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 91: 06/14/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we return to the Old Testament Book of Exodus, and then in the first reading, we study a summary of the Christian faith. In the Gospel reading, Jesus empowered His disciples with miraculous powers to heal and cast out demons.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Old Testament Book of Exodus. The reading begins after God had provided water to the Israelites at the Rock of Horeb (17:6) and Moses' Father-in-Law Jethro's visit. During the visit, Jethro gave Moses important advice about appointing elders over the people to judge the smaller matters and then bring judgment only in the larger ones. Interestingly, Jethro returned home to his own country after his visit rather than wander forty years with the Nation.

First Reading:

> *Exodus 19:1-6 NAS95 1 In the third month after the sons of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. 2 When they set out from Rephidim, they came to the wilderness of Sinai and camped in the wilderness; and there Israel camped in front of the mountain. 3 Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: 4 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself. 5 'Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; 6 and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel."*

Three months had elapsed since the Nation had gone out of Egypt (v. 1). Moses then went up on the mountain of God as His prophet. God then provided Moses with an important insight as to the conditional nature of the Law that would be given to him during his future visits up the mountain. God gave Moses an "if then" statement, something which theologians refer to as a "lawsuit." God said, "*if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples*" (v. 5a, b). Next, God affirmed part of His nature as that of the creator and sovereign God (v. 6, "for the earth is mine." In the closing verse, God revealed that the Nation of Israel was called to be a "holy nation" and a "kingdom of priests" (v. 6).

We see in the reading how Moses spoke as a prophet of God to bring special divine revelation to the people who were now camped in the desert, unaware of their future 40 years of wandering. It was at this crucial point that God gave Moses insights into the kingdom He was building on the earth through His chosen people. These people were to be to Him a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. This promise was conditional, however, as the future promises later revealed to Moses were contingent upon the people's obedience. The conditional aspect of what was later called the "Mosaic Covenant" did not nullify in any way the promises that God had previously made to Abraham (see Genesis 12).

Today's reading revealed how Moses was appointed to act as a prophet of God by bringing His holy revelation to the Nation. Moses, who we later understand was a "type of Christ," brought God's word to God's people in order to build the Nation of God. We can celebrate, as believers in God, members of the New Covenant, that the nature of this eternal covenant with God is unconditional, pointing back to the promises of God through Abraham. Although the record of humanity is one of failure, Jesus came to earth in human form as a Victor. *Note: Scripture never records Jesus as a Victim.* Although Adam, the first man, broke God's commandments, and the Nation of Israel did too, Jesus came along as a substitute for our sin and fulfilled the commandments and the Law (1 Peter 2:22, John 8:46). As believers in Jesus Christ, we are not people who in a sense wandering in the

desert, rather we are those who are led by God's Word celebrating our daily delivery from sin through God's power.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Today's reading is from Romans chapter 5, a chapter that opens with a "therefore." "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). The unconditional nature of the New Covenant is conditioned by faith (see Ephesians 2:8-9). The opening verses of this chapter then reveal the value of faith as the gateway to God, "through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God" (v. 2).

Second Reading:

> *Romans 5:6-11 NAS95 6 For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. 11 And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.*

The reading is perhaps the greatest summary of faith in the New Testament. It shows how God revealed His love for us through His sending of Jesus, even though we are lost sinners (v. 8). Even though we were sinners, we were justified (through faith) by Jesus' death (v. 9b, "His blood." As non-believing sinners, we were justified with God when we believed, and reconciled to God (v. 10). As a result, we can "exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have received reconciliation" (v. 11). We are no longer promised the "wrath of God" (v. 9b) because of the gift given to us by Jesus.

We cannot overstate the value of the salvation that we as believers have through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul revealed in the reading from Romans that God has delivered us from the wrath of God, a

promise still made to non-believers. We can continually celebrate "in God through our Lord Jesus Christ" the momentous victory that Jesus achieved for us, "while we were yet sinners" (v. 8c), not yet born when Jesus came to earth to die for our sins some 2,000 years ago. His victory over sin is as fresh now as it was when it happened way back then. We have been "justified by His blood" (v. 9b), which is a legal, judicial term meaning that God has pronounced that we have been set free from our former sinful status "just as if we had never sinned." Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from Saint Matthew beginning with the closing of chapter 9 just after Jesus had gone "throughout all the cities and villages" (9:35) teaching and healing the people, events which brought about crowds of people.

Gospel Reading:

> *Matthew 9:36 – 10:8 NAS95 36 Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then He *said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. 38 "Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest." 1 Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. 2 Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; 3 Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; 4 Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him. 5 These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; 6 but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7 "And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' 8 "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give.*

Even though there were plenty of priests, scribes, and Pharisees, Jesus proclaimed that, although many sought to believe in God, there were few true proclaimers of the faith. He then went on to list the twelve leaders of the faith, one of whom was a devil (v. 4c). The Twelve (minus Judas Iscariot) were the true reapers of the plentiful harvest that God had planted in the world, and a foretaste of the future harvesters now working to build God's kingdom through His church. The Twelve were given a special mission and powers to go only to the Jews, and also received the same healing

powers that Jesus had just previously demonstrated to them.

The Scriptures are very interesting because they are often very personal and give real names of real people, such as the Twelve Apostles of Jesus. These are the Twelve that are forever enshrined as the Apostles of the Lord, the ones whom God sent as the first "workers into His harvest" (v. 38b). We can forever remember them and note how Peter (the Rock), was listed first, followed closely by Andrew, James, and John.

In summary, as believers, we can praise God that we are not under the Law and its conditional promises, since these were fulfilled by Jesus. God has led us out of Egypt in a sense, through faith in Jesus, and sent us as harvesters to work in His fields through our faith in the Lord Jesus. We can celebrate how, "while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6), meaning us in our former sinful state.

Reflection Questions

1. The second reading from Romans is often upheld by theologians as one of the more famous "but God" statements in the entirety of the Bible. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" Romans 5:8). Read the following verse 9 again. What did today's reading reveal as the alternative outcome for those who don't partake of God's blessings through faith in Jesus Christ? In what ways does this empower you in light of what you learned in the Gospel reading?

2. In what ways do you find yourself as a harvester in God's field of the world?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 06-16-2024

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Introduction to the First Reading:

When an F5 tornado struck Joplin, Missouri, on May 22, 2011, 158 people died, and countless others were injured. Tornado warnings had been issued and the sirens activated, but many did not seek shelter soon enough. One study found that only 10 percent of the population responds immediately when a tornado warning is given. The others respond with what the researcher called, "denial." * Lives are lost when people don't believe and heed the warnings.

Ezekiel was a prophet of God sent out to warn God's people of impending destruction. God had always been their shelter in a time of storm, but they had strayed far from Him. If they didn't turn back to Him destruction would surely overtake them. Ezekiel and many of the other prophets were sent to sound the alarm, but sadly, many did not heed the prophets' warning.

The people of God were composed of twelve tribes descended from Abraham's grandson Jacob, (renamed Israel in Genesis 35:10). These descendants and the land God gave them for a home were called Israel. From them, the Messiah Jesus would come, and through the salvation He would bring, all the nations of the world would be blessed.

Despite their privileged position in God's plan for the nations, Israel rebelled against God and went after the false gods of the surrounding nations. They forgot the Lord's commands and worshiped idols. This was the fate of King Solomon when he ruled in Israel after his father David's reign. At first, he followed God, and God gave him great wisdom to rule justly. But when Solomon married foreign women, he began to follow after their gods. Because of his idolatry, God would take ten of the tribes from his rule and leave his posterity the tribes of Benjamin and Judah only. The ten tribes became known as the Northern Kingdom and were called Israel. The remaining two tribes formed the Southern Kingdom and were called Judah. It was to Judah that God sent Ezekiel with His warnings.

God had already sent an invading army from Babylon to take Judah into captivity. Ezekiel was with the first wave of captives taken to Babylon. Some of God's people, however, still remained in Jerusalem, Judah's capital. If they didn't repent and turn back to God, they would face a similar fate as their brothers. They ignored the warning, and instead of seeking God, they sought an alliance with Egypt. That failed, and Babylon conquered Jerusalem taking most of the people who resided there into captivity.

First Reading:

> ***Ezekiel 17:22-24 NAS95 22 Thus says the Lord GOD, "I will also take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and set it out; I will pluck from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one and I will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. 23 "On the high mountain of Israel I will plant it, that it may bring forth boughs and bear fruit and become a stately cedar. And birds of every kind will nest under it; they will nest in the shade of its branches. 24 "All the trees of the field will know that I am the LORD; I bring down the high tree, exalt the low tree, dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will perform it."***

In the First Reading, Ezekiel uses trees as a metaphor for rulers God sets up and takes down. When kings abandoned God and led the people far away from Him, God sent prophets like Ezekiel to call them back to God and warn them of impending destruction. When the king and his people persisted

in their rebellion, God sent conquerors to come and take them captive.

Ezekiel looked forward to the time when God will set up another king. God will take a twig from the lofty top of the cedar and plant it on the mountain of Israel, and it will bear fruit and birds of all kinds will come and prosper there. This tree is a reference to Jesus who will be established in Israel and will bring salvation to all who come to Him. And someday He will reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords in a heavenly kingdom that has no end.

Another prophet sounds the warning for us. St. John tells us:

> ***16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. 18 He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.***
> ***(Gospel of St. John 3: 16-18)***

Those who believe in Jesus have eternal life. Those that don't, stand judged already.

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Introduction to the Second Reading:

1 and 2 Corinthians were written by St. Paul the Apostle to the church in Corinth. There were sin issues in the church, and Paul had addressed them frankly in 1 Corinthians. Now in his second letter, he wanted to reassure the Corinthians that he did this, not out of anger, but out of love. In 2 Corinthians 2, Paul encourages the Corinthian church to forgive and restore the one who had caused the problems. He goes on to discuss practical matters of Christian living such as financial giving and caution regarding relationships with unbelievers. But often his thoughts turn from earthly matters to eternal blessings.

In the proclamation of the gospel, St. Paul had undergone extreme persecution which he recounts in 2 Corinthians 4. He testified, *"We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed."* Encouragement came from knowing that these "light troubles," as he called them, were producing eternal results—people were hearing about and believing in Jesus. His focus was not on the temporary suffering but on eternal rewards. He continued this focus in chapter 5.

Second Reading:

> ***2 Corinthians 5:6-10 NAS95 6 Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord– 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight– 8 we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. 9 Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.***

In the first five verses, St. Paul compares our bodies with an earthly tent. Tents are fragile and temporary and subject to destruction. So are our earthly bodies. While we are in this "tent" we groan and are burdened, Paul tells us. We long for a heavenly body, which is like an eternal house not a fragile tent.

In this reading (v. 6-10), Paul acknowledges that it would be much better to be away from this body and home with the Lord in heaven. But until then, Paul tells us to do what is pleasing to the Lord. God has a ministry for us to do, and it would be pointless to waste this time by wishing we were in heaven. But on the other hand, knowing that we are going to heaven someday will give us courage and perseverance when we face persecution and hardship in this life.

In addition, St. Paul reminds us we will someday have to give an account to Christ for what we have done in this life as Christians. Did we serve Him well? Did we tell others about Christ? Will He someday be able to say to you and me, "*Well done, good and faithful servant*"? He will if we faithfully use these earthly bodies to accomplish his eternal purposes.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Wherever Jesus went, a crowd of the curious gathered. He often spoke to them in parables. A parable is a simple, everyday story that represents a spiritual truth or moral principle. It usually compares a spiritual concept with an earthly object or event.

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> ***Mark 4:26-34 NAS95 26 And He was saying, "The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; 27 and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows–how, he himself does not know. 28 The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. 29 But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come." 30 And He said, "How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it? 31 It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the soil, 32 yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches; so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR can NEST UNDER ITS SHADE." 33 With many such parables He was speaking the word to them, so far as they were able to hear it; 34 and He did not speak to them without a parable; but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples.***

In the Gospel Reading, two parables are given. The first one begins, "*The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil."* Stories like these are often told to illustrate or illuminate a truth. But Jesus spoke in parables not to clarify the truth but to obscure it. It was a judgment on those whose hearts were hard. To the unbelieving, the parables were incomprehensible riddles, but to those who wanted to understand the truth, Jesus would give them understanding. He said to His disciples and His true followers, "*To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables, [12] so that while seeing, they may see and not perceive, and while hearing, they may hear and not understand*…."*

In the first parable, the kingdom of God is compared to a man who plants seeds. While he goes about his daily routine and without any further help from the man, the seed sprouts and matures. So it is with us. We plant the seed of the gospel in people's hearts when we teach or preach or proclaim the truth of the Bible to our friends, neighbors, and relatives. Then God causes the implanted truth to take root and grow. A mature Christian is the result.

The second parable says that the kingdom of God is like a tiny mustard seed which grows into a

large plant with branches capable of providing shade for the birds of the air. The church was small in the beginning–just a little band of disciples. But when those men were empowered by the Holy Spirit to be witnesses of the Gospel to the whole world, the church grew rapidly. Many have found comfort and salvation there. If we plant the seed of the Word of God in people's hearts, God will cause that seed to sprout and the church to flourish.

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Reflection Questions

1. What would you need to do differently in order to live your life for eternal purposes? List two areas in which you will write down on a card or in your personal journal.

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 06-17-2018



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with Ezekiel 17: 22-24. The prophet uses a metaphor to show how God sets up kings and takes them down and will eventually establish a King who will reign over all. Then we move to St. Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5: 6-10, encouraging the use of our earthly bodies for eternal purposes. Finally we conclude with St. Mark 4: 26-34, as

Jesus uses parables to teach about the kingdom of God.

Introduction to the First Reading:

When an F5 tornado struck Joplin, Missouri, on May 22, 2011, 158 people died and countless others were injured. Tornado warnings had been issued and the sirens activated, but many did not seek shelter soon enough. One study found that only 10 percent of the population respond immediately when a tornado warning is given. The others respond with what the researcher called, "denial." * Lives are lost when people don't believe and heed the warnings.

Ezekiel was a prophet of God sent out to warn God's people of impending destruction. God had always been their shelter in a time of storm, but they had strayed far from Him. If they didn't turn back to Him destruction would surely overtake them. Ezekiel and many of the other prophets were sent to sound the alarm, but sadly, many did not heed the prophets' warning.

The people of God were composed of twelve tribes descended from Abraham's grandson Jacob, (renamed Israel in Genesis 35:10). These descendants and the land God gave them for a home were called Israel. From them, the Messiah Jesus would come, and through the salvation He would bring, all the nations of the world would be blessed.

Despite their privileged position in God's plan for the nations, Israel rebelled against God and went after the false gods of the surrounding nations. They forgot the Lord's commands and worshiped idols. This was the fate of King Solomon when he ruled in Israel after his father David's reign. At first, he followed God, and God gave him great wisdom to rule justly. But when Solomon married foreign women, he began to follow after their gods. Because of his idolatry, God would take ten of the tribes from his rule and leave his posterity the tribes of Benjamin and Judah only. The ten tribes became known as the Northern Kingdom and were called Israel. The remaining two tribes formed the Southern Kingdom and were called Judah. It was to Judah that God sent Ezekiel with His warnings.

God had already sent an invading army from Babylon to take Judah into captivity. Ezekiel was with the first wave of captives taken to Babylon. Some of God's people, however, still remained in Jerusalem, Judah's capital. If they didn't repent and turn back to God, they would face a similar fate as their brothers. They ignored the warning, and instead of seeking God, they sought an alliance with Egypt. That failed, and Babylon conquered Jerusalem taking most of the people who resided there into captivity.

First Reading:

> ***Ezekiel 17:22-24 NAS95 22 Thus says the Lord GOD, "I will also take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and set it out; I will pluck from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one and I will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. 23 "On the high mountain of Israel I will plant it, that it may bring forth boughs and bear fruit and become a***

> ***stately cedar. And birds of every kind will nest under it; they will nest in the shade of its branches. 24 "All the trees of the field will know that I am the LORD; I bring down the high tree, exalt the low tree, dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will perform it."***

In the First Reading, Ezekiel uses trees as a metaphor for rulers God sets up and takes down. When kings abandoned God and led the people far away from Him, God sent prophets like Ezekiel to call them back to God and warn them of impending destruction. When the king and his people persisted in their rebellion, God sent conquerors to come and take them captive.

Ezekiel looked forward to the time when God will set up another king. God will take a twig from the lofty top of the cedar and plant it on the mountain of Israel, and it will bear fruit and birds of all kinds will come and prosper there. This tree is a reference to Jesus who will be established in Israel and will bring salvation to all who come to Him. And someday He will reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords in a heavenly kingdom that has no end.

Another prophet sounds the warning for us. St. John tells us:

> *16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. 18 He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (Gospel of St. John 3: 16-18)*

Those who believe in Jesus have eternal life. Those that don't, stand judged already.

* http://www.mprnews.org/story/2012/05/09/storm-ready-human-reaction#gallery accessed 5/18/15

Introduction to the Second Reading:

1 and 2 Corinthians were written by St. Paul the Apostle to the church in Corinth. There were sin issues in the church, and Paul had addressed them frankly in 1 Corinthians. Now in his second letter, he wanted to reassure the Corinthians that he did this, not out of anger, but out of love. In 2 Corinthians 2, Paul encourages the Corinthian church to forgive and restore the one who had caused the problems. He goes on to discuss practical matters of Christian living such as financial giving and caution regarding relationships with unbelievers. But often his thoughts turn from earthly matters to eternal blessings.

In the proclamation of the gospel, St. Paul had undergone extreme persecution which he recounts in 2 Corinthians 4. He testified, *"We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed."* Encouragement came from knowing that these "light troubles," as he called them, were producing eternal results—people were hearing about and believing in Jesus. His focus was not on the temporary suffering but on

eternal rewards. He continued this focus in chapter 5.

Second Reading:

> ***2 Corinthians 5:6-10 NAS95 6 Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord– 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight– 8 we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. 9 Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.***

In the first five verses, St. Paul compares our bodies with an earthly tent. Tents are fragile and temporary and subject to destruction. So are our earthly bodies. While we are in this "tent" we groan and are burdened, Paul tells us. We long for a heavenly body, which is like an eternal house not a fragile tent.

In this reading (v. 6-10), Paul acknowledges that it would be much better to be away from this body and home with the Lord in heaven. But until then, Paul tells us to do what is pleasing to the Lord. God has ministry for us to do, and it would be pointless to waste this time by wishing we were in heaven. But on the other hand, knowing that we are going to heaven someday will give us courage and perseverance when we face persecution and hardship in this life.

In addition, St. Paul reminds us we will someday have to give an account to Christ for what we have done in this life as Christians. Did we serve Him well? Did we tell others about Christ? Will He someday be able to say to you and me, "*Well done, good and faithful servant*"? He will if we faithfully use these earthly bodies to accomplish his eternal purposes.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Wherever Jesus went, a crowd of the curious gathered. He often spoke to them in parables. A parable is a simple, everyday story that represents a spiritual truth or moral principle. It usually compares a spiritual concept with an earthly object or event.

Gospel Reading:

> ***Mark 4:26-34 NAS95 26 And He was saying, "The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; 27 and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows–how, he himself does not know. 28 The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. 29 But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come." 30***

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> ***And He said, "How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it? 31 It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the soil, 32 yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches; so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR can NEST UNDER ITS SHADE." 33 With many such parables He was speaking the word to them, so far as they were able to hear it; 34 and He did not speak to them without a parable; but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples.***

In the Gospel Reading, two parables are given. The first one begins, "*The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil."* Stories like these are often told to illustrate or illuminate a truth. But Jesus spoke in parables not to clarify the truth but to obscure it. It was a judgment on those whose hearts were hard. To the unbelieving, the parables were incomprehensible riddles, but to those who wanted to understand the truth, Jesus would give them understanding. He said to His disciples and His true followers, "*To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables, [12] so that while seeing, they may see and not perceive, and while hearing, they may hear and not understand….*"*

In the first parable, the kingdom of God is compared to a man who plants seeds. While he goes about his daily routine and without any further help from the man, the seed sprouts and matures. So it is with us. We plant the seed of the gospel in people's hearts when we teach or preach or proclaim the truth of the Bible to our friends, neighbors, and relatives. Then God causes the implanted truth to take root and grow. A mature Christian is the result.

The second parable says that the kingdom of God is like a tiny mustard seed which grows into a large plant with branches capable of providing shade for birds of the air. The church was small in the beginning–just a little band of disciples. But when those men were empowered by the Holy Spirit to be witnesses of the Gospel to the whole world, the church grew rapidly. Many have found comfort and salvation there. If we plant the seed of the Word of God in people's hearts, God will cause that seed to spout and the church to flourish.

*Information gleaned from a sermon by John MacArthur accessed 5/20/15.
http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/90-464/the-purpose-for-parables

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Reflection Questions

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areas in which you will write down on a card or in your personal journal.

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