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 Sunday, 8-21-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **8-21-2016**. This week our first reading is from the final chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah. The passage is prophetic in nature, that is, it touches on events in the last days of God's plan for redemption. The second reading from the Epistle to the Hebrews deals with the very difficult subject of discipline and how God uses it in the lives of His children. Finally, we read more about Jesus' teaching ministry as He traveled through Israel. In this passage He includes some very hard lessons that are important for us to understand.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The book of Isaiah is like a small Bible. Chapters 1-39 speak of Israel in the midst of the nations (like the Old Testament, consisting of 39 books in many versions). Chapters 40-66 speak of comfort in the revelation of Christ (like the New Testament's 26 books). This last section begins with John the Baptist, climaxes in chapter 53 about the sacrifice of Christ, and ends with the Millennial Kingdom. Today's portion was written, perhaps, to educate Israel concerning the distant future with respect to the Messianic Kingdom of God and ultimate restoration of the nation.

First Reading:

Isaiah 66:18-21 NAS95 18 "For I know their works and their thoughts; the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and see My glory. 19 I will set a sign among them and will send survivors from them to the nations: Tarshish, Put, Lud, Meshech, Rosh, Tubal and Javan, to

the distant coastlands that have neither heard My fame nor seen My glory. And they will declare My glory among the nations. 20 Then they shall bring all your brethren from all the nations as a grain offering to the LORD, on horses, in chariots, in litters, on mules and on camels, to My holy mountain Jerusalem," says the LORD, "just as the sons of Israel bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD. 21 I will also take some of them for priests and for Levites," says the LORD.

In these verses Isaiah moves from speaking of God's judgment upon those who are unfaithful to Him to announce a future gathering of all nations. Representatives will come into God's presence and be introduced to His great glory. Then, they will be sent out to the nations of the world who have not known God. Someone has called this the Great Commission for Israel (similar to the Great Commission to the Church in Matthew 28). These "missionaries" will declare the glory of God to the nations.

The result will be a great migration, multitudes coming to Jerusalem, described as "My holy mountain." The text tells us that they will come in a variety of ways: "on horses, in chariots, in litters, on mules and on camels." Notably, God will choose some of these new believers to be priests and to be used in serving capacities for God.

One might well ask, "When will these things come to pass?" The answer would require a very careful study of prophetic Scriptures—both Old and New Testament texts—to be definitive. The Bible often speaks of a great tribulation in the end times, and many believe it is the saints (believers) who come out of that tribulation period who will be the messengers to bring to God those who had not yet heard of His love and grace and who, as a result of this witness, come into a relationship of faith in God.

No matter the timing of this prophecy, the recurring theme in this passage is God's glory. What is God's glory? "Glory" is a very difficult word to define because it does not represent a concrete object. It represents a quality or essence, much like the word "beauty." God's glory is the reflection of His beautiful and perfect essence, the manifestation of His unique and sought after presence. Glory is the positive reference to His attractive reputation, which is manifested in who He is and displayed in what He does. We get a sense of God's glory by the loving dynamic within the three persons of the Godhead, with His generous and gracious interaction with humankind (as recorded in Scripture), and in His display of exotic beauty and intricate design in nature (general revelation). God's glory has been on display for all to see in creation, so that Saint Paul says: "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse . . . Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man . . . " (Romans 1:20,22-23).

Responding to God's glory and living in light of this reality is an important part of a life well-lived, a life that has eternal qualities to it. In the passage of Isaiah, it is the distinct privilege of people to declare His fame and reflect His glory to those who do not know. In our lives, we have the privilege

to live for God's fame, and not our own on a daily basis. We can choose to order our lives around giving glory to God, or we can choose to exchange this opportunity in order to glorify self, honor the finite things of this world, or value what was created over the Creator Himself. Though the results are not always immediate, this passage reminds us that God's glory is worth pursuing.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The major theme of Hebrews is the pre-eminence of Christ. It involves some very important and deep theology, but it also includes very practical ideas about Christian living. In fact, the last three chapters give valuable teaching about walking in faith (ch. 11), walking with hope (ch. 12), and walking in love (ch. 13). Today's reading gives a helpful lesson about the value and necessity of discipline, which often may be painful but always serves God's good purpose.

Second Reading:

Note: Includes verses 8-10 omitted from the reading.

Hebrews 12:5-13 NAS95 5 and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; 6 FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES." 7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. 11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. 12 Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

The section begins with a reminder that discipline comes from God, and it happens in the lives of all Christians ("every son," v. 6). In fact, the very reality that God disciplines someone proves that person's sonship; he indeed belongs to God, because parents don't discipline someone else's children. It should be noted here that the words in the text express discipline and chastisement, not judgment and punishment. There is a difference.

Most people do not like pain and suffering, and we pray fervently to be rid of them. But, whatever the reason for the pain—whether it's the discipline of God or the consequences of natural infirmities, God can use the suffering for His good purposes. One writer, who has suffered a debilitating disease for many years, wrote: "If my parents could have stopped me from being afflicted by this disease, they would have. But God didn't, and He's the perfect Father, knowing what will make me a better person. Because of their love, my parents would more likely have insulated me from some of the greatest lessons of life that I could learn only through my suffering. Because of God's love for me, He

dare not withhold the pain and suffering."

But why is it necessary for God to discipline His children? What are God's motives? Unfortunately, many of us have been disciplined by an earthly parent out of impatience, sometimes to show us who's boss, or to get us to cooperate with their plan with no interest in our nurture. Some of the tactics that earthly parents wrongly use are guilt and shame, producing in us a fear of punishment and a surface compliance to the desires of the one with authority. If we view God like we view our earthly parents, then we have some soul work to do in order to trust God in the midst of His discipline.

God does not discipline His children in order to get begrudging compliance or in order to get even with wrongs we have done. God lovingly disciplines His children to help shape a worldview in our hearts that pries our fingers off of self-reliance, independence, and autonomous pride; and in exchange, opens our arms to embrace a God-reliant walk with Him. Saint Paul wrote of a time in his life where he was under so much affliction that he even despaired of life itself. As a result of this time of discipline, Paul internalized a deep reliance on God, saying: "we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead" (2 Corinthians 1:9).

In our immaturity (just like a child), we do not know how much we need our Father. We often live as if we are in charge and give a quick nod to God when we want to do well on an exam, need a new job, or feel like we are in a bind. But God, in His kindness, knows that this is low-level living in Him. Through having the proverbial rug pulled out from underneath us, He helps us to live in light of reality and recognize that we cannot do life on our own. In our disorientation and desolation, we desperately reach out for God's abiding presence and find our consolation in Him (not in our sense of control or carefully arranged circumstances). We begin to internalize His value system in our soul by living in dependence on Him, which is a "severe mercy" on God's part. God's motive is to bring life that is truly life (John 10:10) to us in the midst of His strategic and loving discipline.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

We hear a lot today about intolerance. We are urged to be tolerant of almost everyone and everything that someone might believe or do. Moral standards of right and wrong seem to have evaporated in modern society, and common sense has been replaced with personal preference. But, there is a standard; there is a right way, and everything contrary to that must be wrong. Jesus and Christianity are often criticized because of their claim that there is only one way to God. Today's reading emphasizes that truth in the teaching of Jesus Himself, who claimed to be that one way (John 14:6).

Gospel Reading:

Luke 13:22-30 NAS95 22 And He was passing through from one city and village to another, teaching, and proceeding on His way to Jerusalem. 23 And someone said to Him, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" And He said to them, 24 "Strive to enter through the narrow door;

for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. 25 Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, 'Lord, open up to us!' then He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know where you are from.' 26 Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets'; 27 and He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you are from; DEPART FROM ME, ALL YOU EVILDOERS.' 28 In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being thrown out. 29 And they will come from east and west and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God. 30 And behold, some are last who will be first and some are first who will be last."

Luke records important lessons from Jesus' teaching as the Lord makes His way to Jerusalem, where He is to suffer and die. He had told His disciples about His destiny, although they did not fully understand His plan of salvation until after the promised resurrection. Apparently, some had understood His teaching about the necessity to come to God through Him, and one asks Him specifically about it. Are there, he wonders, only a few that will be saved? Jesus answers by describing the entrance to faith as being "the narrow door." His further comments can leave no doubt about the exclusiveness of the way to God.

Not all who feel entitled to enter can do so. The "head of the house," no doubt a reference to God the Father, surely has the right to open and close the door to His own house, and knocking on the door will not achieve entrance if you are unknown to the householder. He makes it clear that past physical association with Him (eating and drinking, for example) is not sufficient. People also claim that they listened to Him teaching in their streets, but this is still not sufficient. Those who are actually entitled to enter are those who enter through the "narrow door." What is this narrow door that Jesus is referring to?

In the Gospel of John, Jesus answers the question by metaphorically referring to himself as the door to the sheepfold. Inside the sheepfold, the sheep are safe and find refuge. He said, "Truly, truly I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:7-10). It is clear from this and other parts of Scripture (John 14:6, Acts 4:12) that Jesus is the only entry point to eternal life.

It is clear, then, that apart from genuine trust in the grace of Jesus and His finished work at the cross, evidenced by His resurrection, there is no salvation. He indeed is the only way to God. Those who reject the opportunity to trust Him will weep and gnash their teeth when they see Israel's fathers and prophets in the kingdom and they themselves are left out. These words should bring them to repentance so they will be able to "recline at the table in the kingdom of God." The last—the down-and-outers, the ones who do not feel entitled—will be first in the kingdom because they have accepted the lordship of Jesus in their lives.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. The pinnacle of God's glory is displayed in His work of salvation accomplished through Christ's perfect life, His death and His resurrection. How has God's glory changed you from pursuing the corruptible things of this finite world to orienting your life around the incorruptible beauty of God's nature? Where do you see God's glory being displayed in your life's choices, attitudes, and values? Where would you like to see God's continued work in your life and through your life to reflect His glory?

2. How did your parents discipline you as a child? What tactics/motives reflected the heart of God and what tactics/motives did not reflect the heart of God? What parts of that experience do you need to exchange in order to embrace the loving discipline of God in your life? What seasons of discipline do you need to revisit in your mind and mentally process with this new perspective of God's heart for internalizing His value system in you? How can this perspective on God's discipline being part of our sonship be an encouragement for you and those you love to stay faithful to God in the midst of suffering?

3. Since Jesus was speaking metaphorically of entering through the narrow door, what does it mean to do this spiritually? How does this metaphor get lived out in your life? It might require a first-time decision to follow Him if you have never articulated your allegiance to Christ or it might require daily moments of trust to show your allegiance to Him as Lord. What would it be worth to you to recline at the table in the kingdom of God and be with the Old Testament saints for eternity? How might you grow in valuing this eternal reward over short-term gratification that gets in the way of reflecting God's glory.

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/082116.cfm

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 120

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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Mass Study Notes for Sunday 7-6-2014



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 7-6-2014. The first reading highlights a prophecy of Jesus who came humbly the first time riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. However, He will return a second time in justice and power to claim victory over a world entrenched in war against Him and His people. In the second reading, we encounter the contrast between those who had Jesus' Spirit living inside of them and those who are driven purely by their carnal, spiritually dead natures. As we move to the Gospel lesson, we will learn about how Jesus relied upon prayer to God the Father for His spiritual victory. The last reading gives us insight into the communication that occurred between these two Persons of the Godhead, which is a pattern for the type of communion that God wants with all of us (John 17:20-21).

The first reading is from the Prophet Zechariah. Zechariah was one of the twelve Minor Prophets, a term that indicates the size of their writings in contrast to the larger Books written by the Major Prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah. Zechariah wrote during the exile of the Jews to Babylon and returned to Jerusalem with Zerrubbabel, also known as Sheshbazzar (Ezra 1:8) the leader of the tribe of Judah. One of the things for which Zechariah is known is the prophecy of the flying scroll (Zechariah 5:1-11). This message symbolized the Word of God that had been disobeyed by Israel and

the moral components which were also broken by the entire world. The message called for judgment according to God's righteous rule. The context of the reading for today is during the reign of the Persian King Darius some two years before the Jews rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem. In Chapter 8 Zechariah had prophesied about what we know today as the return of the Lord Jesus to Jerusalem. He said, "Thus says the LORD, 'I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts will be called the Holy Mountain'" (Zechariah 8:3). Chapter 9 opens with a prophecy against the nations surrounding Israel followed by a pronouncement that God would deliver His people. "But I will camp around My house because of an army, Because of him who passes by and returns; And no oppressor will pass over them anymore, For now I have seen with My eyes" (Zechariah 9:8).

As you study the reading take careful note of the prophecy of the Coming King and remember Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on the day we call Palm Sunday (Mark 11:1-11).

> *9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, humble, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey. 10 I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem; and the bow of war will be cut off. And He will speak peace to the nations; and His dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. (Zechariah 9:9-10)*

In this prophecy, we see both advents of Jesus compressed into three short verses. Verse 9 contains Zechariah's prophecy that was fulfilled on the day that Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey on Palm Sunday. In verse 10, the tenor suddenly changed from one of a triumphal celebration of the coming Messiah to one of war. At Christ's Second Advent, He will cut off the world war (v. 10a) and "He will speak peace to the nations" (v.10b). Finally, Zechariah said that the territory under the reign of the king would range from the Euphrates River all the way around the earth.

The war about which Zechariah was speaking is the war that will come with the appearance of the man known in Scripture as the Antichrist. Saint Paul said, "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition" (2 Thessalonians 2:3). This "man of sin" will fill the world's vacuum for a leader and will seize power by intrigue (Daniel 11:21). We can take comfort in knowing that one day Jesus will return to the earth to usher in worldwide peace and bring in an era of justice. When we see wars and rumors of war all around us, this does not take God by surprise. He is waiting for the perfect timing to bring His Son back to rule and reign on the earth. Second, we can rest in the fact that although Zechariah probably didn't understand the prophecy that he wrote, he faithfully recorded it in the Scriptures. We can trust that the prophecies such as this one from Zechariah provide important, after-the-fact, confirmation of the accuracy of God's Word, even if they are hard to understand before the events have played out. This gives us confidence to follow God's Word, because we know that it is not manmade, it is supernatural.

The second reading today is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans. Paul opened Chapter 8 in

Romans by explaining the difference between a person that was born again through the Spirit of God and the one whose heart was set on the flesh (Romans 8:6). The believer, whose righteousness is found through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ, is in a right relationship with God. Paul said, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Romans 8:1). Next, he explained the significant contrast of the heart of the unbeliever. "For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8:6-8). This context is helpful in understanding the word "however" which serves as a contrast and opens today's reading beginning in verse 9. We included verse ten although it didn't appear in the reading.

> *9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. 10 If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. 11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. 12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh– 13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (Romans 8:9-13)*

Paul said that a person must have the Spirit of God dwelling in them in order to belong to Him. This is the same thing that Jesus explained to the Jewish ruler Nicodemus who came to Jesus at night, which I like to call "Nick at night." Jesus told him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3b-ff). Jesus and Paul taught the same very important scriptural truth, a person must be indwelled by the Holy Spirit of God in order to be one of His children. This indwelling happens the moment a person surrenders his or her life to Christ for salvation. Whether or not they sense anything tangibly, this is when the Holy Spirit comes to live inside of a believer. It is a mystery of God (John 3:8), but something we can be assured happens because of the reliability of God's Word.

Paul further explained that although the believer's body would die because of sin, their spirit was made alive (quickened) because of the righteousness of Jesus Christ imparted to them through faith (v. 10). Next, Paul gave words of hope for believers by saying that since Christ was raised from the dead someday our bodies will also be given eternal life (v. 11). Finally, Paul called believers to put to death the carnal, fleshly behaviors inherent in our sinful nature through the power of the Holy Spirit (v. 13).

It is important for us to pause here and contemplate what Paul said regarding the calling of believers towards holy living. "[F]or if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (v. 13). His teaching on this matter took the form of a set of "if then" conditional statements. **If** a person who doesn't have the Spirit of God lives according to the natural flesh, which of course is the only direction they know to

take, **then** they will die. But **if** you who are indwelled by the Holy Spirit (are born from again, born from above by the Holy Spirit, John 3:3) **then** you will have empowerment from God's Holy Spirit to live according to the purposes of the Spirit, who inherently has life. Jesus is the empowering force that lives within us through God's Holy Spirit, enabling us to turn from the natural inclinations of our sinful flesh and towards the things of the Spirit. It's not so much that God doesn't like unholy living and punishes it with death, it's more about the natural course of consequences that are inherent in the universe that God designed. He pleads with people to choose life, but often times we choose death (Deuteronomy 30:19). Paul makes a striking case for the ongoing growth of believers to become more and more like Christ, from the inside out, because we have a new relationship of grace with His Spirit who "teaches us to say 'no' to ungodliness" and calls us to righteous living (Titus 2:12).

The Gospel lesson is from Saint Matthew. The context of the lesson is when Jesus was traveling from city to city with the disciples (Matthew 11:1) to preach and teach. Jesus had some not-so-nice things to say about His experiences there. "Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent" (Mt 11:20). Jesus used several examples of the cities to which He had visited, then spoke about Capernaum, a town located on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, a town that possibly was the location of Saint Peter's home. "And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day" (Matthew 11:23). We pick up with the reading in verse 25.

> *25 At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. 26 Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. 27 All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. 28 Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Matthew 11:25-30)*

Here we see a prayer between God the Son and God the Father, given by Jesus in a public setting so as to provide the hearers with certain important spiritual insights. Remember that Jesus had just finished speaking about the urgent need for the people to repent. In His ministry, Jesus had taken over where John the Baptist had left off with this urgent call of repentance. Frequently the "wise and intelligent" (v. 25c) find it quite difficult to humble themselves and become like infants (v. 25c). God asks us to come to him humbly (Matthew 5:5) and rewards those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).

Jesus revealed several very important spiritual truths in this passage:

- God has given Jesus complete sovereign control over the earth.
- The only Person with a true understanding of God the Father is God the Son AND those to

whom God the Son has revealed Himself.

- Jesus has provided the believer a position of rest. We not only do not have to earn our salvation but we also may rest and trust in our righteous standing with God. We saw this in the second reading today from Romans 8 as well.
- The way of Jesus is easy compared to the way of the religious. In those days, the religious leaders were called Pharisees and they thought they earned their salvation by doing many religious things. In contrast, the believer's burden is light because the hard work that Jesus did in earning our salvation is already completed. Nothing can be added to it no matter how hard we work. Therefore, being yoked to Jesus provides freedom from the burdensome labor of religion.

Jesus' calling is to the humble people, like Himself, not proud ones who are "carnally minded" (Romans 8:6) as we saw in the second reading. In the same way that Jesus pronounced curses upon the nations that did not repent, God will one day pronounce judgment upon each unbelieving person who doesn't repent. "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Romans 8:13). We can rest in our faith in Jesus for He said, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Mathew 11:29-30).

Have a great week being yoked to Jesus.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. We read about the difference between a person who is "carnally minded" and one who is motivated by the Spirit of God. How can a person know that they are saved? Read the following verses and write down a few ways in which a person can know they are in a right relationship with God.

> *Romans 8:16-17: 16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.*
>
> *1 John 2:3-11: 3 By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4 The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; 5 but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: 6 the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. 7 Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard. 8 On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining. 9 The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. 10 The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. 11 But the one who*

> *hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.*

2. Pride is one of the things that keeps people from entering into a righteous relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Read the verses that follow and answer the questions below.

> *Proverbs 6:16-19: 16 There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: 17 Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises evil schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies, and a person who stirs up conflict in the community.*

> *James 4:13-15: 13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." 14 Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that."*

A. Why do you think that pride was first on the list of things which the LORD hates? How are all the rest of the evil things on that list connected to and/or generated by pride? In what ways does pride blind people to the scriptural truths of salvation through faith in Jesus?

B. In what ways do you identify with what did James said about the self-confident person? In light of your answer, how could you pray to look at things differently this week?

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/070614.cfm

First Reading ZEC 9:9-10

Second Reading ROM 8:9, 11-13 (plus skipped verses)

Gospel Reading MT 11:25-30

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 2-23-2014



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass Notes. This week we will be opening with a story about an encounter I had with two members from a certain religious group who were making the rounds one evening while I was visiting a friend. Then we will move onto the Book of Leviticus and learn something about God's calling for the Jews to be holy. Then we will continue our study in First Corinthians and finally conclude with further study from the Sermon on the Mount from Saint Matthew. There we will see a message that Jesus gave his disciples which culminated with a statement to them that they were to be perfect. How can anyone be perfect you may ask? We will address that and other things in the Mass Notes this week.

One night I was attending a dinner party at a friend's house in a nearby city. After dinner, we were sitting around talking and the doorbell rang. My friend left to answer the door and then suddenly called out, "Jim, it's for you!" Thoughts raced through my mind, who even knew that I was there, who could it be that wanted me while I was visiting someone else's house? I left the dining room and walked over to the front door only to be met by two young Mormon missionaries. These were of course not unique and matched the "cookie cutter" pattern with their nametags and backpacks. This was going to be an interesting night! After I introduced myself to the men, I prayed silently and asked God for the approach that I should take in order to introduce these boys to the *true* Gospel. As it turned out I had just completed a study of Mormon doctrine and it came to me that I should discuss the doctrine of perfection with them. I just so happened to have a Bible with me in my jacket and I asked them if they were familiar with Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount. I don't remember

their answer but I pulled out my Bible and asked them if they had time for a little Bible study because "You do believe in the Bible don't you?" Next, I asked them, "How good do you have to be to make it to heaven?"

They said something like, "We strive to be perfect." Nice boys they were.

I said that that was good because "Did you know that under the biblical Law Jesus taught that in order to be saved by being a good person you have to be perfect?" I opened up the Bible to Matthew Chapter 5 and read, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). I asked them what was their standard of perfection, just how good did they have to be to make it to heaven, and how would they know when they had reached this standard? They weren't sure about that, but said that they just had to keep on trying. The debate continued and I was able to show them God's true plan of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and not by good works. I explained to them how God emphasized the value of our good works, but that good works were not meritorious for salvation. I read to them Saint Paul's capstone statement on the matter:

> *8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)*

Paul's statement about the only way that people are saved (v.8a) is quite different from what is taught by the Mormon "church" that believes that they are saved by grace, but only *after all they can do*. This addendum is noticeably missing from the Word of God. Since salvation is a free gift from God that is obtained *only* through faith in the Lord Jesus we don't have to strive to be perfect in order to earn our salvation. Paul explained that the reason that God saved us was for the purpose of our good works. He didn't say that we were saved because of our good works. Although Christians are called to live holy lives through God's power a good Mormon is expected to triumph over sin in their own power, and this in order to earn their salvation. We can rejoice in the victory that God has given us over such a false belief system.

As we move onto the first reading, it's important for us to put our Old Testament hats back on and return to the culture of ancient Judaism. The first reading this week is from Leviticus Chapter 19. The Book of Leviticus is concerned with God's giving of the Law to Moses, and especially the ecclesiastical Law concerning sacrifices, offerings, and dietary Law. One of the overall purposes of the Law was to set the Hebrew people apart from the surrounding people. God said in the previous chapter, "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'I am the LORD your God. You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you; you shall not walk in their statutes" (Leviticus 18:2-3). However, the most significant purpose of the Law was to point people to the perfect sacrifice that would occur through the Lamb of God (Jesus) who would take away the sins of the world (John 1:29). Let's pick up with the reading today in Chapter 19.

> *1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 2 "Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, 'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. 17 You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him. 18 You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.'"(Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18)*

Several points arise from the reading. First, we see that God called the Hebrew Nation to be holy or set apart from sin and dedicated to the service of the LORD. Although we have all used and heard the word "holy" lots of times in our lives it's easy to gloss over the rich meaning of the word. In the reading God provided a simple reason why the Jews were to be holy when He said, "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy" (v.2b). This was God's appeal to His nature and a calling for the Hebrew nation to emulate his character. As we said above, one reason that God provided the Law was to set apart the Nation of Israel from the surrounding people. The word holy means to be set apart and the Jews were called to be a peculiar people, different from the idolaters in the pagan cultures that surrounded them. They were to be holy because they were God's chosen people and were to reflect His image of holiness to the world around them. As we saw two weeks ago in our study of the Sermon on the Mount, the concept of being "set apart" was to fulfil special purposes for God, not to live an ordinary existence. The Jews were set apart for the purpose to be salt and light to those around them.

Second, God set a high standard of love for one's neighbor. This standard would have been foreign to the people from the nations surrounding Israel. The Jews, and by application all believers including us, were not to hate our neighbor in their mind (v.17a), but were instead called to love their neighbors as themselves (v.18c), and were not to take vengeance against them (v.18a). He didn't mean that we had to just love our literal neighbors, but everyone. God set this high standard of loving behavior in stone, in the Law of the land for the Hebrew people. Which of us hasn't hated our neighbor at one time or another?

Third, God said that the Jews were not to take vengeance against their neighbors. This wasn't directed to soldiers in battle because God provided clear direction to the Jews regarding those matters (see for example Deuteronomy 2:34, 3:6, and especially Deuteronomy 20:16-18). This was directed to all of God's people who were given these specific examples of how to live out one's life in a status as "set apart." Saint Paul confirmed that the admonition against taking retribution in Romans and quoted the exact verse from Leviticus. "'Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:19). Although we may feel like we want to get even with someone for hurting us, God has given us a universal calling not to take action against a "neighbor" that has wronged us.

Back when I lived in a suburb in a large Midwestern city, I developed a strong dislike for the neighbor whose back yard adjoined the back of my own house. This particular neighbor, who I didn't even know, had a dog that he used to let outside to do his business. This dog would then bark endlessly until the neighbor let him back inside the house. This barking dog used to drive me

absolutely crazy and as a result I developed a strong dislike of my neighbor. One day out of the blue, I came up with a novel approach to solve the problem. The next time he let the dog out to bark (I mean to let him do his business!) I walked over to the fence and called to the dog, "here boy." I kept calling and sure enough, the dog came running over to the fence, jumped up wanted to be petted. I made friends with the dog that day and as a result found that I no longer disliked my neighbor either! In fact, after I moved away I actually missed my doggy friend. Why did it take me so many years to figure that out? This was a case where love did truly conquer the conflict with my neighbor. Now if I could just makes friends with my current neighbor's Akita!

How about you? Do you have some difficult people in your life to whom God is calling you to love, even though you don't have feelings of love for them? If you are His child, He will give you the ability to grow in loving even your enemies. Pray to God and ask Him to change your heart.

The second reading this week is a continuation of the study from last week in Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. In this reading, Saint Paul explains the concept of personal holiness. As you read try to imagine the sense that a First Century Jew would have had when Paul mentioned the phrase "temple of God" and how that would flavor their reading of this text.

> *16 Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are. 18 Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, "He is THE ONE WHO CATCHES THE WISE IN THEIR CRAFTINESS"; 20 and again, "THE LORD KNOWS THE REASONINGS of the wise, THAT THEY ARE USELESS." 21 So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, 23 and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God. (1 Corinthians 3:16-23)*

For a First Century Jew the temple in Jerusalem was the holiest and most sacred place on earth. We know from Jesus' ministry to the Jews that they had a difficult time understanding how the human body could be a temple (John 2:19). This was especially true not only because of the grandeur of the temple but also because the whole Jewish religious system revolved around the temple. But, when Jesus ushered in the church age he fulfilled the prophecy of Ezekiel. "And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 11:19). Our bodies are a holy temple, or shrine. Later in the same Letter Paul said, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?"(1 Corinthians 6:19). We are called to be holy because our bodies are a living temple of God.

In the next section, Paul prescribed humility for healing the divisions that existed in the Corinthian Church. What Paul is saying is that a person must be humble in order to learn. Paul quoted from Job Chapter 5 and Psalm 94 to make his point. Verse 10 that he quoted from Psalm 94 was sandwiched

between two verses that dealt with chastening. "10 He who **chastens** the nations, will He not rebuke, Even He who teaches man knowledge? 11 The LORD knows the thoughts of man, That they are a mere breath. 12 Blessed is the man whom You **chasten**, O LORD, And whom You teach out of Your law" (Psalms 94:10-12). Chastening can be God's way to bring us to a humble position. One of Paul's intents was to bring the chastening of the Lord to bear on the sin of division in the Corinthian church.

If we really believe that our bodies house God's Spirit, that has far-reaching implications for how we treat and use our bodies, as well as how we treat others. As we move onto the Gospel lesson for today consider Paul's statement in the second reading about our bodies being a temple. Ponder this as you read the text from the Sermon on the Mount in Saint Matthew Chapter 5. "Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16).

> *You have heard that it was said, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.' 39 But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. 40 If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. 41 Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. 42 Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you. 43 You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 48 Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:38-48)*

The opening quotation was from Exodus 21:24. As an interesting side note, this quotation in Exodus followed the warning from God about neglecting to honor your parents. The Jewish Law said, "He who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death" (Exodus 21:17). Even though Jesus came to fulfill the Jewish Law, and under the New Covenant the civil and ceremonial Law are no longer binding upon Christians, the principles found in the *moral* Law are behaviors which are upheld in the New Testament. This includes honoring our parents (Ephesians 6:2), though the penalty for disobeying this law is no longer the death penalty. Notice the word "but," a transitory (conjunction) term. Jesus said in effect, "The Law prescribed this (you have heard it said), *but* I say do that." Jesus wasn't contradicting the Law but was instead calling His followers to obey a standard *higher* than the Law. We will see that this calling wasn't limited just to the Jewish Law, but to the laws of their entire society.

Jesus also called His followers to recognize a higher standard than their religious Law found in the Pentateuch (the first five Books of the Bible). His called extended to the Roman Civil law as well. This fact came out in verse 41 when Jesus spoke about being forced to go one mile. The First Century Jews were living under Roman occupation and as a result were under certain laws falling under the category of "impressment." Although they weren't under a requirement by the Romans to

serve in a military function (conscription) they were required in certain circumstances to assist the Roman military. This could include being required to carry a Roman soldier's backpack 1,000 paces (a Roman mile). Jesus' outrageous call was to show the Roman soldiers generosity by going beyond the legal requirement. This principle of "going beyond the law" runs throughout the Gospel lesson for today.

Next, Jesus quoted from Leviticus 19, the text that we studied in the first reading. He said that you should love your neighbor (v.43) but go beyond this and love your enemies and those who persecute you (v.44). Jesus' mention of "enemies and those who persecute you" could be an allusion to the Romans and the impressment laws. The Romans were the enemies of the Jews, which was a condition that came to a head with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70, then again in AD 132.

Who are the "Romans" in your life? How might you go beyond obligation and actually go the extra mile?

The culmination of Jesus' radical call to go beyond the requirements of the law to perfection was found in verse 48. Take careful note of the adverb "therefore," and ask yourself "what is it there for?" This word is "there for" because it linked Jesus call to a radical new behavior to the source of the empowerment for His people to achieve it. Jesus said, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). I asked the Mormon missionaries, how can anyone, even Jesus' own disciples be perfect? If we look further ahead in the Sermon on the Mount to Matthew Chapter 6, it seems apparent that by this point in Jesus' message the crowds had begun to rejoin Him and were hearing His message. This is evident because of the way the tone changed when He introduced practices that were typical of the Pharisees in 6:1-2. He said to "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them" (6:1a) and "So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets" (6:2a-b). Although Jesus' disciples may have had difficulties in controlling their personal behavior (as we do), they certainly didn't warrant Jesus' label of "hypocrites." No, Jesus reserved this label for His nemesis, the group known as the Pharisees. Now, with this context in mind let's read verse 48 in Chapter 5 again. How does Jesus love His "enemies" the Pharisees? Jesus said to the Pharisees and His disciples who were also listening, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." The Pharisees were hypocrites and many evidently thought that they were already perfect through their strident observance of the Law (Matthew 23:5-7). The Scripture clearly states that nobody can be made perfect under the Law, "for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). What the Pharisees didn't understand was that perfection was only possible through faith in Jesus Christ. Saint Paul said, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2Corinthians 5:21). Jesus provided the Holy Spirit to live within us as the source of our *spiritual* perfection. This spiritual perfection manifests itself in our radical obedience to God in going above the prescription of the eternal moral laws and the prevailing civil laws of our society. It's not that we won't ever sin but that our ongoing intention is to accomplish the work of God by being salt and light even to our enemies, the "Roman soldiers" in our community.

In summary, as Christians Scripture calls us to go beyond the law. Christians are called not only to observe the civil law (Romans 13:1-3) but to follow a standard above this body of law as well as a higher standard than the moral law that God has written on our hearts (Romans 2:15). God has provided us with His empowerment to follow this higher standard through the gift of the Holy Spirit Who is given to every believer who obeys (Acts 5:32).

> *8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)*

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the Gospel lesson we said that as believers our spiritual perfection manifests itself in radical obedience to God in going above the prescription of the eternal moral laws and the prevailing civil laws of our society. Answer the following questions.

> A. Who are the "Roman soldiers" in your life? Is it your neighbor with their relentless barking dog? Has a city official ruled against you in a zoning dispute? Did a police officer nail you in a speed trap at the bottom of the hill in your village? Is your spouse eroding the feelings of love you once felt? Are you tired of changing an elderly person's diaper? Is your coworker stealing your joy in the workplace?
>
> B. How does knowing that God lives in your heart change the way that you view your enemies?

2. If holiness (being set apart) is God's vision for created human beings, then how might you cooperate more fully with God's plan?

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/022314.cfm

First Reading LV 19:1-2, 17-18 (Plus extra verses for Context)

Leviticus 19:1-18 NAS95 1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 2 "Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, 'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. 3 'Every one of you shall reverence his mother and his father, and you shall keep My sabbaths; I am the LORD your God. 4 'Do not turn

to idols or make for yourselves molten gods; I am the LORD your God. 5 'Now when you offer a sacrifice of peace offerings to the LORD, you shall offer it so that you may be accepted. 6 'It shall be eaten the same day you offer it, and the next day; but what remains until the third day shall be burned with fire. 7 'So if it is eaten at all on the third day, it is an offense; it will not be accepted. 8 'Everyone who eats it will bear his iniquity, for he has profaned the holy thing of the LORD; and that person shall be cut off from his people. 9 'Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 'Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the LORD your God. 11 'You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another. 12 'You shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the LORD. 13 'You shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning. 14 'You shall not curse a deaf man, nor place a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall revere your God; I am the LORD. 15 'You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly. 16 'You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people, and you are not to act against the life of your neighbor; I am the LORD. 17 'You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him. 18 'You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.

Second Reading 1 COR 3:16-23

1 Corinthians 3:16-23 NAS95 16 Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are. 18 Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, "He is THE ONE WHO CATCHES THE WISE IN THEIR CRAFTINESS"; 20 and again, "THE LORD KNOWS THE REASONINGS of the wise, THAT THEY ARE USELESS." 21 So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, 23 and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God.

Gospel Reading MT 5:38-48

Matthew 5:38-48 NAS95 38 "You have heard that it was said, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.' 39 "But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. 40 "If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. 41 "Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. 42 "Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you. 43 "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.' 44 "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 "If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 48 "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Source(s):

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

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Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 1-19-2014



This week we will open with another of Isaiah's "Servant Songs." Last week we looked at the first of these prophetic messages contained in the first reading from Isaiah 42, and the fourth of the Servant Songs in the study question from Isaiah 53. We will look at the introduction to Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians them move onto the Gospel lesson in which we will see the event when John the Baptist announced the promised Messiah.

The first reading is from Isaiah 49, the second of the Servant Songs in which God the Father addressed the Nation of Israel as a personification of His Servant, and secondly He spoke to His Son the Messiah. As you read, take note of the purposes of the servants, the servant Israel and the Messiah Servant that whom we know as Jesus.

> *3 And He said to Me, "You are My Servant, Israel, In Whom I will show My glory." 4 But I said, "I have toiled in vain, I have spent My strength for nothing and vanity; Yet surely the justice due to Me is with the LORD, And My reward with My God." 5 And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, in order that Israel might be gathered to Him (For I am honored in the sight of the LORD, And My God is*

> *My strength), 6 He says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth." (Isaiah 49:3-6)*

The first purpose of the servants was to restore the Jews to God. The LORD said to His Servant Son that He "formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, in order that Israel might be gathered to Him" (v.5b-ff). Though Israel was the God's servant (v.3, "My Servant Israel," this Servant Son was born with the express purpose of restoring the people of God to true communion with Him. Jesus said in the Gospel of Saint Matthew, "How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling" (Matthew 23:37).

The second purpose of the servants was to be a light to the Gentiles so that "My salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (v.6d). The mechanism through which the restoration came wasn't through Israel, but through Jesus. As we will see later in the second reading, the Church temporarily usurped the role of Israel as a light to the nations, a condition which will be restored during the Great Tribulation. Jesus said to His disciples, "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" (Matthew 28:19-20b). We see that the Church is yet the third servant of God. In spite of the temporary unbelief of some of the Jews, Israel's disobedience was used by God to bring light to the Gentiles through the ministry of this third servant, the Church of Jesus Christ. Saint Paul said that, "a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" Romans 11:25c). The Church hasn't replaced Israel, because once God has completed his divine plan through the refining fire of the tribulation period all of Israel will be obedient to Him. Paul said, "[A]nd so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB" (Romans 11:26).

The discussion of the Church as the servant of God brings us to the second reading from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. Paul, a servant of God for the Gentiles (Romans 15:16) brought his message to this ungodly and carnal city of Corinth. The reading is from the opening section of Paul's first message to them. In this very important message his overall purposes were to deal with some divisions in the church, address some serious moral issues, defend his apostolic authority, and to specifically answer several questions from a letter they sent to him (1 Corinthians 7:1). As you read try to keep in mind the purposes of the servant Paul in the same manner we did in the first reading from the Servant Song in Isaiah.

> *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 upon 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. (1 Corinthians 1:1-3)*

Here is some background about Sosthenes mentioned in verse 1. This man, whose name means

"safe in strength" and pronounced "sose then ace" was likely the amanuensis who wrote the Book for Paul, meaning the one to whom Paul dictated it through the inspiration of Holy Spirit. It's likely that this scholar was a man of high standing in the church, and also the converted synagogue ruler who is mentioned in Acts 18:17. If this is the same man then he is the one who likely replaced the former ruler Crispus (Acts 18:8) who also became a believer in the Lord Jesus. Though Sosthenes probably wrote down the Letter, Paul added a greeting "in his own hand" at the end (! Corinthians 16:21).

Just as we did when we studied the Servant Song of Isaiah in the first reading, we will cover the purposes of the servant Paul in the opening of First Corinthians. The first purpose of the servant Paul was to speak to the church with the authority of God. He said he was "an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God" (v. 1a). Later in Chapter 3 he said, "What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave [opportunity] to each one" (3:5). It's significant that Paul opened the letter with a statement of authority which stated that his role was ordained by God (v.1a). He made the same statement in the openings of Second Corinthians (2 Corinthians 2:1), Ephesians (Ephesians 1:1), and Colossians (Colossians 1:1). This stamp of authority was very important in order for Paul to be able to speak with God's power to the Corinthians who were struggling with a variety of difficult issues in their church. In fact there was open immorality in the church with a man who was having a sexual relationship with his stepmother (5:1).

The second purpose of the servant Paul was to affirm the holiness (or sainthood) of all true believers (v.2c). Paul affirmed this in the Letter to the Romans when he said, "to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints" (Romans 1:7). The idea behind the usage of this particular word translated as "saint" from the original is holiness, meaning to be set apart. This means that one should be morally pure or blameless, unique from the ordinary culture that does not view human beings as much different than animals. Some Bible versions have used the word "holy" instead of "saint." Either way, the people of God are both called to *be* holy and are affirmed *as being* holy in Paul's opening statement. This "already, not yet" call to holy living is echoed throughout the Epistles. Through belief in Jesus the righteousness of God *has been* imparted to a believer (Romans 3:21-22). However, God calls believers to live righteously on an ongoing basis. Paul said in Romans, "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, **acceptable to God**, which is your spiritual service of worship (Romans 12:1, emphasis added). So we may remark that someone is a "saint" when they display unusual patience or kindness, but truly each child of God is a saint. Let's live up to this glorious calling in our moment by moment choices, attitudes and lives.

The third purpose of God's servant Paul was to affirm and call for the unity of the church. Paul said, "with **all who in every place** call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, **their Lord and ours**" (2d, emphasis added). Unity in the church was one of Paul's most important purposes as later in Chapter 1 he launched into this critical topic for the Corinthians. He said, "Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Corinthians 1:10).

He continued, saying, "For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's [people], that there are quarrels among you" (v.11). Later in the Letter Paul explained the importance of unity in the Church. He said, "For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ" (12:12). Then, he extended this analogy to a theoretical conversation between parts of the human body. "If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,' it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body" (12:15). Since the human body has to be united in order to function, the Church of God must also be unified in their purpose.

As we move onto the Gospel lesson, keep in mind how Paul spoke with the mind of God when he announced his purposes in the opening of the Letter to the Corinthians. In the opening verse of the lesson today from Saint John Chapter 1, John the Baptist, whom Jesus called the greatest man that ever lived (Matthew 11:11), announced the beginning of the ministry and purpose of Jesus Christ. He also affirmed his authority as one who was appointed as the forerunner and witness of Jesus' baptism by both water and the Holy Spirit.

> *29 The next day he saw Jesus coming to him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.' 31 And I did not recognize Him, but in order that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water." 32 And John bore witness saying, "I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. 33 And I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' 34 And I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the Son of God." (John 1:29-34)*

John the Baptist affirmed Jesus' mission to the world when he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (v.29b). The use of the word picture "Lamb of God" would have alerted those familiar with the sacrificial system the nature of Jesus' mission. By His death on the cross, He made the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. But we must accept this sacrifice on our behalf for it to save us. Have you recognized Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away your sin?

John announced that although he was baptizing with water (as a sign of the people's repentance from sin), Jesus would baptize in a different way, with the Holy Spirit of God (v. 33d). This baptism of the Holy Spirit is the gift that Jesus left the Church. Jesus said, "And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; [that is] the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, [but] you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you (John 14:16-17).

A second purpose of John was that he affirmed his personal humility and faith in God's announcement concerning the Messiah. He said, "And I did not recognize Him" (v.33a). Does this means that the even the greatest man that ever lived didn't immediately recognize the Messiah? He certainly knew Jesus as a person, but not as the Messiah, until it was revealed to him explicitly by

God through the fulfillment of the prophecy concerning the way in which the Holy Spirit would come upon the Promised One. Imagine the life of John the Baptist. From the day he was born, he was told by his parents and then through divine messages from God in the form of the Old Testament Scriptures that he was to be the one that announced the long awaited Messiah. Then when Jesus actually arrived on the scene to begin his public ministry he stated that he didn't recognize Him as the Messiah until God granted him a divine revelation that this was indeed the One whom he was expecting.

How about us, are willing to humbly admit our inability to see Jesus? Do we trust in God's word concerning Him, as John the Baptist did? It's like the little boy Johnny who always wanted to be a fireman, in a region that hadn't had a fire in hundreds of years. His parents told him he would be a firefighter. His friends told him he would be a firefighter. When he graduated high school, he enrolled in training to be a firefighter. One day the alarm bell rang in the training center and he knew that he was going to see a real fire. When he got there, he said, "Boy, I have never actually seen a fire before, that doesn't look like a fire." At that the fire chief said, "Johnny, that's a fire," which quickly settled the matter. Johnny may have looked a bit silly in front of his classmates, but he truly spoke what was on his mind. John the Baptist, whose whole short life was dedicated to the express purpose of the forerunner of the Messiah, the one to announce His ministry; was in a similar spot. When he saw Jesus he didn't recognize Him right away as the Messiah. But, when God spoke the matter was confirmed once and forever.

Let's be humble like John the Baptist and admit we need eyes to see the reality of the Messiah as we read Scripture and we live our lives. Since God wants to reveal the Messiah, He will help us to see with fresh awareness the glory of Jesus as the Messiah and what a difference He can make in our lives even today.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. What about us, what has God raised us up to be watching for? What are the purposes that God has placed upon *our* hearts as servants of the Lord?

2. If all true Christians are "saints" how does that change your view of your life's purpose and meaning? How can you live into the identity of being set apart for special use?

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/011914.cfm

First Reading IS 49:3, 5-6 (plus skipped verses)

Isaiah 49:3-6 NASB 3 And He said to Me, "You are My Servant, Israel, In Whom I will show My glory." 4 But I said, "I have toiled in vain, I have spent My strength for nothing and vanity; Yet surely the justice due to Me is with the LORD, And My reward with My God." 5 And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, in order that Israel might be gathered to Him (For I am honored in the sight of the LORD, And My God is My strength), 6 He says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Second Reading 1 COR 1:1-3

1 Corinthians 1:1-3 NASB 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 upon 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.

Gospel Reading JN 1:29-34

John 1:29-34 NASB 29 The next day he *saw Jesus coming to him, and *said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30 "This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.' 31 "And I did not recognize Him, but in order that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water." 32 And John bore witness saying, "I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. 33 "And I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' 34 "And I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB