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 48: 05-04-2025



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass Notes. This week, we will examine how the apostles were energized through God's power in the Book of Acts. In the Gospel reading, we will discover how Jesus restored Peter's position after his denial of Him during his trial. We will also examine a reading from the Book of Revelation and provide some good context to help frame the reading.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Acts. The context is just after the story of Ananias and Sapphira, both of whom attempted to lie to the Holy Spirit of God and were struck dead. God used this event to reveal the necessity of purity in the early, vibrant, and growing church during a time when "many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles" (Acts 5:12). These events revealed how the church was both pure and potent, like God. Just before today's reading, the apostles were gathered in an area of the Jerusalem temple called Solomon's Portico (v. 12). All of the commotion brought the attention of the high priest, who arrested the

apostles and put them in prison (vv. 17 – 18). Next, "during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out" (v. 19). At daybreak, the apostles reentered the temple portico and began teaching again (v. 21). Then the high priest convened "the counsel and all the senate of Israel" (v. 21b) meaning the Sanhedrin. At this point, the officers found the apostles missing from the prison while its doors remained secured (vv. 21c – 24). During this same time, the apostles remained to teach in the temple (v. 25). Next, the officers brought the apostles voluntarily to appear before the Council (vv. 26 – 27), where today's reading begins.

First Reading:

Note: Verses 33 – 39, which were omitted from the reading, were included below.

> *Acts 5:27-41 NAS95 27 When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them, 28 saying, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." 29 But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. 30 "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. 31 "He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. 32 "And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him." 33 But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and intended to kill them. 34 But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people, stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men outside for a short time. 35 And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men. 36 "For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. But he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. 37 "After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census and drew away some people after him; he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered. 38 "So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown; 39 but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God." 40 They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them. 41 So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.*

An essential point in the reading is about Peter, who denied Him three times during Christ's arrest and was willing to die rather than forsake his Lord again. This indicates the power of the Holy Spirit working to energize him in his role of leading the emerging church. Later in the Gospel reading, we

see how Jesus forgave and restored Peter to his position. Peter was energized by the power given to him by God. After the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2), the apostles ministered boldly and powerfully to all who would listen. Their ministry emphasized "teaching," notice that this word appears twice in verse 28. This gives evidence to the importance of the teaching going on in the church, precisely what the Jews had earlier warned them not to do. The apostles were confronted by Rabbi Gamaliel, "a teacher of the law" (v. 34a), who was none other than the Rabbi who taught Saint Paul (Acts 22:3). This teacher possessed great wisdom, to such extent that the Council accepted his profound advice (v. 40). Perhaps Gamaliel recognized the miracle that occurred when the apostles were delivered from with the locked prison. Whatever happened after the Council accepted the Rabbi's advice, even though the apostles were not charged with a crime, they were still flogged in clear violation of the Jew's own law. This was done because they had disobeyed the previous order from the high priest not to teach (v. 28).

What are some ways that we can apply this reading to our lives? We cannot and should not expect miracles like they happened in the early church. We should not expect to be delivered from conflicts arising either with civil or religious authorities. We can, however, expect to experience miracles in other ways. We can expect to see God working miraculously in our lives and in the lives of those around us to whom we are ministering. We can expect miraculous answers to our prayers in ways we may not expect. We can also expect miraculous delays in God answering our prayers. How among us hasn't proclaimed, I am glad that God didn't answer that prayer right away or in the way I expected? Second, Just because a religious group grows and succeeds doesn't mean it is a movement of God. Gamaliel mentioned the cults of Theudas and Judas of Galilee from his time. Many examples in our era include the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Islam. Any movement of God will survive, at least to the extent that His purposes are accomplished through the particular movement. God's purpose through the church will not be thwarted, and He will continue building movements of His Spirit until the Lord Jesus returns. Third, we are called to obey God rather than humans. We can expect to experience cases when we must follow God's commandments and not man's commandments. This may mean that we will bump up against the civil authorities when they establish laws that are clearly against biblical absolutes and principles. Finally, we must remember the urgent call of evangelism as elicited in these passages and in the closing words of our Lord to His apostles in the Great Commission. Our primary ministry should be to "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, **teaching** them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Mt 28:19-20, emphasis added).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from the Book of Revelation. The context is after the message given in

chapters 2 and 3 to the literal seven churches of Asia Minor in existence at that time. In these messages, we find many similarities between the various churches of our era. The conclusion of the messages to the churches marks the beginning of the revelation to John regarding the things which "what must take place after these things" Revelation 4e), meaning after the conclusion of the church age. John receives these messages "in the spirit" while appearing before the throne of God in heaven (Revelation 4:2). These messages continue until the end of the Book. Chapter 5 opens with the gradual unsealing of a divine "scroll," which we can regard as the title deed of all the earth. This title deed is gradually unfurled, and as this is done, a series of judgments are revealed, including judgments associated with seals, trumpets, and bowls. The scroll marked with the seven seals can be considered the overall container for all the judgments. The "unfurling" of the scroll by the sequential breaking of the seals reveals the seal judgments that release the trumpet and, finally, the bowl judgments. This symbolic expression is a handy metaphor that God used to display the pouring out of the judgments upon the world in a way that early and predominantly Jewish Christians immersed in Roman society would understand. People in this society would understand how an important document, like a deed, would be sealed by a person in authority concerning that document and how each seal would have to be broken in order for the full content of the document to be revealed. In this case, the title deed scroll is marked on both sides (Revelation 5:1), indicating that perhaps not all of the content is secret except for the material behind the portion obscured by the rolled-up area held in place by the seals. John was sad that nobody was worthy to open the seals on the scroll, but the "elder" revealed to him that the Lord Jesus alone was worthy, "the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David" (v. 5). Next four spiritual creatures, seemingly types of angels, along with 24 elders (likely 12 from Israel and 12 representing the church) exclaimed a victory song about Jesus and the priestly power of His believers. "And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth" (Revelation 5:9 – 10). This leads us to verse 11, which is the opening of today's reading.

Second Reading:

> *Revelation 5:11-14 NAS95 11 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." 13 And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." 14 And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshiped.*

The big idea in the reading is that the Lord Jesus, the "Lamb that was slain" (v. 11) is worthy of

worship, whether it comes from angelic beings (four living creatures), people, or every created thing (v. 13). The Scripture is clear that "EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD" (Romans 14:11, Isaiah 45:23). In the reading the text uses the term "myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands" (v. 11) was meant to portray the largest number that could be expressed in the Greek language. The fact that God has so many creatures worshiping Him should remind us that He is worthy of our worship! The reading said that Jesus is worthy "to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing" (v. 12). As a divine human, Jesus is worthy of our worship, not just ours but all of creation. We need to keep Jesus' rightful position as the only One worthy to open the seals in the forefront of our minds as we remember our weaknesses and those of the servants of the Lord throughout the Bible. Jesus came for the first time as a sacrificial Lamb, which is the Gospel's good news. However, when He returns, He will be the bearer of bad news for those who don't believe. Jesus is the only One who can unveil the judgments of the seals, trumpets, and bowls. Saint Paul said, "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom" (2 Timothy 4:1).

John's vision of the exalted Lord Jesus leads us to the Gospel reading, where we will see Jesus while He is still on earth, just after His resurrection.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from John. After Jesus' resurrection, Thomas missed the first meeting of the apostles when they gathered in a locked room, only to be surprised by Jesus' entrance. However, eight days later, Jesus appeared again when Thomas saw and believed. Jesus told Thomas, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed" (John 21:29). Today's reading opens with another appearance of the Lord to the apostles this time along the Sea of Galilee.

Gospel Reading:

> *John 21:1-19 NAS95 1 After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested Himself in this way. 2 Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. 3 Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will also come with you." They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing. 4 But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did*

> *not know that it was Jesus. 5 So Jesus said to them, "Children, you do not have any fish, do you?" They answered Him, "No." 6 And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch." So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish. 7 Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped for work), and threw himself into the sea. 8 But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net full of fish. 9 So when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire already laid and fish placed on it, and bread. 10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have now caught." 11 Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples ventured to question Him, "Who are You?" knowing that it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise. 14 This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead. 15 So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My lambs." 16 He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." 17 He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep. 18 "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." 19 Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me!"*

There are two main reasons why John includes this story in the Gospel. The smaller story is about Peter's three statements, and the larger one is John's description of who Jesus is after His resurrection from the dead. Let's unpack the smaller story about Peter first.

As you may recall, one of Peter's last encounters with Jesus before His death was when he denied Jesus three times. Jesus warned Peter that this would happen (Luke 22:34), but despite this, Peter still failed to stand up for his friend. You can imagine that Peter felt pretty awful letting Jesus down during His time of need (Luke 22:62). Although Peter had an encounter with Jesus in the upper room in Jerusalem, the issue of his betrayal had not explicitly been addressed, which is why today's story is so important. In the reading, we see how Jesus asked Peter three times "if he loved him." This corresponded to the three times Peter denied the Lord Jesus on the night of His betrayal by Judas Iscariot. In Jesus' kindness, He allowed Peter to express his loyalty to Him, reinstating their relationship publicly. Interestingly, Peter and some other disciples had returned to their fishing

career, which was then interrupted by Jesus' appearance along the shore to appoint them to career ministry. Similarly, when Jesus first encountered Peter, He called them out of the fishing industry into becoming a fisher of men. Jesus was now reinforcing Peter's primary calling. Peter was now called to "shepherd" (or lead) the early church. Jesus used this occasion to publicly reinstate Peter into a right relationship with Him and reestablish his ministry leadership.

The more significant reason why this Gospel story is vital for the early church is that John wanted believers to know that Jesus manifested Himself as a real person multiple times after His resurrection. He did so in ways that showed both His humanity and His divinity. We see Jesus' humanity in that He was a real person they could see (not a ghost) and ate food with the disciples. Even after Jesus' resurrection, we see Jesus still serving His disciples by preparing them breakfast beside the Sea of Galilee. We see His divinity in how He directed the disciples to cast their net on the other side of the boat and obtain a miraculous catch. On top of that, another miracle was that the net didn't break even with such a large number of fish (v. 11). We see a sign of Peter's reverence for Jesus in that he dressed himself before he jumped into the water to be with the Lord. Another expression of Jesus' divinity was His prophecy of how Peter would eventually die a martyr's death (v. 18). You can imagine that this gave Peter some comfort and boldness in later years because he knew that Jesus had placed this mark upon his life. We saw this very clearly in the first reading in which he appeared before the Council (Acts 5:27). Peter could have thought in later years something like, if I am going to die a martyr's death, why be timid in my ministry? Additionally, since Peter knew that Jesus had predicted his martyrdom, a certain amount of comfort comes from "knowing that Jesus knows." We see in this a very intentional sense of God's sovereignty over Peter's eventual death. We, too, can find comfort in difficult circumstances by knowing that God is sovereign over everything that comes along.

Reflection Questions

1. Jesus offers this exact reinstatement to everyone who has denied the Lord. His death was the payment for the penalty that we all deserve to pay for the times in our lives in which we have denied God's ownership over our lives. What do you see in Jesus' treatment of Peter that you can apply in your relationship with Him? List a few ways you tend to be like Peter and how you can receive Jesus' forgiveness.

2. What importance does Jesus's humanity and divinity hold for believers today?