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

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 148: 10/25/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the first reading from Moses' Book of Exodus, in which we see God's concern for widows, orphans, and the poor. Then we move to the second reading, a continuation of the study we began last week in 1 Thessalonians. We conclude with another of Jesus' discussions with the Jewish leaders from the Gospel of Saint Matthew, this time with the infamous Pharisees.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Exodus 22. It is one of the first five Books of the Bible, known as the Pentateuch, and was written by Moses. The Book recounts God's sovereign raising up of Moses as a leader to shepherd the Israelites out of their captivity in Israel. The Book also chronicles the giving of the Law to Moses, including the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. Whenever biblical texts use the term "Law," they mean the whole canon of Jewish Law, including the Ten Commandments and the several hundred other laws in the last four books of the Pentateuch: Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers,

and Deuteronomy. Chapter 20 contains the Ten Commandments and opens as follows. "Then God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." (Exodus 20:1-2). God, who calls Himself "I am" in verse one, meaning the "self-existent One," led the Israelites out of their bondage under the oppressive rule of the Pharaoh of Egypt through His ordained leader Moses. God gradually revealed the entire Canon of the Law to Moses during his wanderings in the desert.

Understanding today's reading requires some considerable insight into the cultural and religious milieu of Jews in the ancient Near East. Foreigners were not the only downtrodden class of people to whom God afforded special protection in the Law. In those days, three classes of people were as low in the socioeconomic strata as foreigners. These were widows, orphans, and the poor, though the first two certainly shared the characteristic of poverty. These groups of people had almost no rights in the secular kingdoms that surrounded Israel. However, throughout the Law, we find God's special protection for these groups. God's protection of the lower classes through the Law reveals something about His very nature. In the Book of Psalms, we see God's care for the poor. God says that He is "A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows" (Psalms 68:5). The Psalmist said, "I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted And justice for the poor" (Ps 140:12). "The LORD performs righteous deeds And judgments for all who are oppressed," the Psalmist said (Ps 103:6). God made special provisions for the protection of these classes of people throughout the Law. In Lev. 19:9–10, God protected strangers and the poor by providing for them through the gleanings in the corners of the fields. In Deut. 14:28–29, God provided special Laws for strangers, the fatherless, and widows. At the opening of his book, the prophet Isaiah called the Israelites to repent of their sin. God said, "Learn to do good; Seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow" (Isaiah 1:17). This admonition appears multiple times throughout the Old Testament and is, in fact, what James in the New Testament called "basic religion." He said, "Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world" (James 1:27).

As you read the first reading, try to imagine what it would be like to have absolutely nothing and no social standing in the ancient world. *Note: Verse 27 was included for context.*

First Reading:

> *Exodus 22:20-27 NAS95 20 "He who sacrifices to any god, other than to the LORD alone, shall be utterly destroyed. 21 "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you*

> *were strangers in the land of Egypt. 22 "You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. 23 "If you afflict him at all, and if he does cry out to Me, I will surely hear his cry; 24 and My anger will be kindled, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless. 25 "If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, you are not to act as a creditor to him; you shall not charge him interest. 26 "If you ever take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, you are to return it to him before the sun sets, 27 for that is his only covering; it is his cloak for his body. What else shall he sleep in? And it shall come about that when he cries out to Me, I will hear him, for I am gracious.*

The reading opens in verse 20 with the often-repeated warning about idolatry. "He who sacrifices to any god, other than to the LORD alone, shall be utterly destroyed" (Exodus 20:20). In the next verse, God introduces new teaching on how to treat aliens. God says, "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 20:21). Here, God gives a reason for treating foreigners properly: the Israelites were once foreigners under Pharaoh's rule.

In the reading, we see God's concern for widows (v. 22), orphans (v. 22), and the poor (v. 25). God said that He would hear the cries of the widows and the orphans and answer with judgment by allowing the people to be killed by their enemies with the sword (v. 24). This is something that was repeated over and over again throughout the Old Testament, especially in the era of the Judges. When times were good, the people would begin to oppress the lower classes, then God would allow an alien nation to overtake the people. Then they would repent, God would raise up a deliverer (for example, a judge like Gideon in Judges 6), the people would again return to prosperity, and the cycle would repeat. God's instruction not to oppress the poor continued in verses 26-27, as a neighbor took his neighbor's cloak as collateral for a loan. This person was so poor that they had nothing to pledge but their clothing. God knew this was a dire situation and provided a clear principle: fellow Israelites were not to take such essential items as collateral for loans. The principle is that when a poor neighbor is taken advantage of by being forced to pledge his essentials to survive, God will raise up a deliverer against the more prosperous man and bring judgment upon him for his unrighteous action. Instead, God said in Leviticus something that we shall study later in the Gospel lesson, "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD" (Leviticus 19:18). Loving your neighbor, in the case of what God said about not taking your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, instead meant sharing in your abundance and that of the community.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

As we move on to the second reading, ask yourself what it means to act in full conviction of the Holy Spirit in response to the biblical precepts about serving Jesus and others. The Jews knew the Laws about not oppressing aliens, orphans, and the poor, yet they didn't practice what was preached. You may have heard the cute acronym "J-O-Y," which means to consider our lives in light of the hierarchy of Jesus, others, and you. As the teaching goes, we should consider Jesus first, then others, and finally ourselves. See what you can uncover from Saint Paul as you read his admonition on taking the Word to heart.

Second Reading:

> *5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. 6 You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. 8 For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. 9 For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, 10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come. (1 Thessalonians 1:5-10)*

Paul told the Thessalonians how impressed he was with them because they didn't just do as he told them to ("word only," v. 5), but also carried out what he directed through the power of the Holy Spirit. Not only that, but they became examples to others (v. 7). The Thessalonians turned from the worship of idols, as was the custom of their culture, to the worship of the One True God (v. 9). Finally, Paul commended them for holding hope in the resurrection of the dead. When he said that Jesus "rescues us from the wrath to come" (v. 10), he meant the eternal punishment promised to unbelievers in hell, not some temporal deliverance or rapture (catching up) from their present circumstances. Later in the Book, Paul discusses how believers alive when Jesus returns will be united with him in the clouds (1 Thessalonians 4:17), which is the context of the book and movie *Left Behind* (we will cover that in a future lesson). Paul's key point to the Thessalonians was his commendation of them for living out their Christian lives in word and action, something the Sadducees and Pharisees in the Gospel narrative hadn't learned.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

In the second reading, we saw Saint Paul's admonition to take the Word to heart and his commendation of the Thessalonians for doing so. In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus summarizes the Law into two key points that reveal the hypocrisy of the Pharisees' hearts, who didn't take the Word to heart. This lesson is another of Jesus' interactions with the Jewish ruling authorities during His inevitable journey to death at Calvary, this time with one of the Pharisees' best legal experts.

Gospel Reading:

> *34 But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. 35 One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, 36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" 37 And He said to him, "'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' 38 This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' 40 On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:34-40)*

First, a bit about the context. When Matthew says, "But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees," he refers to the story that just happened. Here, the Sadducees, who didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead, asked Jesus about a theoretical expansion of the Levitical Law known as Levirate Marriage. They asked Jesus about the relationship in the resurrection between a certain woman and the chain of husbands the Levirate Law afforded her. Remember that the Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection, but they were just trying to trap Jesus. When they asked Jesus whose husband the woman would be in the resurrection after being married to seven different brothers, Jesus answered them as follows: *29 But Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God. 30 For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. 31 But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: 32 'I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living." 33 When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at His teaching. (Matthew 22:29-33)*

The Sadducees' brief silence gave the Pharisees a chance to test Jesus themselves. They asked Him, "Which is the great commandment in the Law?" (v. 36), again addressing Him with the honorable title of Rabbi (teacher). When the Pharisees use the term "Law," they mean the whole of the Old Testament. During that era, rabbis frequently debated which elements of the Law carried the most weight and which could be given less weight or even discounted. Jesus' answer summarized the whole Canon of both the Law **and** the Prophetic writings. He answered them by quoting from the Levitical Law, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets" (vv. 38-40). Here, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:5, or the "Shema," a phrase that religious Jews stated twice a day. He also quoted from Leviticus 19:18, which we mentioned in the discussion of the first reading.

Jesus says a true follower of God is a whole being, with a heart united in purpose (heart, soul, and mind), rather than compartmentalized theoretical knowledge that doesn't lead to action. Loving God naturally leads us to keep His commandments. Jesus said in John 14:23, "If anyone loves Me, he will obey my teaching. . . ." Saint John continued Jesus' connection between love and action when He said, "Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue, but with action and in truth" (1 John 3:18). And again, "We love, because He first loved us. If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also" (1 John 4:19-21).

This was the heart of the indictment against the Pharisees. They were a group about which it could be said, "do as I say, but not as I do," as the expression goes. Love demands concrete action, not just correct information about God. This means helping your neighbor when he needs it, not offering him a loan by taking his cloak as collateral, as we saw in the first reading. Loving your neighbor as yourself also means loving yourself as someone created in the image of God. This means caring for our bodies, spiritually and physically, as temples of the Holy Spirit.

Reflection Questions

1. As you journey through the week, what does it look like for you to have a heart united in love and action for God? In our global society, what "neighbor" is God placing on your heart to help with a gift that doesn't require a loan or collateral?

2. Spiritually, we are all as helpless as the orphans and widows of the ancient society. How do you respond to God's heart for you in your own spiritual poverty? What spiritual resources (see below) have you appropriated in your life? Which ones do you need to continue internalizing?

Spiritual Resources in Christ:

- I have been washed (1 Corinthians 6:11).
- I have been sanctified (set apart for special use) (1 Corinthians 6:11).
- I have been justified (pronounced "not guilty") (1 Corinthians 6:11)
- I have been forgiven of my sins (1 John 1:9)
- When I sin, I have an Advocate – Jesus Christ, who speaks to the Father in my defense (1 John 2:1)
- I am a new creation, the old has passed away, and the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- I have been blessed in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Ephesians 1:3)
- I belong, I have been adopted, I have a spiritual family (Ephesians 1:5)
- I have resurrection power (Ephesians 1:19-20)

- I have God's grace that teaches me to say "no" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live a self-controlled, upright, and godly life (Titus 2:11-12, 1 Corinthians 10:13)

3. Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-14. Unpack the meaning of verse 13 in light of the surrounding verses. How does this spiritual truth help you live as a Christian in the face of temptation?