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

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 08-18-2024



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. In the first reading, we look at the Book of Proverbs, where we see the concept of wisdom personified. The second reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Ephesians and focuses upon the behavior of those enlightened by God through faith in Jesus Christ. We close with a continuation of Jesus' lesson from last week in which Jesus called Himself the "living bread that came down out of heaven" (John 6:51).

Introduction to the First Reading:

The book of Proverbs is full of true, wise sayings about everyday life and relationships. It is similar to poetry in that it often uses figurative language to make its point. Many of the Proverbs were written by King Solomon, considered the wisest man who ever lived. God blessed him with great wisdom and riches, and early in his life he followed God faithfully. Later, he sinned against God by marrying many women who followed after false gods. Sadly, Solomon followed their idolatrous ways. These Proverbs however, were given by God and are still a source of great wisdom today.

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The Book of Psalms provides us with an insight concerning wisdom. Psalm 119:102-104 says:

I have not turned aside from Your ordinances, For You Yourself have taught me. How sweet are Your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth! From Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way.

First Reading:

> *Proverbs 9:1-6 NAS95 1 Wisdom has built her house, She has hewn out her seven pillars; 2 She has prepared her food, she has mixed her wine; She has also set her table; 3 She has sent out her maidens, she calls From the tops of the heights of the city: 4 "Whoever is naive, let him turn in here!" To him who lacks understanding she says, 5 "Come, eat of my food And drink of the wine I have mixed. 6 Forsake your folly and live, And proceed in the way of understanding."*

In Proverbs Ch. 9, the writer uses personification (giving human traits to a nonhuman object or idea) to describe wisdom. She (Wisdom) has built a strong house, indicating that wisdom gives us a strong and secure place from which to live. She is like the mistress of the house who prepares all good things for us to enjoy and invites us in to freely partake of it. Wisdom is available to us if we will only forsake our foolish ways and come and dine. Since God is the source of all wisdom, the food we must consume to get wisdom is His Word—the Bible.

Believers grow in their knowledge of God by developing a deeper understanding of God's Wisdom as revealed through the Bible. As we move to the second reading, we will see how Saint Paul calls believers to express their wisdom through godly expressions of spiritual songs, hymns and psalms. These are activities which happen during the fellowship of believers in the church, and they help us to grow in our knowledge of love of the Lord Jesus.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. It begins with the adverb "therefore" which means we must understand the meaning of the verses immediately before to

which Paul is referring.

Second Reading:

> *Ephesians 5:15-20 NAS95 15 Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, 16 making the most of your time, because the days are evil. 17 So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; 20 always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;*

The "therefore" refers to the fact that as believers in the Lord Jesus we are "children of the light" (Ephesians 5:8b-c) who were formerly in darkness (v. 8a). Since we are children of the light, we are to produce fruit in keeping with the light, "for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth" (v. 9). Though we live in evil times (days, v. 16b) we are called as believers to be good stewards of the light that we have through our knowledge of God's word in the Bible. Our understanding of the Bible is how we know God's will (v. 17b). We must let worldly things like wine get in the way of our walking in the truth of the Lord (v. 18), for being drunk is the behavior of the sin darkened unbelievers. One of the ways in which we can express our love for God and also to grow in the knowledge of Him is through "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord" (v. 19). God also calls us to be thankful for the things that God has bestowed upon us (v. 20).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

In the Gospel reading, we continue the discourse that Jesus had with the crowds concerning his teaching as He is the "bread which came down from heaven." The people to whom Jesus was speaking were misunderstanding both the *nature* of the Messiah as well as His *identity* as the One to whom they were listening.

Gospel Reading:

> *John 6:51-58 NAS95 51 "I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh." 52 Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" 53 So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. 54 He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. 55 For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. 56 He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. 57 As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me. 58 This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever."*

Once again, we return to the chapter where Jesus refers to himself by a spiritual metaphor—the bread of life. Many people were following Jesus. They saw his miracles, and they were excited about what Jesus had done and curious about what Jesus would do next. They wanted to be part of his entourage. But was that enough of a commitment to call themselves true followers of Christ? Jesus is going to shock the crowd with a stunning metaphor, designed to separate the curious from the true disciples: *"He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day (John 6:54).* As bread gives life through its nourishment, so Jesus gives life to all who believe in Him. Bread provides its physical benefit, not when it is sitting on the table but when it is taken into the body. Jesus provides his spiritual benefits not to the followers who are merely curious but to those who make a full commitment to Him from the heart. Romans 10:9 says, "*If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved*." Eating in this case is not physical consumption, but belief from the heart that provides the spiritual benefit of eternal life.

Many could not understand the spiritual nature of Jesus' words. They missed the metaphors, and His talk of eating flesh and drinking blood was offensive to them. They demonstrated the principle that the words of Jesus cannot be understood through human wisdom alone, and no one can come to Jesus unless the Father grants it (v. 65). These disciples, blinded by their own sin, walked away and no longer followed Him.

As Jesus continued His teaching, He began to move deeply in the hearts of the crowd causing them to move closer to the point of decision that we will see next week in John 6:66. In the reading today, Jesus once again used the "I am" phrase, something which His hearers would have understood as a claim to divinity. Jesus told the crowd at least one year before His final Passover meal at what we call the "Last Supper" that it wasn't the bread that would save them, but rather their belief in Him. The manna in the Exodus was something created divinely by God which fell from the sky at night for the Hebrews to collect each day (except on the Sabbath). Even though this special "bread" came

directly from God, those that ate this physical provision from God, still died physically (v. 58b). In contrast, those that "feed" upon Jesus are the ones that believe in Him as the Messiah, which is the only way to eternal life (John 14:6). If we read a few verses later in this section, Jesus explained the spiritual analogy He used by calling Himself the bread of God. He said, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life" (John 6:63). The people misunderstood His spiritual metaphor and stumbled upon His identity as the one and only Messiah of God.

The Jews understood that they were prohibited by the Law from the drinking blood. Leviticus says, "You shall not eat anything with the blood" (Leviticus 19:26a). This prohibition from a blood meal was repeated in the New Testament so as not to create a stumbling point with the early Jewish believers. The proclamation in the Book of Acts reads, "that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood …" (Acts 15:29a). The practice of consuming blood would have been deeply offensive to the Jews because of their immersion in the teachings of the Mosaic Law. Jesus, aware of the legalistic Pharisees in the crowd, used this metaphor to further deepen the divide that existed between the true and false followers of God.

This theme of separation continued in John's Gospel beyond this point and reached a climax just after today's reading in John 6:66 where John said, "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore." As we said in the introduction, the people to whom Jesus was speaking were misunderstanding both the nature of the Messiah as well as His identity. Only a small number of them put it all together, those on the narrow road that leads to life (Matthew 7:13). This theme is nowhere more evident that in our current world in which the true followers of the Lord Jesus are in the minority even among cultures which seemingly exalt Christianity.

Reflection Questions

1. Describe in what ways Jesus was truly wisdom personified, taking into account the relationship between the words of Jesus in the Bible and the person of Jesus?

2. The Gospel reading followed a series of miracles that Jesus performed for the crowd including the multiplying of the loaves and fishes. Yet we know that many of the people in the crowd did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah (John 6:66). What miracles from Jesus have you experienced in your

own life? Why are your experiences different from the people in the Gospel narrative?