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 04-03-2022



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass. This week we open with the Old Testament reading from Isaiah in which we see his foretelling of an aspect of the New Covenant. In the second reading we learn about Paul's passion in running the race for Jesus in opposing the false teachers of his era. We close with the story of the woman caught in adultery from the Gospel of John.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Let's review the background of the Prophet Isaiah from which the first reading was taken. Isaiah was a prophet to the Southern Kingdom of Judah shortly after the Northern Kingdom (called Israel) was conquered by Assyria in 722 BC. Isaiah brought a dire message to Judah that God was going to use a foreign nation to judge them, like what had just happened to Israel. He also proclaimed a message of hope and restoration, including a promise that a Messiah would come to restore all that would be taken from God's chosen people. He is one of the most important prophets because of all of the information he provided regarding the coming Messiah. He said regarding this future Ruler, "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel" (7:14). He continued, "For a child will be born to us, a son

will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace" (9:6). His writings then moved onto the near-term prediction about the coming invasion by Babylon and closed with a series of messages with a very long-range view, including the time during which Jesus will reign on earth during the Millennial Kingdom.

Today's reading is from a section in which we see how God reminds the people of Judah about God's greatness as well as His sovereignty. Chapter 43 opens with, "But now, thus says the LORD, your Creator, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel, Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine!" (Isaiah 43:1). God reminds the people of His unique covenantal relationship with them. He shows how He is with them during their hardships that He allowed to overtake them in order to accomplish His purposes. The second verse in the chapter says, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, Nor will the flame burn you." We see similar wording in today's reading.

First Reading:

Isaiah 43:16-21 NAS95 16 Thus says the LORD, Who makes a way through the sea And a path through the mighty waters, 17 Who brings forth the chariot and the horse, The army and the mighty man (They will lie down together and not rise again; They have been quenched and extinguished like a wick): 18 "Do not call to mind the former things, Or ponder things of the past. 19 Behold, I will do something new, Now it will spring forth; Will you not be aware of it? I will even make a roadway in the wilderness, Rivers in the desert. 20 The beasts of the field will glorify Me, The jackals and the ostriches, Because I have given waters in the wilderness And rivers in the desert, To give drink to My chosen people. 21 The people whom I formed for Myself Will declare My praise.

Isaiah is providing comfort to those in the future who will return from the Babylonian Captivity some 150 years in the future. He reminds them of who God is because it will be hard for them to understand God in the midst of their discipline that came about through the exile. God reminds them of how He acted powerfully during the first Exodus under the direction of Moses (vv. 16 – 17). Moses was the one to whom the Law was given (Mosaic Covenant). The Mosaic Covenant included the Ten Commandments and the other requirements, which the Jewish people had to fulfil in order to show their covenant relationship with God. Isaiah brings out a contrast in the next verses. In other words, he is saying something like, "if you through the Exodus was amazing just wait until you see what I do in the future." To which future event is Isaiah be referring, has it already happened or is it yet to

transpire? Here are some characteristics of this future event.

- It comes on suddenly (v. 19b).
- It is undetected (v. 19b), the Jewish people will miss it.
- It is something supernatural because it defies the natural order of things (streams in the desert, v. 19c).
- Everything and everyone will praise the Lord, right down to the wild animals, jackals and owls (v. 20).
- It will completely satisfy people's spiritual thirst (v. 20, see also Isaiah 55:1-3).

Based on what Isaiah predicted, it becomes clear that he was referring to the New Covenant inaugurated by Jesus. This is a new and better deliverance (and "exodus") which outshines the original Exodus from Egypt and the Mosaic Covenant. It started at Jesus' First Advent (His death and resurrection), but it will be fully realized at His Second Advent when everything will be made right.

In the New Testament, the author of Hebrews made the superiority of Jesus very clear as we see in the following verses.

Hebrews 10:12-18 NAS95 12 but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, 13 waiting from that time onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET. 14 For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. 15 And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying, 16 "THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART, AND ON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM," He then says, 17 "AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE." 18 Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.

What does this mean for our lives? Since God has been powerful and trustworthy in the past, we can trust Him to be powerful and trustworthy in the future. Even if our circumstances seem to be a desert experience, He will sustain us and eventually make all things right, but it may not happen during our natural lifetime. As part of God's family through which we have been engrafted (Romans 11:17) we can bring praise to God (v. 21) as we trust Him and sense Him working in our lives.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Philippians, one of the "Prison Epistles" since it was written while Paul was under house arrest (Philippians 1:13) in Rome (Acts 28:16). Paul viewed this time of captivity as a special ministry of service to Jesus Christ as we see especially in Philippians 1:12-14. Paul said there, "Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel" (v. 12). Today's reading is from chapter three in which Paul discusses the great value of following his leader Jesus through the use of an athletic metaphor.

Second Reading:

Philippians 3:8-14 NAS95 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, 9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. 13 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul surrendered everything that he had on earth in order to serve Jesus Christ (v. 8). Paul was clear that even his most admirable achievements fell far short of earning his way into the kingdom of heaven, this came only through faith in the Lord Jesus (v. 9). This revealed Paul's heart for the people to find their true righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ alone, which comes not by striving but through God's power (v. 9). This was in contrast to the false teachers plaguing the church (see Philippians 2:21, and Philippians 3:2). These "dogs" as he called them in 3:2 just before today's reading, were those who interfere with spiritual matters about which they didn't have true knowledge. These "Judaizers" sought to impose the Old Testament Law upon the Gentile church, something which Paul wrote an entire epistle against in the Book of Galatians. The bottom line is that it is a distortion of the true gospel of grace given by Jesus Christ when anyone attempts to impose requirements for salvation outside of faith in Christ alone. In contrast to the false teachers who hoped in obtaining power and success in this life, Paul looked toward the eternal future. His hope was in gaining perfection through his personal resurrection from the dead (vv. 11-12), the first

fruits of which we see in Jesus' resurrection from dead.

Beginning in verse 12, Paul used an athletic metaphor in saying that while running towards the future he was striving to forget what was behind him while racing ahead towards this future hope of resurrection "for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (v. 14). Paul frequently used such terminology in his letters as a means of connecting with his readers with symbolism with which they would have been familiar. He likened the Christian life as a race towards the finish, rather than a walk in the park in which we slouch our way towards the finish line (that is coming upon us whether we want it to or not). As an athlete, we take an active role in running the race, and are not just spectators on the sidelines as the others run by us.

What does this mean for us today? We are not to look to things like what the New Testament Jews desired (such as political power). We are also not to think that we can find righteousness through good works in obedience to an elevated (and false) interpretation of the Scriptures, as did the Pharisees. Believers are called to shift their focus not upon the things of this world but to "press on" in order to accomplish God's purposes. All the while we have to remember that the righteousness that we do finally obtain is from God, not our works. Paul said clearly in Ephesians, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). We are to take our Christian lives seriously in the same ways that an athlete competes in a race. Although we can cheer others as they run, we too are called to compete in the event of the Christian life. During the race we can remember that Christ is the One from Whom comes our power, as Paul said "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from John chapter 8 in which we see Jesus' interaction with the woman caught in adultery. The event happened in the temple court after Jesus began to teach there early in the morning (John 8:2-3). As you will see in the reading we are not told about that other half, the man involved in the adulterous affair. In the early New Testament culture, the society tolerated a larger degree of sexual sin among men. In our day we might say something like, that is what men do. In that day we would expect more scrutiny upon the sexual sin of woman, especially one in Jerusalem that was outside of the sexual activities considered normal in the cults of the Roman pagan culture. So it is in the reading that the sin of the woman is brought front and center to Jesus who is placed in a kind of judge position, something for which Jesus was appointed before the creation of time.

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Gospel Reading:

Note: This particular section of the Gospel of John is not found in the earliest manuscripts of the New Testament and was first added to by Jerome in the year 382. If you are interested, we encourage you to research the findings on this matter.

John 8:1-11 NAS95 1 But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2 Early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people were coming to Him; and He sat down and began to teach them. 3 The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the center of the court, 4 they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act. 5 "Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?" 6 They were saying this, testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground. 7 But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." 8 Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. 9 When they heard it, they began to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones, and He was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the center of the court. 10 Straightening up, Jesus said to her, "Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?" 11 She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more."

The two opposing groups known as the scribes (the scholars and lawyers) and Pharisees (legalistic lay people) had strong evidence against the woman, the evidence revealing that she was "caught in the very act" (v. 4). Jesus doesn't question the weight of evidence that they have against the woman. However, rather than responding to their legal question which was nothing more than an attempt to trap Him, Jesus simply stoops down again and begins writing on the ground (v. 6). Evidently, He had risen from His earlier seated position, since it says in verse 2 that "He sat down and began to teach them." One can imagine Jesus in a submissive, kneeling position with His head held low such that he could reach the ground on which to write. We are not told what He wrote on the ground, but it seems evident from the reaction of His listeners that it affected them deeply. The scribes and Pharisees expected an answer, and evidently grew impatient when Jesus failed to answer. After the lawyers questioned Him a second time, He responded by straightening up and saying, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (v. 7), after which He went back to His writing. This was the answer to their question regarding what should be done with the woman caught in adultery. The oldest in the crowd responded first by leaving, until one by one, Jesus was left alone with the "convict." Jesus then admonished her to leave and "sin no more" (v. 11). The completely vulnerable woman who had previously surrounded by a covey of rapt prosecutors bearing overwhelming evidence which would certainly have convicted her was set free by the supreme judge of all the universe (2 Timothy 4:1).

The reading makes it clear that when we examine our lives, we understand that we too are sinners in need of Jesus' forgiveness. We have committed adultery of the heart by going after things other than God in which we find our pleasures. Saint Paul said, "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Sin is a serious matter, and God teaches us that the natural end of a non-believer living out their life of sin is death. Paul said, "for the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a). We can identify with the woman caught in adultery; a person who in that society stood condemned and squarely caught in her sin. We can heed Jesus' warning to her in which he says, "From now on sin no more" (v. 11c). We don't naively think that the woman left the interaction with Jesus and become the most saintly figure in Jerusalem. However, we can imagine that after being set from the consequences of her sin that she was deeply affected by the "Word of God." During those times in which the Spirit of God indicts us for our sin, we too can find healing from the eternal consequences of sin even if God doesn't deliver us from the temporal ones. In each incident in which we find ourselves confessing the depth of our sinfulness, we can celebrate that as believers in the Lord Jesus we will be delivered from the eternal consequences of our sin.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. When was there a time in which you were caught in the very act of sin? Based upon what you learned in the Gospel lesson, how can you imagine that Jesus would have addressed you?

2. In what ways does the story of the woman caught in adultery help you to avoid your own sin? What about certain besetting sins that you keep committing, a cycle of sin / repent / sin?

3. How does the following verse speak to you about your own sin?

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).