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

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 11-30-2014



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 11-30-2014. This week we open with the first reading from Isaiah 63 in which we include a great deal of the surrounding context and learn about God's frustration with the Jewish people during this era. Then we move to the second reading which is the opening verses of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. Finally we conclude with a lengthy analysis from Mark's Gospel on the section known as the Olivet Discourse.

The first reading is in Isaiah 63-64. Israel was experiencing the consequences of turning away from God. Isaiah, who was God's spokesperson, cried out to God on behalf of the people. The people were suffering as a result of keeping God out of their lives. But this was a necessary part of the training process, for how else would they know that surrendering to God was actually for their good unless they experienced the harsh reality of living apart from God? (The bold text is what will be read in the mass, the normal text is the biblical verses that provide the context).

> *16 For You are our Father, though Abraham does not know us And Israel does not recognize us.* ***You, O LORD, are our Father, Our Redeemer from of old is Your name. 17 Why, O LORD, do You cause us to stray from Your ways And harden our heart from fearing You? Return for the sake of Your servants, the tribes of Your heritage. 18 Your holy people possessed Your sanctuary for a little while, Our adversaries have trodden it down.*** *19 We have become like those over whom You have never ruled, Like those who were not called by Your name. (Isaiah 63:16-19)*

As a prophet, Isaiah was in a tough position. He desired to see God move in the hearts of the people,

but he knew that the Israelites were unwilling. God is a "gentleman" and does not barge in where He is not wanted. And so the people's hearts grew harder and harder, to the point where God's protective presence was no longer felt in Israel. Isaiah's complaint was that they had become just like the surrounding nations that did not have a covenantal relationship with God. He said, "We have become like those over whom You have never ruled, Like those who were not called by Your name" (v. 19). Again, the reading continues below.

> ***1 Oh, that You would rend the heavens and come down, That the mountains might quake at Your presence– 2 As fire kindles the brushwood, as fire causes water to boil–To make Your name known to Your adversaries, That the nations may tremble at Your presence! 3 When You did awesome things which we did not expect, You came down, the mountains quaked at Your presence. 4 For from days of old they have not heard or perceived by ear, Nor has the eye seen a God besides You, Who acts in behalf of the one who waits for Him. 5 You meet him who rejoices in doing righteousness, Who remembers You in Your ways. Behold, You were angry, for we sinned, We continued in them a long time; And shall we be saved? 6 For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. 7 There is no one who calls on Your name, Who arouses himself to take hold of You; For You have hidden Your face from us And have delivered us into the power of our iniquities. 8 But now, O LORD, You are our Father, We are the clay, and You our potter; And all of us are the work of Your hand.*** *(Isaiah 63:16 – 64:8)*

Isaiah's response to their predicament was to call God to hurl down His judgment upon the nations that were attacking them (vv. 1-3). He looked back and remembered God's power when He did "awesome things [they] did not expect" (v. 3) and finally admitted their great sin. Isaiah said, "For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away" (v. 6). The connotation of the "filthy garments" here is that of a woman's menstrual rags. This is a strong word picture of how God views our "good deeds" done in our own power. This theme is echoed in the words of King David who said in Psalm 14, "They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, not even one" (Psalm 14:3). Seven hundred years later Saint Paul quoted these verses to explain how every person stands condemned before God because of the stain of sin. He said, "for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). He further explained that as result of our sin the penalty is death (Romans 6:23). This passage teaches that we cannot save ourselves. There is no such thing as a cosmic scale that weighs our good deeds versus our bad deeds. All of our deeds, even the so-called "good deeds" are as filthy garments, good only for the trash heap. If this is the case, we must analyze what we are trusting in for salvation. If we are trusting in ourselves, we are going to be sorely lacking.

Isaiah points to a redemptive solution in this passage by showing the need of trusting in God's righteousness. He described God's character: "Who acts in behalf of the one who waits for Him. You meet him who rejoices in doing righteousness, who remembers You in Your ways" (vv. 4-5). There is an implied sense of relational dependence to which Isaiah is pointing. He continues this theme of relational dependence at the end of the section saying: "But now, O LORD, You are our Father, we are the clay, and You are our potter; and all of us are the work of Your hand" (v. 8). The redemptive solution to the dire situation we find ourselves in as sinners is to throw ourselves on God's mercy and to trust in Him to save us. In the New Testament, we see even more clearly God's redemption in Jesus. He bore the wrath of God and forgives us of our sin and cleanses us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). As believers in the finished work of Jesus we are forgiven of our sin and have a special relationship with God, Who at the moment we believed sent His Holy Spirit to live within us (Ephesians 1:13).

What does this means for us today? We must consider carefully in what/whom we are trusting for salvation. Isaiah is very clear, that we cannot be good enough to be saved on our own merit. Becoming a Christian means to lean your full weight on Jesus and trust His righteousness to save you. As believers we have a special relationship with God, in a way that is similar but yet unique from God's chosen people Israel. There will be untold blessings for all believers when they pass into eternity with God the moment they die. Saint Paul quoted from the first reading and said about believers in the Lord Jesus, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). God allowed judgment to come upon the people of Israel for the purpose of bringing them back to the Lord. As we transition to the second reading, which is also from 1 Corinthians, Paul celebrates with the believers in that region the forgiveness they received through Jesus Who "died for their sins according the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3). We can celebrate that we have come to believe even without having to endure a military invasion and being carried captive into a foreign land as happened with the Jews. Although the Jewish people about whom Isaiah wrote in the reading had turned away from the Lord, one day all of Israel will repent of their sin and be saved (Romans 11:26).

The second reading is the first six verses from Saint Paul's Letter to the Corinthians. Paul founded this church on his second missionary journey as recorded in Acts 18. The Corinthian church was in a major cosmopolitan city in southern Greece, immersed in the surrounding godless culture of a worldly crossroads city. This was actually Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, he mentioned the first letter in 1 Corinthians 5:9 that was subsequently lost.

> *1 Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, 2 To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 4 I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, 5 that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, 6 even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, 7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who will also confirm you to*

> *the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Corinthians 1:1-9)*

Paul began by affirming his apostleship, meaning that he was someone who saw the resurrected Lord Jesus and was personally called by the Lord to his ministry. This happened to him while he journeyed on the road to Damascus as was recorded in the Book of Acts (Acts 9:3-5). Second, Paul provided the name of Sosthenes who was most likely his secretary. This man had suffered for the Lord when he was beaten for taking Paul in front of a Corinthian civil court (Acts 18:12-17). The mention of Sosthenes is significant because it reveals that this important Jewish leader of the synagogue in that region (Acts 18:17) came to faith in the Lord Jesus. Third, Paul affirmed the holiness of anyone who believes in the Lord Jesus. He said, "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours (v. 2). Sanctification is the concept of being set apart for the purposes of God. This word comes from the Greek "hagios" meaning "separation," and is the same Greek word that is translated "holiness."

This is a one-time, forever event, but also has an ongoing, growing element, in that as the author of Hebrews stated, "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14). Finally, Paul says that in the end, believers in the Lord will be "blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 8). This is a common theme for Paul, we also see it in 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 as well as in Philippians 1:6 and 2:15. Paul said in Colossians, "yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach–if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister" (Colossians 1:22-23). Believers are blameless in their positon before the Lord, meaning they are justified as if they had never sinned. However, the ungodly behavior that Paul noted later in 1 Corinthians was not indicative of true believers, for only true believers are blameless before the Lord. Paul said in the closing verse of the reading, "God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (v. 9). Although as we saw in the first reading, "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), continuing in the faith is a sign of a true believer.

We can celebrate that as believers we have been set apart from the world for the purpose of serving God. Most of us do not get too excited about holiness, because holiness has the connation of being no fun. But that is the deception of the Enemy who makes us think that holiness is a drag. The idea of holiness is to be set apart for special use, and which one of us doesn't want to be "special". That is a longing that everyone has. We see a world full of people trying to be special based on the world's value system, using their looks, their personality, their wit, their charm, their money, and their talents to try to stand out from the rest of the crowd. Wanting to feel special is a legitimate longing, but unless it's met in Christ, we will try to meet it in some illegitimate way, which is sinful (even if it is not immoral). So the moral of the story is to recognize that God's imparted holiness to us is what meets this deep longing to be set apart for special use.

Something Paul said in the second reading provides an entry point to transition to the Gospel lesson. Paul said that the Corinthian believers were "awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:7). In the Gospel lesson from Mark Chapter 13, Jesus provides some important insight into just how that event will come about. This reading is from the portion of Scripture known as the Olivet Discourse because Jesus told it while on the Mount of Olives just across the Kidron Valley from the Jerusalem temple. In this passage, the Lord predicts the future destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and looks far beyond to the time when God will pour out His judgment upon the world just before He returns to usher in His Millennial reign. *Note: In order to provide the full context the entire first portion of the chapter that was skipped in the lectionary was included since it was so important in order to understand the entire context and the meaning that flows from it.*

> *1 As He was going out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, "Teacher, behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" 2 And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down." 3 As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew were questioning Him privately, 4 "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?" 5 And Jesus began to say to them, "See to it that no one misleads you. 6 Many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He!' and will mislead many. 7 When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be frightened; those things must take place; but that is not yet the end. 8 For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will also be famines. These things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. 9 But be on your guard; for they will deliver you to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them. 10 The gospel must first be preached to all the nations. 11 When they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit. 12 Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. 13 You will be hated by all because of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. 14 But when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION standing where it should not be (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. 15 the one who is on the housetop must not go down, or go in to get anything out of his house; 16 and the one who is in the field must not turn back to get his coat. 17 But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! 18 But pray that it may not happen in the winter. 19 For those days will be a time of tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never will. 20 Unless the Lord had shortened those days, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom He chose, He shortened the days. 21 And then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ'; or, 'Behold, He is there'; do not believe him; 22 for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect. 23 But take heed; behold, I have told you everything in advance. 24 But in those days, after that tribulation, THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS*

> *LIGHT, 25 AND THE STARS WILL BE FALLING from heaven, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken. 26 Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN CLOUDS with great power and glory. 27 And then He will send forth the angels, and will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven. 28 Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. 29 Even so, you too, when you see these things happening, recognize that He is near, right at the door. 30 Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. 32 But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. 33 Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time will come. 34 It is like a man away on a journey, who upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, assigning to each one his task, also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert. 35 Therefore, be on the alert–for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning– 36 in case he should come suddenly and find you asleep. 37 What I say to you I say to all, 'Be on the alert!'" (Mark 13:1-37)*

In order to understand the meaning of Jesus' message we must provide a brief overall grid of the end time (eschatological) events. First, although this prophecy was partially fulfilled with the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in AD 70, the final fulfillment will be in the future when the Old Testament prophecies regarding the "Day of the Lord" will be poured out upon the unbelieving world. During this time, the events of the end times will be marked with signs on earth, signs in the sky, and signs in heaven. It is important to understand that some events run in parallel throughout our current age up until the return of the Lord; other events run sequentially, such as those that play out during the tribulation period.

Parallel Events: Some of the events that run in parallel are as follows.

- The persecution of believers (verse 9)
- The overall decline of morality and godly living (2 Timothy 3:13). Both of these conditions will grow worse and the persecution of believers will intensify until the close of this age and the return of the Lord Jesus.
- An overall increase in natural and manmade disasters. Beginning in verse 6 Jesus moved to an overall description of the age preceding his return. This period was to marked by "wars and rumors of wars" (v. 6), earthquakes and famines (v. 8), world wars (v. 8) and by many false Messiahs (christs, v. 6) coming and saying that they are the Christ. Jesus said that the Gospel must first go out to the entire world (v. 10), which we see will be fulfilled by an angel in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 14:6), in spite of the best efforts of Christian missionaries to achieve this goal.
- The coming of many antichrists (v. 22). Many antichrists have arisen in our age including figures like David Koresh, Joseph Smith (Mormons), and Charles Taze Russell (JW's). An interesting one is the case of a man named Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson. This rabbi from New York was a very influential Jewish leader in the world. When he died in 1994 his

followers expected him to rise from the dead in you guessed it, three days. As of this writing, he is still in the grave.

Sequential Events: Other events follow sequentially, some of which are as follows.

- Jesus' prediction in verses 1-3 of the destruction of the temple, which was fulfilled in AD 70.
- A future "catching up" to meet Jesus in the air, first of the believers that have already died, then those living of the church to heaven as predicted by Saint Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

  "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)

  Once the church is removed from the world because "God has not appointed us to wrath" (1 Thessalonians 5:9) the cascading series of events known as the tribulation period will commence. The last half of the closing chapter of the tribulation period is known as the "Day of the Lord," and this is the emergency scenario that begins when Jesus warns the people in verse 15.

- Signs in the sky (vv. 24-25).
- The coming of the ultimate Antichrist spoken of by the Prophet Daniel and in the Book of Revelation. Saint John said in his day that many antichrists had already come (1 John 2:18), but the Bible predicts the coming of one known as the Man of Sin (2 Thessalonians 2:3). This is the one that will bring about the "abomination of desolation" described by Jesus in verse 14. This will mark the establishment of a global ruler known as the Antichrist (1 John 2:18, Daniel 7:8 "the little horn," Revelation 6:2 –the rider on the white horse), and the false holy spirit figure known as the false prophet (Revelation 13:11-15).
- The unveiling of God's judgments described in the Book of Revelation including the seven seals, trumpets, and bowls (Revelation 6, 8, 11, 15, 16). These are judgments of God as declared in Revelation: "You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve. … Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments" (Revelation 16:5-7).
- The unveiling of a powerful missionary force from God known as the "144,000 thousand witnesses" (Revelation 7:4).
- Supernatural protection of the Nation of Israel in a special place prepared by God (Revelation 12:6). This is the place to which Jesus is telling the people to flee in verse 14 when they see the Abomination of Desolation (refer to the next point below).
- The "abomination of desolation" (v. 14). This is when the Antichrist figure will establish himself as God and set up his own image in the temple to be worshiped. Paul said this about the Antichrist: "who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship,

so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God" (2Thessalonians 2:4). The Jews were familiar with something like this happening before when Antiochus IV Epiphanes sacked the temple and rededicated it to the god Zeus in 167 BC, and sacrificed a pig in the temple to his god. This "abomination of desolation" was a type of the one to come, a prefiguring of the time that the Antichrist would establish himself as god in the temple to be worshiped by everyone in the world, not just Jerusalem as happened in the earlier time.

- The destruction of the Antichrist's religious and civil empire known as "Mystery Babylon" (Revelation 18:2).
- Marriage Supper of the Lamb with all believers in heaven (Revelation 19:7)
- Return of the Lord Jesus to earth with his victorious church (Revelation 19:11-19).
- Antichrist and False Prophet thrown into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 19:20)
- Satan bound for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:3) then released for a final battle (Revelation 20:7)
- Satan thrown into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:10).

What does all of this mean for us today? First, Jesus cautioned His disciples to be aware of their future destiny so that they were living rightly today. By using the parable of the fig tree (v. 28), something with which the people in the Mediterranean region were very familiar, they could see the signs of the times and live in a watchful and purposeful way. In the same way that Jesus cautioned His disciples to beware of by watching for the signs, we can know that Jesus' return in imminent by watching the signs ourselves. This means that we should not delay in accomplishing the work that God has placed in our hearts to accomplish. For, "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). Second, because God's prophets so accurately predicted events that have already occurred, including Jesus' (the greatest prophet of all) prediction of the destruction of the temple, we can trust that the events will play out exactly as God as described in the Scriptures. Because God has so accurately predicted the future, we can trust Him when He tells us how to enter into an eternal relationship with Him through faith in His Son, the risen the Lord Jesus Christ. Finally, we can rest in the fact that everything is going to turn out fine for anyone who trusts in the Lord Jesus for salvation. Those with faith in the Lord can trust that even if they find themselves thrown into tribulation, be it the "Great Tribulation" or any tribulation, they can trust that no matter what happens it will turn out well.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. How does knowing how the Grand Story ends influence how you live today? What values do you have as a result of knowing that God wins in the end? What values do you want God to develop in you based on this knowledge of the end times?

2. The first two readings dealt with humankind's lack of righteousness (Isaiah) and the Corinthian's being called saints. Think about this contrast that is spoken about throughout the Bible. The worse the bad news is, the better the good news is. Explain why the coming of Christ to die on the cross for our sins is called "the good news." How has this become good news for your life?

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Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/113014.cfm

First Reading IS 63:16B-17, 19B; 64:2-7

Second Reading 1 COR 1:3-9

Gospel Reading MK 13:33-37

Source(s):

Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB