned about from Deuteronomy, as well as speak the truth from the words of Scripture into confusing and dark issues. Although we may not have all of the well-reasoned answers to spiritual skeptics, if we know the Word of God we can respond with God's authority simply by applying the truth of Scripture to each encounter.

This week one of my relatives is being forced to take a hard stand at her school. Her coach has decided to get around the rules regarding the frequency of athletic practice allowed for this

particular conference by scheduling "open gym" periods with the team. In theory, these events are optional but in reality, any player missing one of the open gym periods would be in jeopardy of harming their standing on the team. This particular team player has decided to abide by the rule and miss this informal practice session in order to satisfy the calling that God has placed upon her heart to be obedient to Him. Although our study of the Word of God can sometimes be rather abstract in terms of application in our daily lives, in this case it became clear to this person from God's teaching that they needed to take a stand. Is there anything in the Bible study lesson this week that caused a "prick in your heart" about which you need to take a stand for God? In what areas in your life have you been exposed to false teachings and need to exclaim that these sources are accursed?

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Think about some of the concepts covered in this week's Bible reading:

- Being discerning about who I listen to and rejecting false teaching
- Being obedient to true teaching (that lines up with Scripture)
- Being wise about how I think about marriage and singleness
- Surrendering to Jesus' authority
- Standing up to misuse of authority with Scripture as my authority

Which of the above concepts do you need help in? Talk to God about how you would like for Him to be at work in this area.

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/020115.cfm

First Reading DT 18:15-20

Second Reading 1 COR 7:32-35

Gospel Reading MK 1:21-28

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Paedru's Testimony



If anyone hears my tiny voice amongst the massive Information Blob in the internet . You have come to the right place to hear about God's great saving power.

Where my seeking heart poured out my voice and reached the heavens and the heavenly father has responded. Yes,,I see Life differently now..

LIFE is now a leisure lake for me to swim in; as my Life depends entirely on him – The father almighty.

> Let's take A little dip into faith.

I was in the kitchen cutting vegetables ..helping my mother in preparing breakfast and all my thoughts were chained in one direction – How do I do it ?? .. There was a massive task in front of me…Seeing LIFE for the first time at the closest where the onus for everything was directly on me and my brother.

Being a Christian I somehow had that shallow faith that the LORD will make it happen. But being a person who works in the corporate I just needed a Concrete plan. I believe the word JUST is over exaggerated in my previous statement considering all the hardships we had been through in the year

2013 & 2014 .

It seemed as if I had to stand and deliver in LIFE and nothing short of that was acceptable .. as one step short would mean like crashing down..

It was a perfect situation of man v/s Tide.

I will tell you a little about what the years were :

The Lord took my father in December 2013.I just could not comprehend, did not know how to react as I was caught up in my own world of working hard and became thick skinned as all my thoughts before that fateful day was about going abroad and advancing in career. As a result I really could not react to my father's death.. I was there but there was little I could do to save my father. Please don't get me wrong.. I ensured dad was in hospital and got treatment with all my strength but I did not take up his health issue as a top priority when there was time some months before ..thinking that he was recovering and God will take care of him without putting in my full efforts ..

Then what ensured after that was Chaos/confusion and more confusion to a point that Bad days had no end.

My brother being more compassionate and caring than I am took good care of my father.. Since he had taken care of my father before shifting to Chennai for a job..I was not so conscious about my father's degrading heath and eventually God took him from suffering into his own hands..

I felt bad for many things and eventually hated myself..

1. Why did I not do what I had to do as a son and take care of my father.

2. My father trusted me so much that at before his passing away he said that he had no worries of me and I could take care of myself in LIFE. At that point I had no clue of what was to come shortly afterwards….

3. After my dad went to heaven I continued working with zeal in the JOB..although not happily, but I put efforts again in work…I was selfish I think ; Mad…and really went on in with the demands of LIFE…

4. Even then, thoughts came about progressing in LIFE about a career jump etc…rather I should have dropped all worldly plans and just tried to move slowly in LIFE.

5. Many tasks came into my hands as my brother was caught up in Chennai and I had to handle it.

My Mom had to undergo Cataract surgery, She had developed high Blood pressure, She had to undergo Physiotherapy shortly afterwards , we had to do some transactions involving huge amount

amongst all the emotional turmoil , one family friend cheated us of a huge amount of rupees, my mother was emotionally affected by her own brother's behavior. He lived just a stone's walk from our house but he discouraged my mother from going to their house when I was at work and when she was alone during the day by not behaving in a consoling manner. Apart from this my brother got a job back in Mumbai but one day before coming to Mumbai he met with a Bike accident and was saved by God's grace. My mother's eye on which the cataract surgery was done was accidently injured. My knee was dislocated, Meanwhile we got news that some villagers had occupied two of our Lands. All of this happened when my father had dreamt that in next few months we will be going to Native place to settle down..So even his dreams were not materialized. And the last we missed our flight to go to native place from Mumbai on our dad's 1st year anniversary … And to add a final touch I almost lost my Job as I was released from a project in which I was working.

I was furious at the Lord. And even abused him many times. (Forgive me Lord)

The reason being…I had trusted him before my dad passed away .. Let's pitch back to a few months before my dad passed away as to why I trusted him and left his health completely into God's hands.

The mornings used to be happy and holy. I used to sleep till about 6:30 am after coming late at night and working hard. But my mom and dad used to wake up at about 5:30am go for morning walk .. come back ..immediately turn on a Channel in which God's preachings were aired. There used to be Godly music played in the channel ..I could almost everyday see my mom and dad reading the bible together. I used to happily leave the house to work as I could see both of them happy. I was contented.

I knew there was a humongous task in front of my dad as he had planned in settling down at native place. But I was confident that everything that seemed impossible like me changing my Job location and adjusting to a new environment will be possible by God's love on us. He would do it for us.

But everything crashed.. God changed the plans.

Now what…

I became a pessimistic about everything. I wanted to hate everything and everyone.. People who mattered to us before started behaving weirdly and selfishly and used to jeer and mock as if we were now totally destroyed. Some were even happy that such thing happened to my mother.

I was reluctant to do many things as task after task after task after task was burdened on me…I was emotionally burdened .. physically burdened to take care of mother, do many household tasks.. handle my Job(I really did not like to work but I had to do that ..)Somehow I was so over exhausted that occasionally I used to feel a slight pain on the left side ..like a physical piercing pain in my heart.. But did not have time to go to doctor as I was afraid it may reveal something severe medically and give additional burden.

I had to stand up..which I decide to do and eventually did.. But where is the time to mourn for the loss of my father?…I really did not have time..I had to put every iota of my thoughts into coming out of this mess .That is , I had to solve the practicalities of LIFE like..getting my mother treated….settling down in native place..getting married and see LIFE a few years ahead and plan accordingly.

In short I had no time for an emotional outburst which I really want to since I want to cry out and feel…I just didn't want to get over it….I really want my father back.. I lost him!!! Now only one practical option remains.. to see him in heaven when I am gone.(I personally don't like it since I want to see him happy in his retired LIFE).I want him here on earth with me..

Coming back to reality.. Somehow a year passed ..GoD worked his miracles through these tough and rough times.. Firstly My mother got a bit emotionally stable. One of our relatives stood up with us though this tough phase and by Gods grace he is helping us in many ways (he too is a strict catholic like us..God bless him)..and I almost lost my Job. Now how is that good??

I feel it is good because it was that Job that caused me to give priority to career..maybe I could have been more diligent in treating my dad.

I did take care of my dad in many ways but every doctor we went to could not help my father with all the side effects that he was experiencing.. May be it was Gods plan.

Now as of January 2015 I am writing this testimony to you wherein I am losing my Job and at this rate if I were to stay without a software project in my company, I will be eventually asked to leave the company. This is the Current status.

But we'll see how God changes it..

Let's backtrack to the scene of my narration where I was in the kitchen cutting vegetables……

I am thinking of the near future and pacifying myself ..

A thought says: It will become all right !!!

But suddenly another contradicting thought comes to my mind: But how to do it? What if things go wrong in Chennai (My Native place where my father wanted to settle down)….I have heard in Chennai robbers are ruthless in stealing.. It is not safe for my mother.

Another thought says: We have time but we need a plan..

Another thought says: We have enough material possessions it's just a matters of executing it ,.

Another thought says: Should I buy a house in Chennai.. But I don't have enough money for that..

Another thought says: How is LIFE going to be…?

And in this manner I am getting discouraged and confused all along the way**..(Devil wants us to be remain in fear and loose hope)**

Suddenly out of this confusion. I hear a voice in my conscience in a comforting and the most assuring manner : My Son! You just go. I will lead the way..(I have not given the exact words as I was overjoyed to an extends that I did not register them in my memory).It was the most assuring voice I heard and I can bet that my brain can't thing postives like this when I am already into some serious thinking.. Yes..It was God's voice..

…

And immediately my brain was able to pick up the waves and a scene of Moses leading the children of Egypt under the clear open light blue skies was created in my mid…My brain immediately thought ..Moses was too given a tough task.. He had an entire army to take out.. Did not know where to go ..He could easily have been worried like I was.. But he had immense and extreme confidence in the LORD that was unshakable come what may…The task and troubles are nothing in front of the LORD..

I became very relieved and happy and light hearted and cheerful that morning that I felt so light that I immediately started praying and praising the Lord..I can't describe it. You got to feel it to know it.

*All that I remember that I was quiet at that time and God heard my fears and worries. Remember God talks when you are quiet.. That is why morning time is the right time to pray.. since you are fresh from bed and you mind is thoughtless.

I say to you my dear friend ..the Bible is a living word .. When you read it; it might seem like a History text book.. like recounting incidents that happened long long ago..

But remember ,it is relevant and the words and quotes that the LORD used to help his children (Moses,Job,….)out of harms way in the bible will be used to speak to you so that you know when the LORD is speaking to you.. **In my case God told the words of leading the way for me and taking complete ownership of my problems.**

When the Lord speaks you will feel as if you are comforted. If any of you reading this happens to be a practical and scientific thinker, you will be tempted to think that the brain is releasing some Alpha waves which is motivating you.. It is not that it- It is stronger than those thoughts..

Loose yourself when that happens.. Don't think ; just let the emotions flow.. Cause when God

touches you by the power of the holy spirit sometime people get the gift of tongues..or the gift of tears…Some begin to cry, some become Overjoyed.. I became overjoyed ..

This is THE PROMISE that the Lord gave only to you..

This is the first level.. where you have prayed to him and he has listened your prayers and he also has expressed it for you..

The second level is FAITH… **This is what counts**…(And for the Non-believers this is the differentiating point between practical thinking and miracles happening.. Beyond this point all practical thought and efforts spend in any direction is useless and a mere waste)

Yes FAITH..is what takes you there ..like where Moses reached to the safest and farthest point where pharaoh's men could not reach .

What is FAITH then ?? FAITH is where no logic applies.. If you try to apply logic then you just lost the charm of it. The gift that was your way won't come to you…It is revoked..(Pls correct me if I am wrong about the revoking part since I speak from my experience)..

I believe faith is what convinces God that you wholeheartedly trust him..

I will give you example of how to apply faith in the below narration.

Faith is something you need to **apply** ..even if you get distracted and are not convinced.

I have highlighted the word **Apply** since Faith means to apply God's love and promise without trusting your instincts and logic.

Just do what the Lord commands no interruption and interpretation from your side is expected !!!

In my case what was God's promise? .. It was that he will lead the way..

Coming back to the same day in the morning…

I am overjoyed now .. I went to office and spent the day reading through mails and I got information that there is a Walkin Interview that's happening on the very next day i.e a Saturday.

Usually I had bad experiences in Walkin interviews. I have attended numerous of walkins..Failed badly and strongly believed I need someone to set me up in the company to get selected.. So it was a very faint opportunity of getting selected. But I need that job badly as I was about to loose my job.

Anyways I walked into the interview venue on the next day and God begins to give me

symptoms of his presence . – I was confident that morning. I checked in as candidate number 12 into the office which is one of my lucky numbers. I was called first to give my interview. The person taking my interview did not seem so professional or intimidating nor did he seem very learned or did he seem negative. He seemed very normal in normal clothes and was average looking by appearance which indeed boosted my confidence and I gave the best shot in God's given strength.

Second round also went well that the interviewer almost told me I was selected. I walked out of the venue happy and contended.

Two days passed no sign of a call or confirmation that I am selected. I am waiting patiently with confidence in the Lord's promise ..In our two day's morning prayers we had this intention of JOB for me .

Nothing happened yet. So I started thinking hard trying to get any way to find if I am in the job or not. I suddenly remembered a colleague from my office also had attended the interview on Saturday and she too had cleared two rounds. So I started to think if I should ask her if she got any confirmation about the job for her. I was so desperate

Immediately I got a message from God in my mind. **Trust the LORD.**

This meant I should not ask her for any clue or try any logical ways to know about the Job. Which will imply that I am not trusting the Lord and trying to desperately get the information.

So I went to office as usual. Again the devil strikes back and I went to meet her and to ask her.

Before I was to talk to her again this message clearly is played in my mind repeatedly to trust God. So confidently I walked back and never asked her and waited patiently in Lord's promise.

.On the third day too we lit candles and prayed specially for this intention. Within two hours before I was to leave for job that day I got a mail from the company asking me to submit document to process the JOB offer. (Praise the LORD!!!)

Today as I write this testimony I am waiting to get the final Job Offer letter yet. But I am trusting the Lord it will happen and I am least worried now.

Coming back to other problems to solve for my family.. Now I believe God has stepped into our Lives. He will take over.. I whole heartedly believe that too. And I KNOW he will time to time give me messages in my conscience to take the right decisions and steps provided I keep my soul clean.

I am writing this as I still have one favor to ask God.. that he show me a VISION of my dad in heaven.. After that in LIFE I will not ask anything no more.. Praise be to God .

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I am writing this testimony so that the LORD will speak to **YOU** somehow.. You just have to be tuned in and raise your troubles unto him..He chooses channels to talk to you depending upon your personality and strength of your belief:

a. For people like me , who like to be time and again reminded of God's love.. and who wants to convince myself that God really exists ..God uses Your conscience to talk to you..
b. For people that still don't' know about Jesus or even heard about him.. he will appear to him .
c. For people who are innocent he will protect them.

My advice- Stay tuned always as God constantly speaks to you through your conscience everywhere you go and in everything that you do.

Praise be to GOD. Praise be to Jesus.

What is Salvation?



Next Steps (Continued):

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

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

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

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

The next things that we need to discuss are the attributes of God. Many people have a personal view of God which may or may not be correct. They may be absolutely wrong in their view. Or their god may not really be God at all. For years my god was myself, I sought pleasure as my source of personal fulfillment. Here is what God says about Himself in His book, the Bible.

(1) God is a Holy God

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

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

(2) God is a God of Justice

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(3) God is a God of Love

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

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

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

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

(4) God is a God of Mercy

The condition that we must meet in order to go to Heaven is found in the book of Romans, and it

reveals God's attribute of mercy. The Book of Romans was written by the apostle Paul to Gentiles (non-Jewish people) like myself:

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

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

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

Hell = No Hope

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

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

The Bible says:

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

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

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 1-25-2015

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

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

1 Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you." 3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days' walk. 4 Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown." 5 Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. 6 When the word

reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes. 7 He issued a proclamation and it said, "In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. 8 But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. 9 Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish." 10 When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it. (Jonah 3:1-10)

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

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

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

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

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

how now shall we live?

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

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

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

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

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

In my life, I have had to reconsider my beliefs regarding who would or would not come to believe in Jesus Christ. I worked in a state prison where I saw convicted criminals give their heart to the Lord that provoked deep change in their lives. Someone who would have been manipulative and self-seeking became trustworthy and sacrificial. One man in particular was a practicing Muslim and had even adopted a Muslim name. Over the years, his heart became softened and one day another of the professors led him to express faith in the Lord Jesus. This is just one example of people who are

often marginalized by the Christian society thinking that they will never come to the Lord. How we treat people is a reflection of God's heart for them and that He wants all men to come to the knowledge of everlasting life in Him (2 Peter 3:9).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

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

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

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/012515.cfm

First Reading JON 3:1-5, 10

Second Reading 1 COR 7:29-31

Gospel Reading MK 1:14-20

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 1-18-2015



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

The first reading is from the Book of First Samuel. The context is the commissioning of the Prophet Samuel in the era of the period known as the Judges. This was the period of time when the history of Israel followed a pattern of rising and falling. God would allow His people to fall into the hands of their enemies, next the people would repent and God would raise up a deliverer. After some time in freedom, the people would begin becoming complacent again and the cycle would repeat. This was also the era in which the people "did what was right in their own eyes" (Judges 21:25) versus following the commandments of the Lord. *Note: Many verses were omitted in the reading. Since this is a more comprehensive study of the Scriptures we have included all of the verses between verses 1 and 19.*

1 Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD before Eli. And word from the LORD was rare in those days, visions were infrequent. 2 It happened at that time as Eli was lying down in his place (now his eyesight had begun to grow dim and he could not see well), 3 and the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD where the ark of God was, 4

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

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

Some important lessons that we learn from this passage include:

- God will fulfill His promises, whether they be blessings or curses. If this is the case, a point of application is to be aware of God's promises and live in light of these realities.
- God spoke through the prophets to disclose ultimate reality for those of us who are finite.

While this might have felt harsh at the time, it was actually for humankind's good to know the Truth. Some of the prophetic utterances were divinely inspired to became part of our Holy Scriptures (1 Peter 1:21). These Truths can be heeded or rejected while we are here on earth. But God discloses these ultimate things so that we might live as wise people here and now.

- Because we can trust God's Word, it's important for us to study in light of the truth He has revealed to us. We see this in Samuel's life as he learned to listen and even to do difficult things in order to follow God's voice.

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

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

There are three overarching principles that Paul uses to help Christians be discerning about the choices that we make. First, when contemplating one's freedom in Christ, we must consider whether this helps or hinders our relationship with God (v. 12). Paul said that all things are permissible for him but not all things are beneficial (v. 12). The second main point is that when we are united in Christ we are one with Him in Spirit; therefore, when we sin we drag Him into any sinful patterns that we engage in (v. 17). This should help us to consider how our choices affect Christ, not just ourselves. The third overarching principle to help us be discerning in our freedom is the fact that our bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit; therefore we are to honor God with our bodies (19-20). All

of these points put together provide a very strong deterrent when we are attempted to go back into immoral and sinful patterns. We are not only encouraged to resist sexual immorality but Paul actually calls us to flee from it.

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

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

The Gospel reading is from John Chapter 1. The context is Jesus' gathering of His disciples after His baptism by John the Baptist. From this passage, we see that John the Baptist and his disciples recognized Jesus' identity as Messiah early on in His ministry.

35 Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, 36 and he looked at Jesus as He

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

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

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

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

(refer to the next page)

Truth that Counteracts Lies:

"The list below itemizes in first-person language who you really are in Christ. These are some of the scriptural traits which reflect who you became at spiritual birth. You can't earn them or buy them any more than a person born in the United States can earn or buy the rights and freedoms enjoyed as an American citizen. They are guaranteed to the person by the Constitution simply because he or

she was born in the United States. Similarly, these traits are guaranteed to you by the Word of God simply because you were born into God's holy nation by faith in Christ." (Source: Anderson, N. T. (2000). Victory over the darkness. Ventura, CA: Regal books. p. 51)

I Am Accepted:

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

I Am Secure:

Rom. 8:1-2	I am free from condemnation.
Rom. 8:28	I am assured that all things work together for good.
Rom. 8:31-34	I am free from any condemning charges against me.
Rom. 8:35-39	I cannot be separated from the love of God.
2 Cor. 1:21-22	I have been established, anointed and sealed by God.
Phil. 1:6	I am confident that the good work God has begun in me will be perfected.
Col. 3:3	I am hidden with Christ in God.
2 Tim. 1:7	I have not been given a spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind.

1 John 5:18 I am born of God and the evil one cannot touch me.

I Am Significant:

Matt. 5:13-14 I am the salt and light of the earth.

John 15:1-5 I am a branch of the true vine, a channel of His life.

John 15:16 I have been chosen and appointed to bear fruit.

Acts 1:8 I am a personal witness of Christ.

1 Cor. 3:16 I am God's temple.

2 Cor. 5:17-21 I am a minister of reconciliation for God.

2 Cor. 6:1 I am God's coworker (see 1 Cor. 3:9).

Eph. 2:6 I am seated with Christ in the heavenly realm.

Eph. 2:10 I am God's workmanship.

Eph. 3:12 I may approach God with freedom and confidence. (Source: Anderson, pp. 38-39).

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

Interaction:

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

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

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/011815.cfm

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

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

Gospel Reading JN 1:35-42

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 1-11-2015

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

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

Jesus fulfilled this prophecy. For us the distant event in Isaiah's day of the coming of Jesus Christ completely overshadowed anything about the immediate circumstances being encountered by the Jewish people during Isaiah's time. *Note: The reading omitted verse 5 that has been included in the text below.*

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

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

The alternative first reading is also from the Prophet Isaiah. The context is just after the depiction of Jesus as the Suffering Servant on the cross, something that happened over 700 years after Isaiah penned it (Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12). An interesting note about Isaiah 53 is that it is a forbidden Book in

Jewish circles, something the rabbis avoid and the vast majority of Jews have never heard. "Who has believed our report and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed," Isaiah said (53:1). This powerful display of Jesus is followed by chapter 54 in which Isaiah shows God's everlasting kindness. "For a mere moment I have forsaken you, but with great mercies I will regather you. With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you, says the Lord your redeemer" (Isaiah 54:7-8). The reading today from Chapter 55 is just before God more fully revealed His plan to bring salvation to the Gentiles who would be in-grafted into His plan of eternal salvation (Isaiah 56). As you read, try to keep in mind the context in which Isaiah gave his message in a time when the Jews weren't listening to the voice of God.

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

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

In verses 6 – 9 the Prophet emphasized the need for a person in the Old Testament to see the Lord before it was too late (v. 6), repent of their sin (v. 7a), trust in God's ability to forgive sin (v. 7), and recognize their insufficiency and sovereignty of the Lord (vv. 8-9). His message in this section was a general evangelistic calling that also gives us some insights into the nature of God. First, God is compassionate and forgiving of sin even though He is far above people in His ways and thoughts. Second, God calls everyone to repent of his or her sin and place their trust in Him. Third, people

must not wait to place their faith in God as it may easily become too late when they become hardened by sin and the opportunity for them to believe passes. Finally, God reminds us that His ways are far above our own. In context this means that the way that God brings sinners to repent of their sin and place their trust in Him is beyond our understanding, it is a mystery of God (John 3:8). This is what we discussed a in a previous issue when we studied Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus in John Chapter 3.

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

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

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

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

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

1 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him. 2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. 4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world–our faith. 5 Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? 6 This is the One who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. 7 For there are three that testify: 8 the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. 9 If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for the testimony of God is this, that He has testified concerning His Son. (1 John 5:1-9)

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

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

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

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

a dove (v. 10c), and of course Jesus Himself.

What does all of this mean for us as we live out our lives as Christians? First, like John, we also are called to "prepare the way of the Lord" by preaching the Good News to the world that if they repent of their sin and place their faith in Jesus Christ they will have eternal forgiveness in eternity with God. Although the church has in no way replaced Israel, the church is God's light to the Jews and the Gentiles during the church age until Jesus returns in glory. God is "patient and not willing that any should perish" to the extent that He uses unusual people like John the Baptist and even more unusual people like you and me to do His work! Finally, since the return of the Lord Jesus is imminent we need to accelerate our proclamation of this message, as well as live in a way befitting of His soon return.

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

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

Read the following verses and answer the questions that follow.

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

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

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

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/011115.cfm

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

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

Gospel Reading MK 1:7-11

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Dewey's Testimony



My Testimony

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

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

Introduction:

Process. This single word can be used to summarize my relationship with Jesus Christ. Defined as "a series of actions or steps taken in order to achieve a particular end," the process of which I am referring to is God sculpting me into the "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14) masterpiece that He has created me to be. The "series of actions/steps" involved in the sculpting procedures are never-ending and I will not be a finalized work until until I reside in The Kingdom of Heaven (1 Peter 5:10). However, my journey with Christ during my Earthly life is not one of perfection, but of direction. Although that journey tends to be ever changing and unpredictable, the direction always remains constant- Steadfast pursuit towards "the narrow gate" (Matthew 7:13-14) with the Heavenly Father as my guide (Psalm 32:8). With each passing day, God continues to mold me into the Disciple I was created to be (Isaiah 64:8). Throughout the course of this eternal walk with God, it is only Him that I wish to receive glory, honor and praise; I am merely a vessel at the disposal of my Master (2 Timothy 2:21). The Lord has placed it on my heart to publicly share my story of being redeemed by His Grace and Love, and it is my prayer that through the sharing of my testimony, God's Love can be witnessed and received by somebody who comes across this text. To all reading this, may The Lord bless you and keep you everyday of your life (Numbers 6:24), and may you come to experience the greatest love this world has ever seen through a relationship with Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:4-5)! Never forget: God loves you more than you could ever fathom no matter who you are, where you come from or what you have done in your life (Romans 5:8)!

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

My name is Dewey Dovel, and I am a Disciple of Jesus Christ. My mission for my life is to do everything in my power to spread The Gospel to all of creation (Mark 16:15), while sharing God's Love in my words and deeds (1 Corinthians 16:14). I want to be a "fisher of people" (Matthew 4:19), and a bold witness for The Lord (Acts 4:29). I want to live my life as a humble servant of The Kingdom of God consecrated to our Heavenly Father in order to fulfill my life's purpose: Complete devotion to carrying out "The Great Commission" (Matthew 28:18-20). I have been called to preach The Gospel, and I will do so as enthusiastically, eagerly and passionately as I can (Romans 1:15) while being as obedient as possible to the direction and guidance that the Holy Spirit provides me with throughout the course of my ministry/life (John 16:13). I couldn't feel anymore blessed or humbled in regards to where my life is taking me, and in the fact that God would anoint me with a future of proclaiming His Message; As the Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:16: "For when I preach The Gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach The Gospel." I truly am compelled to preach The Truth that is Jesus Christ (John 14:6) and the love that He has for the WHOLE world (John 3:16). I believe that there is no greater message to be shared in our world, than the message that is God's Love for humans exhibited through what Christ did for us on The Cross (1 John 4:10). It is His everlasting love that millions in our world today are longing for; They search to fill the void in their lives with anything they can find to satisfy the eternal emptiness that encompasses their hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Millions relish in temporary sin and pleasure to

escape from the problems that they are faced with on a daily basis only to be disappointed and further grieved as their efforts to escape prove to be futile (Hebrews 11:25). Many individuals are searching for truth to the seemingly endless questions that are present in our world while longing for a better tomorrow (John 18:38). Our world wants change, revolution and solutions to fix our society and rescue mankind from the pits of our own self-destruction! It is only through Jesus Christ that we can witness a transformation in the hearts of humans (Ezekiel 36:26). Only through Christ can man find the solution to its problems and fill the void that is present at its core (Psalm 16:11). Only through Jesus Christ can we experience the hope and change we long for as a world (1 Peter 1:3)! It is through Christ alone that my life was forever changed! He has brought me a renewed life filled with joy, peace, rest and hope for my future. In placing your trust in Him, He will do the same for you! (Matthew 11:28-30)

Prologue To My Testimony:

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

Testimony:

I grew up in a household with a family strong in their Christian faith. As a child, I constantly sought my parent's approval and did everything I could to make them proud of me. My parents showered me in nothing but love, and I couldn't be anymore blessed or thankful to have them as my parents. I loved nothing more than the feeling of pleasing my parents, and over the course of time I made it my top priority to receive attention and praise from them. However, as I began elementary school it

didn't take me long to realize that it would take a different kind of behavior in order to stand out in front of my classmates. From my perspective at the time, the behavior that was necessary to obtain attention from my peers was not the same behavior that my parents had taught me during my childhood. I knew that in order to be "cool" and "fit in," I would have to act in a way that was similar to the people I was surrounded with. Although this behavior would not reflect how my parents raised me, I was willing to do whatever it took to win the approval of my peer group. After all, garnering attention and praise from my parents had always been great, so naturally I assumed that any kind of attention received from my peers would be equally as satisfying. I wanted popularity, I wanted acceptance and I was not going to be labeled as average. My desire for self-gratification and attention was so powerful (even at a young age), that I began to act out in any way possible to be the center of attention. The line that divided right and wrong became a blur to me as I starved for prominence in my social circle; Because I believed it would make me "cool and grown up," I began to swear at the age of 7. In a short amount of time, my flamboyance and ostentatious antics began to gain me the notoriety that I hoped for. In reflection, the publicity I was receiving from my classmates was more negative than positive. Nevertheless, I was satisfied that people were paying attention to me. Like it was with my parents (in my eyes), the actions of Dewey Dovel were the focal point of my peers. Unfortunately, I got to the point to where I was living two lives: the one my parents saw at home while I was in their presence, and the one I lived when I was around my peers. This was only the beginning of my gradual start down a slippery slope that only led to feelings of emptiness, discontentment and inadequacy. Before long, my growing thirst for social acceptance and conditional happiness would reach such a point that nothing could quench it. Heading into the genesis of my adolescence, I was in trouble.

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

next 6 years would prove that I was still as spiritually lost as I was before I was baptized. Honestly, things only got worse for me (spiritually/emotionally/socially) from that day forward for quite some time.

My life was a blur from that day forward. On the surface, things were looking great; I was excelling in school and in baseball. My parents couldn't have been any more proud of the man I was becoming. I was attending church weekly, and proudly proclaimed that I was a Christian to my peers. Life was about as good as it could have been, or so it would appear to be from the outside. Truthfully, reflecting back on my life from 11-17, I couldn't have been anymore miserable. At the age of 13, I became addicted to pornography. My misery was fueled by this powerful addiction and the effects of my newfound obsession would prove to be tumultuous. I was fascinated with the visual and physical temporary pleasure that pornography offered me. I knew from my parent's instruction that premarital sex was wrong, and somehow to this day I have abstained from it. However, my mentality soon became that if I could not have sex, I was going to get all the sexual satisfaction I wanted from what online pornography had to offer me. It did not take me long to become consumed with lust, and buried deep in the trap that is porn. Also, my language and dialect was very inappropriate; It felt as if every other word I said was a curse word, and try as I did, I could not stop cursing by my own power. What had begun as an attempt to sound cool to impress my peers had now become words that were rooted deep within my vocabulary. Worst of all, as middle school progressed into high school, my efforts to win the approval of my peers were failing. Out of frustration for what I perceived as a lack of my classmate's appreciation of me, I began to treat many of my peers very poorly, and from that moment forward I felt that the only way I could get any acceptance was to act out in negative ways. This would result in me spending more time in the halls exiled from class than actually in the classroom. Because of growing insecurity of my public perception, I began to brag about my ability to play baseball and would lie/exaggerate about anything that could make me appear honorable to my classmates. I was completely enslaved to my desire to be popular, admired and accepted. Seeing my continued failures of gaining social acceptance only compounded my despair. To counter my growing depression, I turned to pornography even more and used it as an outlet to escape my self imposed "problems." Pornographic material provided me with a temporary outlet to satisfy myself and take my mind off of my growing social failures. I began to fall deeper and deeper into worldliness, which only magnified the temptations that were present in my life. Of course, with no Biblical foundation or relationship with God, I had no power of my own to withhold from porn or other forms of sin that I clearly knew were wrong. I trudged through my first two years of high school before I changed schools. The change of schools was the most difficult thing that I had endured at that point of my life. Not only was I separated from the few friends I had at my previous school, but I became a social outcast at my new educational institution. I can't begin to express the depression I felt on a daily basis during my junior year of high school. I had zero true friends and felt lost and alone. Granted, I had completely brought everything on myself. I was difficult to relate to, made little effort in participating in fellowship with my new classmates and distanced myself socially in fear of being rejected. As my senior year of high school rolled around, I was at rock bottom spiritually, emotionally and socially. I was deeply depressed, and I began to feel more alone than I had ever felt in my entire life. I had no desire to live, and thoughts began to cross my mind as to if

anybody would even care if I died. In my opinion, my life lacked purpose and I felt as if my future had no direction whatsoever. All of this led up to November 18, 2012 when my life was changed forever; It was on that date that I met the "Prince of Peace" for the first time in my life (Isaiah 9:6). In a matter of minutes following my introduction to Him, my life was never the same.

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

Through the power of The Holy Spirit, I put on "the new self," (Ephesians 4:24) or became a new Dewey Dovel! Obviously, the change I was undergoing was a process; I did not overcome my life of habitual sin overnight. However, the more I prayed, and the more frequently I read my Bible, the less attractive my old lifestyle trends became. I actually began to have success in overcoming the temptations in my life that were causing me to stumble and experience the heartache/inadequacy that I had been feeling for so many years. Slowly but surely, my language and dialect became more

appropriate (Ephesians 5:4 & James 3:11). Over the course of a year and a half, my battle in overcoming pornography addiction was complete through the Power of Jesus Christ! I discovered that the Power and Authority I had in the Name of Jesus was far more powerful than my lustful urges and sinful nature (Luke 10:19)! Also, The Lord freed me from the domineering insecurities of pleasing all of my peers. I began to solely focus on living out God's Will for my life to the best of my ability, and in time my concern for popularity/social prestige vanquished (Galatians 1:10 & 1 Thessalonians 2:4). To my surprise, the less I focused on being popular and forcing my peers to like me, the more my peers showed me their approval/favor. Nearly a year following me becoming Born Again on that November afternoon at my Grandmother's house, God called me to preach The Gospel. In June 2014, I was baptized again firmly solidifying my full circle in being transformed by The Lord into a New Creation! To make a long story short, God changed my life. It was through my faith in Him, and the encouragement He gave me through what The Bible teaches us about His Love that I could be set free from my life of sin (Romans 6:15-23). Honestly, overcoming my sin was not an easy task. The change was not instantaneous, and it was not always smooth sailing. There were many periods of frustration and confusion. There were occasional instances in which I would suffer a temporary relapse into pornography or cursing. However, the constant factor that gave me the strength to overcome my intoxication with worldliness was God's Love for me! I realized that no matter how many times I stumbled, God's support and love never wavered (Psalm 136:1). When I was at my lowest moments, God was right by my side (Psalm 23:4). He was always with me, even before I knew Him intimately through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 13:5). It was through Christ that I had the strength to overcome all the inequity in my life that was bogging me down (Philippians 4:13). It was Christ that gave me a new peace, a new hope and a fresh start in my life (Lamentations 5:21). No matter how many times I stumble (I continue to stumble more than I could ever keep track of), God's Love is enough to cover all my wrongs (Proverbs 10:12)! Jesus Christ has paid the price for my sin (1 Corinthians 6:19-20); He has made me righteous before God (1 Corinthians 1:30), given me new life (Galatians 2:19-21) and ONLY Christ deserves all glory, honor and praise (Revelation 5:12)! Not only has Jesus Christ changed my life, but He has the power to revolutionize EVERY life! He was sent by God to be the sacrifice for the sin of the WHOLE world! He is available to ALL people! (1 Timothy 2:4) He is ready to make an eternal impact on your life if you allow Him to do so! (James 4:8) Have you placed your trust and faith in Jesus Christ? Have you personally met the Prince of Peace?

Decision:

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

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

you can be set free by Jesus Christ! The truth shall set you free!

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sinner's Prayer:

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

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

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

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

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

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

In Jesus' Name I Pray,

Amen.

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

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

God Bless!

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

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 1-4-2015

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



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

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

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

After a prolonged four hundred year period of darkness, Jesus was born in a stable in Bethlehem, the light that shined upon the world. Isaiah predicted that Gentile leaders from the nations would bring gifts of gold and frankincense to the newborn King, something we will read about later in the Gospel message that happened with the visit of the magi. Perhaps most striking in Isaiah's message was further insight into the nature of God's provision of salvation. It would be for the whole world, not just for the Jews. God said that "Nations will come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising" (v. 3). Like many prophecies in the Old Testament about salvation, the reading today has an "already, not yet" sense. God has already provided His salvation to all who believe, both for Jews and Gentiles. During the church age, which is a mystery not seen in the Old Testament, God provides salvation to everyone who will believe (Romans 1:16). However, in a future day all of Israel will come to believe (Romans 11:26). It is interesting to note that Isaiah's prophecy did not include the giving of the third gift, that of myrrh. As we will see in the Gospel lesson, this gift was also given to Jesus during the visit of the magi. Myrrh is a substance used in the preparation of a body for burial. This provided an insight about the nature of Jesus' ministry, that He would have to give up His life for His sheep (John 10:15).

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

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

1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles– 2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; 3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. 4 By referring to this, when you

read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; 6 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, (Ephesians 3:1-6)

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

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

1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, 2 "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him." 3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for

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

God gave the magi revelation to locate the Messiah through their understanding of the Jewish Scriptures, and they responded to this information by journeying a great distance to present gifts to the newborn King. They went to the most logical place where a King should be born, the capital city and seat of power. But when they arrived in Jerusalem, the newborn King was nowhere to be found. The Jewish scholars were consulted and they revealed that the place of the King would be in an unexpected place, a little town of Bethlehem. Matthew quoted the prophecy about which the magi were made aware from the Prophet Micah some four hundred years before the birth of Jesus. "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity" (Micah 5:2). The Jewish scholars may also have been made them aware of another prophecy in the Book of Numbers regarding a sign in the sky. "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near; A star shall come forth from Jacob, A scepter shall rise from Israel, And shall crush through the forehead of Moab, And tear down all the sons of Sheth" (Nu 24:17). The magi, unlike most of the Jews, recognized the validity of these predictions and acted upon it when they saw the sign in the sky.

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

until after He had given his life for the sins of the world.

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

As we begin a new year, we often think of the past year and how we want to be strategic with the year ahead. We often make resolutions for changes, contemplate goals that we to accomplish and try to wash the slate clean of past mistakes. While these are all noble pursuits, they are not enough to provide the type of life that we were meant to live. Jesus said that he came to give us a different sort of life than one of merely trying harder and forcing ourselves to do things that don't come naturally to us. He came to change our lives, to give us new intentions in our hearts, so that we would want to become a new type of person, one who has love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Instead of making a New Year's resolution on your own strength that will probably get broken in the next few days, why not talk to the Lord and ask Him to make you into a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17)? Why not take the plunge and lean your full weight on Jesus by asking Him to give you His light for each step of your journey in this New Year? Are there decisions you need to make? Are there relationships that seem chaotic? Are there places of greed or anger that need to get confessed? Why not spend some time talking to Jesus and asking Him to be Lord of your life, to cleanse you of the past and to give you His light for the future? He's willing, are you?

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

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

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

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

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Believe:

Follow:

Respond:

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/010415.cfm

First Reading IS 60:1-6

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

Gospel Reading MT 2:1-12

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 12-28-2014

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

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

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

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

In the first passage, we see that Abram was concerned that he did not have an heir. However, God

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

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

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

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

We see in this passage of God has commended Abraham and Sarah for their faith. In the beginning of this chapter we find that "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6). With all of these examples including Abraham who is the father of faith, we find inspiration for our own journey of faith in God. Abraham was called out of his own land to go to a place that God would show him.

He didn't have a map of God's plan but walked in faith day by day of what he did know. Then God promised him a son after Sarah was beyond the age of childbearing. By faith Abraham believed that God could perform this miracle. As we read earlier, Sarah conceived and gave birth to Isaac. When we walk by faith in God we are living as Abraham's children.

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

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

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

The Gospel reading is from the second chapter of Luke.

22 And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "EVERY firstborn MALE THAT OPENS THE WOMB SHALL BE CALLED HOLY TO THE LORD"), 24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, "A PAIR OF TURTLEDOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS." 25 And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, 28 then he took

Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, 29 "Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, According to Your word; 30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation, 31 Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, And the glory of Your people Israel." 33 And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him. 34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed– 35 and a sword will pierce even your own soul–to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." 36 And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers. 38 At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. 39 When they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth. 40 The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. (Luke 2:22-40)

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

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

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

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

of faith?

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

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/122814.cfm

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

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

Gospel Reading LK 2:22-40

Source(s):

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

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