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, 5-15-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **5-15-2016**, Pentecost Sunday. We open with the first reading from Acts that chronicled the Day of Pentecost when God sent the Holy Spirit to indwell the believers in the early church. Then we move onto the second reading from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians and discuss the gifts of the Spirit. We conclude with the Gospel lesson from Saint John where we will examine what it means when Jesus said, "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained" (John 20:23).

Introduction to the First Reading:

The theme of the readings this week goes like this: In the first reading, we see God's sending of the Holy Spirit to the church. In the second reading, we see the revelation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Finally, in the Gospel lesson we find the commissioning by the Holy Spirit for all believers to spread the Gospel message. Let's begin with the first reading from the Book of Acts. This is the record of the momentous day on which God sent the Holy Spirit to indwell the believers in fulfillment of Jesus' promise (John 14:17). This event occurred fifty days after Jesus had risen from the dead and ten days after Jesus returned to heaven.

First Reading:

1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were

sitting. 3 And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance. 5 Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. 6 And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language. 7 They were amazed and astonished, saying, "Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? 9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs–we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God." (Acts 2:1-11)

God's sending of the Holy Spirit fulfilled what Jesus had predicted when He said that he wouldn't leave the believers as orphans (John 14:18). The Holy Spirit is the Person who empowered the disciples to turn from hiding in the upper room to being bold speakers in the name of Jesus. Notice how the first ministry of the Holy Spirit was to cause the disciples to speak in various languages in such a way that the Jews from around the world heard them in their own language (v. 6). It's not known whether each of the disciples spoke a different foreign language or if they spoke some sort of holy tongue that the foreigners were able to understand. Jesus had earlier told the disciples, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you" (John 14:26). This first ministry of the Spirit was to spread the Gospel to the foreign Jews gathered for Pentecost by allowing them to hear the Gospel message in their own language. Their testimony was that "we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God" (v. 11).

We cannot overstate the importance of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. His ministry through the believers in whom He dwells is important not only for spreading the Gospel around the world but also for empowering us to accomplish all of the purposes of God in our lives. As we move to the second reading from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians we see some of the gifts sent to us by the Holy Spirit.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The context of the second reading from 1 Corinthians is Paul's teaching on spiritual gifts. The opening verses of chapter 12, from which today's reading are drawn make this clear and provide some important contextual information. "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware. You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to the mute idols, however you were led" (1 Corinthians 12:1-2). It's interesting how Paul wrote about how the Corinthian non-believers were pagans whereas by implication these new believers were non-pagans. Their conversion to Christianity resulted in a change of character, from pagan idolaters "led astray to mute idols," to those transformed by the renewing of their minds (Romans 12:2). Today's reading opens with the word "therefore" which provides a logical linkage to the people whose lives were

transformed by God through their conversion by faith in Jesus Christ.

Second Reading:

3 Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. 4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. 6 There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. 7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. 12 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. 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:3-13)

In this reading, Paul cataloged some of the gifts of the Spirit and said that the purpose of the gifts was "for the common good" (v.7). Although this was not an exhaustive list of the gifts (see also Ephesians 4:7-13 and Romans 12:3-8) they included wisdom and knowledge (v.8), faith (v.9a), healing (v.9b), miracles (v.10a), prophecy (v.10b), discernment of spirits (v.10c), speaking in tongues (v.10d), and interpretation of those speaking in tongues (v.10e). Later in the reading, Paul stated that although the gifts of the Spirit were diverse with everyone having a different gift, they were delivered by God in such a way as to work perfectly together in the whole body of the church (vv. 11-13). Even though not everyone would have the same gift, the diversity of gifts among the believers would accomplish God's purposes through the unity of the believers (v.13). For example, only certain people were given the gift of prophecy, meaning either the ability to foretell future events or more prominently in the New Testament context to forth tell through the preaching of the Scriptures. In today's age, some of the gifts that Paul listed are more prevalent than other ones. During the early church immediately after God sent the Holy Spirit certain gifts such as tongues and healing were very important as "sign gifts" that greatly increased the spread of the Gospel to a culture thoroughly immersed in the worship of idols. God used these sign gifts in a powerful way as we can see in the first reading with the empowerment of the disciples to speak in various languages.

As we move onto the Gospel lesson we will see how God the Holy Spirit commission the believers in the early church to spread the Gospel. The context of the reading from John Chapter 20 is the evening of the first Easter Sunday when Jesus' first appeared to the disciples who were gathered together in the upper room with the doors locked. This didn't stop Jesus, who was able to walk right through the wall or door by exercising His divine power with His new glorified body. Only ten of the disciples were present as Thomas "The Twin" didn't see Jesus until the next time the whole group was gathered together (John 20:26) and Judas had already given up hope and killed himself.

Before we read the text, since the central focus of the lesson will be on the concept of the forgiveness of sin let's review what God's Holy Word says about this crucially important subject. First, God says that everyone, except for Jesus, is a sinner. Paul said in Romans, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Second, God says that because of our sin, we deserve the penalty of death; having sinned against a Holy God Who is completely separate from sin. Paul said, "for the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a). We can never enter into the presence of our Holy God because we are sinful. The only way that we can enter into a relationship with God and be in His presence when we die is to have our sin forgiven by God. Third, there is good news. Paul continued in Romans 6:23, "but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23b-ff). Finally, only God can forgive sin. In Luke's Gospel Jesus was confronted by the Pharisees after he proclaimed the forgiveness of a paralyzed man's sins and they challenged Jesus authority to forgive sin. In response Jesus said, "Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins have been forgiven you,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But, so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, –He said to the paralytic—'I say to you, get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home'" (Luke 5:23-24). Though Scripture tells us to "confess our sins one to another" (James 5:16), only God can forgive sin. Jesus came to the earth as God in the flesh for the express purpose of dying on the cross for our sin (Romans 4:25). "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Paul explained later in Romans Chapter 10 how to receive the free gift of eternal life through the forgiveness of our sin:

that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. 11 For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; 13 for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED." Romans 10:9-13

We see that the forgiveness of our sin is free gift of God that comes by believing the good news of the Gospel. Jesus gave the disciples, and by application every Christian, what is called the Great Commission to preach this message about the forgiveness of sin. Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20). This is the Gospel, meaning good news, that Jesus instructed his believers to preach to the world for the forgiveness of sin.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading records one of Jesus' post resurrection appearances to His disciples. Let's read what happened that Sunday evening when Jesus made a surprise visit to the disciples gathered in the upper room.

Gospel Reading:

19 So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." 22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained." (John 20:19-23)

What did Jesus mean when he said in verse 23, "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained"? The key to understanding Jesus' teaching in verse 23 is found in the previous two verses. Jesus said "as the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (v.21b). Next in verse 22 He promised that God would send the Holy Spirit. This "sending" or "commissioning" of the disciples (and all believers) is one of the main purposes of the church as expounded in the Great Commission. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20). The binding and unbinding of sin is found in the gift of faith (Ephesians 2:8-9) when a person comes to the knowledge of Jesus Christ as their Savior. Jesus said, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" (John 3:36). Jesus instructed these ten men that anyone who believes in Him through the preaching of the Gospel will be saved, just as we saw in Romans Chapter 10. The interpretation of Scripture must always be consistent with the whole counsel of God's Word.

What do the three themes we discovered in the readings today mean in our lives? First, God sent the Holy Spirit to indwell His believers in order to accomplish His purposes. He sent a diversity of gifts to a diversity of people in such a way that it forces the Church to work together as the Body of Christ. Second, God commissioned all believers, not just the ten disciples that were gathered in the room at Pentecost, to fulfil His Great Commission. This means that everyone that believes is to work to spread the Gospel message and to disciple believers, recognizing that not everyone will be gifted in either of these two particular areas. Some will be called to teach, and some to evangelize. You can rest assured that if you truly commit your heart to the Lord that you won't automatically be called by Him as a missionary in Africa. However, you can be assured that God will call you to use whatever spiritual gift(s) that He has given you to your fullest ability.

As I am writing this week's study, I just returned from the funeral service of a friend back in our hometown. The man who passed away was quite young (his mid-50's) and was a lifelong believer in the Lord Jesus. As I have been reflecting upon his life, one of the things that stands out to me is his faithfulness. Although God gifted the man in various ways, he used these gifts in serving him faithfully up until he got sick and died quickly. Although he was a simple and uncomplicated man, he was always faithful in helping others. Although God doesn't call everyone to do the same things for Him, He does call us to be faithful in using the gifts that He has given us.

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

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Although we looked at part of the list from First Corinthians today, the full list of spiritual gifts can be found in three passages: Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:8-10; 28-30, and Ephesians 4:11. Read each of the other passages and see if you can locate the full list of spiritual gifts: Administration, Knowledge, Apostleship, Leadership, Discernment, Mercy, Evangelism, Miracles, Exhortation, Pastor/Shepherd, Faith, Prophecy, Giving, Serving/Ministering, Healing, Teaching, Interpretation of Tongues, Tongues, and Wisdom.

Romans 12:6-8 NAS95 6 Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; 7 if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; 8 or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

1 Corinthians 12:28-30 NAS95 28 And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. 29 All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? 30 All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?

Ephesians 4:11 NAS95 11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,

2. What is your spiritual gift or gifts? One of the best ways to understand your gifting is to ask other believers for sometimes we cannot clearly recognize our own gifting. Another way it to use one of the many varieties of spiritual gift tests available online. Here is a link to one that I have found useful: http://www.churchgrowth.org/cgi-cg/gifts.cgi?intro=1

In what ways are you using your particular gift to serve God?

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/051516-pentecost-day.cfm

Pentecost Sunday, Mass during the Day, Lectionary: 63

Source(s):

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

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_05-15-2016.pdfDownload

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 5-10-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **5-10-2015**. This week discuss the concept of abiding in Christ during the Gospel lesson. What does it means to abide in Christ?

First Reading

The first reading is from the Book of Acts. The context is just after God had shown Peter in a vision that all food was good for him to eat; he no longer had to obey the kosher laws observed by the Jews. As we will see, the meaning of Peter's vision went far beyond just the food laws. At about this same time, a God fearing centurion from Caesarea saw a vision of an angel who commanded him to send for Peter who was in Joppa. This man named Cornelius sent some servants to Peter who then traveled back to Caesarea. The reading opens with Peter entering Cornelius' house.

Note: We have included the verses that were omitted in the reading and bolded the ones that were covered in the Mass.

Acts 10:25-48 NAS95

25 When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped him. 26 But Peter raised him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am just a man."

Omitted:

27 As he talked with him, he entered and found many people assembled. 28 And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean. 29 That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for. So I ask for what reason you have sent for me." 30 Cornelius said, "Four days ago to this hour, I was praying in my house during the ninth hour; and behold, a man stood before me in shining garments, 31 and he said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. 32 'Therefore send to Joppa and invite Simon, who is also called Peter, to come to you; he is staying at the house of Simon the tanner by the sea.' 33 "So I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. Now then, we are all here present before God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord."

34 Opening his mouth, Peter said: "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, 35 but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.

Omitted:

36 The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all) — 37 you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. 38 You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. 39 We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. 40 God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, 41 not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. 42 And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. 43 Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins."

44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. 45 All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. 46 For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, 47 "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?" 48 And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.

Cornelius' immediate response to seeing Peter is to worship him, an action that Peter immediately forbid because "I too am just a man," he said. This is similar to what happened when John bowed down to worship the angel in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 19:10, and again in Revelation 22:9). In the latter case, the angel sternly warned John saying, "Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God" (Revelation 19:10). In any case, Cornelius was obviously overcome by Peter, either because of his sincere expectation of finding a great man, or perhaps because of some spiritual aura that emanated from him. Remember, Cornelius had just seen a vision of an angel telling him to locate Peter. As the story continues, Peter explained how God revealed to him the deeper meaning behind the vision he had seen. In verse 34, Peter explained how the Prophet Isaiah foresaw that God's plan of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ wasn't limited just to the Jews but extended to anyone who believed (v. 34, Isaiah 42:6). Peter's speech came after he had seen a vision of a great sheet descending from the sky and filled with animals that were ceremonially unclean to the Jews (Acts 10:9-16). In this vision, God commanded Peter to "kill and eat," and said that these animals were not to be regarded as clean because they had been cleansed by God (v. 15). In order to further emphasize the importance of this vision God repeated it three times. Therefore, when Peter met with Cornelius and heard about the miraculous events that had happened with him too seeing a vision from God (in the form of an angel) Peter understood that the plan of salvation had been extended to the Gentiles. In the New Testament era the church has stepped in where Peter left off, proclaiming the message of salvation to everyone, not just to the Jews, as was Peter's primary ministry.

At the conclusion of the reading, an amazing thing happened which was the pouring out of the Holy Spirit of God on the Gentiles who were present in the room and came to believe in Jesus Christ through Peter's preaching. Peter's immediate response to this marvelous event was to command the new believers to be baptized (vv. 47 – 48). These events confirmed Peter's testimony that the plan of salvation extended to both Jews and Gentiles alike (vv. 34 – 35), and opened the door for the explosive growth of the new church throughout the Roman world. As Gentile believers we may be tempted to take it for granted that the plan of salvation extended to anyone who believed. However, we must remember that God chose the Jews for the unveiling of His divine plan and the ultimate revelation of Jesus Christ. Saint Paul taught us that after the Jewish Jesus was martyred for His faith and rose from the dead, God allowed "a partial hardening [to happen] to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" (Romans 11:25).

Second Reading

I remember a conversation that I had many years ago with a woman who claimed she was "spiritual" but wasn't a Christian. Although I was a faithful attender of Sunday Mass, I didn't know how to debate the meaning of what she called "spirituality" versus what constituted Christianity. I have remembered our interaction over the years, to the extent that I can even recall where we were when she told me this. In recent years, I have come to the understanding that much of what purports to be spiritual is decidedly un-Christian. In the introduction to the second reading, we will look at the nature of beliefs that are opposed to Jesus Christ. Then with this understanding of the context, we will learn about love in the context of the true believers.

The second reading continues from First John, which we studied last week. This week we move to chapter four in which John explains in the opening verses before today's reading the nature of false spirits including the Antichrist. False spirits are those that "[do] not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world" (1 John 4:3). True spirits are those "that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" (1 John 4:2). Next, John comforts the believers by telling them, "You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world" (v. 4). There is a sense that a spirit of Antichrist inhabits anyone who doesn't believe in Jesus Christ, and therefore opposes God, while believers are much different. There is no middle ground, either you are for Jesus or you are against Him. John continues, "We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error" (v. 6). There is great dichotomy between believers who confess that Jesus is the Messiah from God, and those that deny this. The first group is called the children of God (1 John 3:1), the latter group is of the spirit of the Antichrist. With this dichotomy in mind, let's proceed to the reading.

1 John 4:7-10 NAS95 7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

In the reading, we see why the context is so important in understanding the meaning. John further expanded upon the theme that he began in chapter 4, the differences and nature of unbelievers as contrasted with believers. Believers "love one another," are "born of God" (see John 3:3), and "know God" (v. 7). In contrast, anyone "who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (v. 8). Next, John explains that "the love of God was manifested in us," that through Jesus "we might live through Him" (v. 9), meaning the love and power that flows to us through His Holy Spirit Who was given to us the moment we believed. We saw this happen in the first reading when the group was assembled in Cornelius' house. When they believed after hearing Peter's preaching, they were given power from on high, in fulfillment of the promise Jesus made to His disciples (Luke 24:49). Finally, John reminded his readers that the greatest expression of love wasn't that the believers loved God, but that God loved them by giving His one and only Son for their sins (vv. 9 – 10).

Gospel Reading

The first two readings logically connect with the Gospel lesson in which we see Jesus' teaching on the nature of a believer's love of God. The context of the reading is Jesus' parting words to His disciples during the Last Supper.

John 15:9-17 NAS95 9 "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. 10 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. 11 These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full. 12 This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are My friends if you do what I command you. 15 No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. 17 This I command you, that you love one another."

Several important points can be drawn from the reading. First, notice how Jesus opened this section with the conditional phrase, "If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love" (v. 10a). The word "love" that appears multiple times throughout the reading beginning in verse 9 is a form of the word "agape" which refers to love that exists between Jesus and God. Jesus said rhetorically that if you love Him then you would follow His commandments. In the Jewish mind, the "commandments" would have referred to the whole of the Jewish Law including the Ten Commandments. However, later Jesus summed up the whole of the Law by the following statement, "This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you" (John 15:12). Jesus expressed the greatest love of all by giving His life for our sin. He said in verse 13, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." We are to express our keeping of the law by loving one another with Jesus sacrificial love as our example.

Second, notice the number of repetitions of the word "abide" in the reading, which gives us the main point of this Gospel lesson. Jesus uses the word "abide" three times in verses 9 through 10. Anytime we see a repeated word, it means we must give it special attention, as Jesus was intentional in using this word so many times in such a short span. The word "abide" in the original text primarily means to dwell, but also to stay, remain, be true to, or persevere. Read verse 9 again, but when you do substitute some of these alternative words. *"Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; **abide** in My love. 10 If you keep My commandments, you will **abide** in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and **abide** in His love" (emphasis added).* God calls us to stay in Christ, in submission to Him, and not to stray. This means to follow His commands with Him as the Master and center of our lives. Through having this focus we will experience the love of God that He desires for our lives.

Finally, notice the number of times that Jesus referred to Himself by using the pattern of words

"My," "Me" or "I" followed by "you." Here are the first two:

- "Just as the Father has loved **Me**, I have also loved **you**" (v. 9)
- "If you keep **My** commandments, **you** will abide in **My** love" (v. 10)

From this, it is evident that in His farewell discourse Jesus is telling His disciples (and us) that He is the one and only true pattern of love. "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you" (v. 9). As the Father loved the most worthy Jesus He then loved His most unworthy disciples. In the same way, Jesus loves us even though we too are unworthy of Him. For it is "by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The famous spiritual author Henri Nouwen had perhaps the firmest grasp of the concept of abiding of anyone this side of heaven. He said about Jesus' invitation to abide in Jesus verse 10 that it was "an invitation to total belonging, to full intimacy, to an unlimited being with." As true disciples of Jesus, we don't approach Him only to experience His love. Instead, we remain (abide) as a branch connected to the vine in order to bear much fruit (v. 16). Unless we abide we cannot bear fruit, in the same way that a branch cannot bear fruit unless it remains completely attached the vine. It is through this intimate connection that we may experience the fullness of Christ's love for us.

If you haven't read any of Henri Nouwen, I would encourage you to read *The Way of the Heart*: Henri J. M. Nouwen (Ballantine, 2003). In this short book, he has helped many Christians to better understand the concept of abiding in Christ.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. As you journey through life this week, ponder Jesus' invitation to abide in Him. What does that look like in your life? What small changes could you make this week to begin a closer journey with abiding in Jesus? Is there anything that is standing between you and abiding in Jesus?

2. In the Gospel lesson we saw how Jesus referred to Himself by using the pattern of words "My," "Me" or "I" followed by "you." Make a list of all of the times that Jesus said that in the reading. Read over your list several times. What can you learn from Jesus in this list in terms of both the proofs and results of His love?

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/051015.cfm

First Reading ACTS 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48

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

Second Reading 1 JN 4:7-10

Gospel Reading JN 15:9-17

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 5-25-2014



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 5-25-2014. This week we open with the first reading from the Book of Acts and then move to the second reading where we continue to study in First Peter. Finally, we conclude with the Gospel lesson from John 14. The notes this week will be brief as we are traveling in France with a group of students for the purpose of experiencing French culture.

The first reading is from Acts Chapter 8. In order to understand the context we will back up to the beginning of the chapter. As we read from the section, remember that this picked up after the stoning of Stephen whom we read about last week.

> *1 Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 Some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. 3 But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison. 4 Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word. (Acts 8:1-4)*

The persecution of the church resulted in the believers being spread about the region thereby further spreading the good news of the Gospel. The man named Saul, the one later known as Paul, brought about this unintended consequence. God continued to work in the church in a mighty way in spite of Saul's persecution.

The reading for today skipped verses 9 to 13. We included those verses in order to provide a clearer picture of what was happening after Philip began preaching the Gospel to the half-breed people known as the Samaritans, ones that the Jews considered unclean.

> *5 Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them. 6 The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing. 7 For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed. 8 So there was much rejoicing in that city.*

> *[Omitted Section:]*

> *9 Now there was a man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; 10 and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, "This man is what is called the Great Power of God." 11 And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts. 12 But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike. 13 Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed.*

> *14 Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, 15 who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. 16 For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:5-17)*

Philip's ministry to the Jews was extremely important because it marked a turning point at which because of persecution on Jerusalem the church began spreading to the Gentile world. This began first with the mixed-breed people known as the Samaritans. This was a group of people that were left over after the exile of the Northern Tribes of Israel during the Assyrian invasion in 722 BC. Even though they had some similar religious beliefs as the Jews, they were excluded from the ministry of the temple in Jerusalem. What happened in the reading was that many from this group of people believed in Jesus. As a result, Peter and John came to Samaria in order to confer on them the Holy Spirit. Second, they commissioned these new believers for service by laying hands on them (v. 17). The big idea is that anyone, either Jew or Gentile, and even a person of the half-breed race of Samaritans can believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and have their sins forgiven. The story about Simon the magician provided additional testimony to the fact that anyone cane believe and be saved, even someone that was formerly practicing magic By application, anyone can believe in Jesus today and be saved through belief on the Lord..

The second reading continues the teaching from First Peter. The context of the text is Peter's instruction about righteous living as a Christian while undergoing persecution.

> *15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; 16 and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. 17 For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong. 18 For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; (1 Peter 3:15-18)*

Peter taught that even when Christians are undergoing persecution they still to be prepared to give testimony for the hope that they have through faith in the Lord Jesus (v. 15b). The way in which believers are to testify is with gentleness and reverence (v. 15c) such that those that are attacking their faith may learn from it such that they too come to faith in Jesus. Peter cautioned that it is better to suffer for doing good than to receive just punishment for doing wrong, such as breaking a civil law. We must remember the example of Jesus Who was put to death for our sins in order to bring us into a right position with God (v. 18).

The Gospel lesson is from Saint John and like last week the context is once again Jesus' parting words to His disciples during the Last Supper.

> *15 "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. 16 "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; 17 that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. 18 "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19 "After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also. 20 "In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. 21 "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me;*

> *and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him." (John 14:15-21)*

Several important points can be drawn from the reading. First, notice how Jesus opened this section with the conditional phrase, "If you love me" (v. 15a). The word in the original translated "love" is a form of the word "agape" which refers to love that exists between Jesus and God. Jesus said rhetorically that if you love Him then you would follow His commandments. In the Jewish mind, the "commandments" would have referred to the whole of the Jewish Law including the Ten Commandments. However, later in John Jesus summed up the whole of the Law by the following statement. "This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you" (John 15:12). Jesus expressed the greatest love of all by giving His life for our sin. He said, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). We are to express our keeping of the law by loving one another with Jesus sacrificial love as our example.

Second, when you examine the reading, you will see that the word "commandments" exists twice, once at the beginning and another time at the end. This "bounding" can be a clue to a central mean that exists between the two mentions of a concept of word. In the case, the central truth that emerged from between the two words is God's revelation of the sending of the Holy Spirit, something that happened fifty days from that first Easter Sunday on the Day of Pentecost. Sandwiched in the middle of this pronouncement is another of Jesus famous "I am" statements that indicated His unity with God the Father. Here we see Jesus testimony that not only is He one with the Father, but He is also one with the Holy Spirit.

Third, notice what Jesus said about the nonbelieving world. He said about the Holy Spirit that He "is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him" (v. 17). When Jesus did rise from the dead He only revealed Himself to a select group of people. Saint Paul said, "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). The unbelieving world has been blinded to the identity of the Person of the Holy Spirit through their inherent sin (Romans 3:23) along with the work of Satan and his agents.

How does the Gospel lesson today impact our lives? The sending of the Holy Spirit to live within us is God's fulfillment of the promise not to leave us as orphans (v. 18). The Person of the Holy Spirit is one of the ways that God works through us as we strive to strive to as Peter said in the second reading to be ready to make a defense to everyone who asks us to give an account for the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15). This "Spirit of Truth" (John 14:17) works to correct the world's false teachings about the way for people to make it to heaven when they die. He does this through living inside of believers and through the inspiration of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16). The Spirit also helps us to understand the Bible. Jesus said, "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come" (John 16:13).

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

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Names in the Bible impart significant meaning to the person to whom they are assigned. List the names that Jesus revealed for the Person of the Holy Spirit. What are some qualities that can be ascertained from Jesus' use of these particular names?

2. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is critically important in the lives of believers. Read John 16:7-14. Summarize the ministries of the Holy Spirit disclosed by Jesus to His disciples in that text.

3. In verse 20 Jesus said, "In that day." To what Day what Jesus referring to? Could Jesus have had a dual fulfillment in mind when he used this term? If so, how would the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost have partially fulfilled this prophecy?

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 5-4-2014



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 5-4-2014. This week, as we did last week, we will open with the Gospel reading. Then we will move onto the first reading from the Book of Acts and then close with the continuing study from First Peter.

The Gospel reading is from Chapter 24 of Saint Luke, which recounts the story of two men who met the risen Lord Jesus on the road

to Emmaus, a city located seven miles northwest of Jerusalem. The context of the reading is just hours after Mary Magdalene reported the news to the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead. A lot happened in the early hours of that first Easter morning. Mark and Matthew tell us that Jesus first appeared to Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9, Matthew 28:9). According to Saint Paul, Jesus appeared to Peter at some point after Mary (1 Corinthians 15:5), and before the meeting with the eleven disciples, the timing of this appearance to Peter isn't known. The next appearance was to the men we will read about in Luke's account below. Not much is known about the exact identity of the two men. One of them is named Cleopas, about whom there is a tradition that he was the brother of Joseph, the husband of Jesus' mother Mary. The other person wasn't named.

> *13 And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 And they were talking with each other about all these things which had taken place. 15 While they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself approached and began traveling with them. 16 But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him. 17 And He said to them, "What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?" And they stood still, looking sad. 18 One of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, "Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?" 19 And He said to them, "What things?" And they said to Him, "The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, 20 and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. 21 But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened. 22 But also some women among us amazed us. When they were at the tomb early in the morning, 23 and did not find His body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said that He was alive. 24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just exactly as the women also had said; but Him they did not see." 25 And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" 27 Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. 28 And they approached the village where they were going, and He acted as though He were going farther. 29 But they urged Him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is getting toward evening, and the day is now nearly over." So He went in to stay with them. 30 When He had reclined at the table with them, He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight. 32 They said to one another, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?" 33 And they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them, 34 saying, "The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon." 35 They began to relate their experiences on the road and how He was recognized by them in the breaking of the bread. (Luke 24:13-35)*

The men testified that they knew about the report of the empty tomb (v. 24) and they had heard that Jesus was alive (v. 23). Somehow, their eyes were blinded to the reality of Jesus walking with them (v.16). It wasn't until Jesus ate with them that their eyes were opened to the reality of Jesus' identity (v. 31). Next, they immediately returned from Emmaus to Jerusalem in order to tell the disciples about their experience with their risen Lord (v. 33). By the time they made it back to Jerusalem it

was Sunday evening. Luke said that the two men found "the eleven" gathered together, but we know that Thomas wasn't present and didn't see the risen Lord Jesus for eight more days (John 20:26). Possibly Thomas stepped away before the two men arrived, or Luke used the term "the eleven" in a general sense. Nevertheless, the two testified that Jesus really had risen from the dead, and confirmed that Peter had also seen Jesus (v.34, 1 Corinthians 15:5). The two men humbly recounted that it wasn't until Jesus broke the bread with them that they recognized Him (v.35).

The big ideas behind the Gospel lesson are first, Jesus is alive, and His resurrection was affirmed not just by his disciples but by others. We can rest in the fact that the biblical account of Jesus' resurrection is true in part because it includes unflattering details about the behavior of people. The men on the road to Emmaus didn't recognize Jesus even though He explained the things concerning Himself to them (v. 27). Second, Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies concerning His coming. The Prophets predicted Jesus birth, life, death and resurrection in amazing detail. As a student of the Bible we have to be willing to admit that prophecy is much easier to interpret after the predicted events have occurred. When we read the story of the two men on the road to Emmaus, we know the secret that they didn't understand until later. The Prophets themselves struggled with these same things. Peter said in 1 Peter, just before the section we will be reading later today, "As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow" (1 Peter 1:10-11).

Because of the complexities and nuances of the prophecies, I have oftentimes wanted to hear Jesus' explanation of the biblical prophecies to the two men. I have spent many hours pondering the Old Testament prophecies concerning Jesus with the significant advantage of hindsight of Jesus' death and resurrection. However, the men on the road to Emmaus didn't have the advantage of hindsight, their minds were buzzing with the events of the past several days (vv. 18-24). Finally, since the prophecies fulfilled concerning of the coming of the Lord Jesus are true, we can trust in the future fulfillment of the prophecies concerning Jesus' return. We can rest assured that Jesus will gather His elect when He comes to claim His Church. Paul said, "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus" (1Thessalonians 4:14).

Before we move onto the first reading, let's briefly look at the conclusion to the story of the two men on the road to Emmaus. As amazing as the story was about how the two men didn't recognize Jesus while they walked all the way to Emmaus and began to have dinner with him is what happened next in the two verses beyond the end of today's reading. Luke continued the account of the events that occurred after the men returned to Jerusalem to testify to the disciples:

> *36 While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst. 37 But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. 38 And He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." (Luke 24:35-39)*

The closing of this story brings out a fourth theological truth from the lesson. Jesus is alive in the flesh, not just in the Spirit. In the same way, one day we too will be alive in the flesh. Job said prophetically in the oldest Book in the Bible, "As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, And at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, Yet from my flesh I shall see God; Whom I myself shall behold, And whom my eyes will see and not another. My heart faints within me!" (Job 19:25-27). We can rejoice in the fact that one day we will receive a glorified body similar to Jesus (1 John 3:2). Beyond that, the whole world will pass away and be restored to a new, beautiful creation (Revelation 21:1).

As we leave the Gospel lesson and move onto the first reading, we return to Acts Chapter Two and the era of the newborn Church. Peter, the uncontested leader of the Faith, set up boldly fulfilling Jesus' commandment to build His Church (Matthew 28:16-20). The context of the passage occurs 40 days after Jesus' resurrection. He was with his disciples, now called "apostles" teaching them about the kingdom of God. At the end of 40 days, Jesus ascended to heaven, leaving them with the charge to wait in Jerusalem for the power of the Holy Spirit. When the apostles were gathered to celebrate the Jewish Feast of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came from heaven and gave them the ability to speak in other known languages for the benefit of proclaiming the truth of the Good news of Jesus' death and resurrection. There were many Jews who were in Jerusalem for this festival, and, amazingly enough; they were able to understand the disciples who were speaking in their native language. It was a miracle, a sign from God that he was in their midst. But some mocked and said that the men were drunk. In the confusion of all of this, Peter got up and explained what was happening. As you read, take note of the words with capitalized letters, noting that these reflect quotations from the Old Testament Scriptures. Also remember what you learned from the Gospel lesson in terms of how Jesus fulfilled so many biblical prophecies.

> *14 But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words.*
>
> > **See Note Below [Omitted verses: 15 "For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day; 16 but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: 17 'AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,' God says, 'THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND; AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHESY, AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS, AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS; 18 EVEN ON MY BONDSLAVES, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, I WILL IN THOSE DAYS POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT And they shall prophesy. 19 'AND I WILL GRANT WONDERS IN THE SKY ABOVE AND SIGNS ON THE EARTH BELOW, BLOOD, AND FIRE, AND VAPOR OF SMOKE. 20 'THE SUN WILL BE TURNED INTO DARKNESS AND THE MOON INTO BLOOD, BEFORE THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD SHALL COME. 21 'AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.']*
>
> *22 "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God*

> *with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know– 23 this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. 24 But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. 25 For David says of Him, 'I SAW THE LORD ALWAYS IN MY PRESENCE; FOR HE IS AT MY RIGHT HAND, SO THAT I WILL NOT BE SHAKEN. 26 'THEREFORE MY HEART WAS GLAD AND MY TONGUE EXULTED; MOREOVER MY FLESH ALSO WILL LIVE IN HOPE; 27 BECAUSE YOU WILL NOT ABANDON MY SOUL TO HADES, NOR ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY. 28 'YOU HAVE MADE KNOWN TO ME THE WAYS OF LIFE; YOU WILL MAKE ME FULL OF GLADNESS WITH YOUR PRESENCE.' 29 Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 And so, because he was a prophet and knew that GOD HAD SWORN TO HIM WITH AN OATH TO SEAT one OF HIS DESCENDANTS ON HIS THRONE, 31 he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO HADES, NOR DID His flesh SUFFER DECAY. 32 This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. 33 Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. Acts 2:14-33*

Several points arise from the text. First, note that although Peter did present firsthand testimony about Jesus resurrection (v.32) he based most of his address on Jesus' fulfillment of the Old Testament prophetic Scriptures. This makes sense, since Peter is addressing a primarily Jewish crowd. He reasoned with them based on their frame of reference for the expectations of the Messiah. Second, Peter compared the biblical patriarch David with Jesus, saying that King David was still buried in the famous tomb, but since Jesus rose from the dead there was no such tomb for this King. To this very day nobody celebrates the burial place of Jesus. Instead, people visit Jerusalem to view a grave that is very much empty! Third, Peter explained that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Davidic promises, the One whom God had exalted to His very right hand. This means that Jesus is exalted by God the Father to a position of the highest possible favor with God, a place of extreme power and sovereignty. Fourth, Peter's address was yet another occurrence of the biblical phenomenon "but God," something which has vast significance, but especially so in regards to God's only means of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Peter used this phrase (v.24a) just before he explained the miraculous events that had happened over the course of the past fifty days. The phrase occurs frequently throughout the Bible. In fact, a search through the Bible reveals that the phrase occurs at least 42 times, here are some highlights:

- "But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark" (Genesis 8:1)
- "But God said, 'No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him'" (Genesis 17:9)
- "But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol, For He will receive me" (Psalm 49:15)

- "Who can forgive sins, but God alone?" (Luke 5:21c)
- "But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power" (Acts 2:24).

Finally, the text from Saint Peter's address in the reading today:

Jesus is the Capstone of the "but God" statements in the Bible! But for God's plan of salvation through Jesus' sacrifice once and forever (Hebrews 10:12) all of us would be destined to an eternity apart from God because of the necessity of the payment of our sin debt to our Holy God (Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, Matthew 7:19). Let's pause for a moment and reflect upon some of the "but God" moments that have occurred in our own lives.

For our context, this passage in the book of Acts brings an important implication of the truth of "but God" to our lives. One theological truth is that Jesus' death was not an accident, but was the definite plan of God. If God was able to use this ultimate injustice to bring about our salvation, isn't it possible that He could use unresolved and unjust circumstances in our own lives for his redemptive purposes? We have a hard time trusting that God can work all things together for good, but this is a shining example of God's great ability to turn evil on its head and gain the victory. Let us pray for God to do this in our own confusing circumstances and insert the mentality of "but God" into our perspective.

We conclude the study notes for today with the reading from 1 Peter. Peter addressed some of the same points that we discussed earlier in his address in the Book of Acts.

> *17 If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth; 18 knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, 19 but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. 20 For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you 21 who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. (1 Peter 1:17-21)*

First, Peter emphasized the great and eternal value of Jesus' blood that He shed for us. He said that we ought to guard our behavior carefully (v. 17) because of the great price that Jesus paid for us through His blood. God paid a ransom for us (v. 17, "redeemed"), and that price was His Son Jesus. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Second, Peter affirmed the eternality and glory of Jesus as the One "foreknown before the foundation of the world" (v. 20a) who made a brief, physical appearance on earth in order to bring us hope through His resurrection from the dead (v. 20). Finally, Peter emphasized the necessity of faith for salvation (v. 21). While the Jews exercised faith through the Old Testament sacrificial system, this verse points out the New Testament understanding of that system: faith is the basis for reconciliation and relationship with God. As we

saw in the Gospel reading today with the 2 men on the road to Emmaus, even though glimpses of the way to God had been provided to the Jews through the prophetic Scriptures, it took Jesus to explain it to them for them to be able to understand. The Jewish sacrificial system prefigured the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus on the cross at Calvary. Jesus was the Passover Lamb, the one slain since before the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8). In the same way that the disciples of Jesus didn't understand salvation through His sacrifice, we too require the explanation found in the New Testament for us to discover the only means of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.

What does all of this mean to you as you walk with Jesus throughout your daily lives? First, but for God we would still be in our sins and the way to God would be closed. If we live with the truths of God in mind as we face challenges, we can find delight in them to know that God will work all things together for our good (Romans 8:28). Second, we must remember that even if men that spent several years with Jesus, or the Prophets themselves, didn't immediately understand God's plan of salvation through Jesus we too must not expect to become biblical scholars without study and leaning upon the wisdom of God through the inspired Scriptures. God calls us to study the Bible, for it is "precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, there a little (Isaiah 28:10). It's okay if we don't instantaneously comprehend deep insights and chiastic structures in the Bible! It's not that we lack information, but that we need to rely upon the Holy Spirit for interpretation and application. Jesus said, "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come" (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit was the blessing that flowed out from God at Pentecost, a gift that put us in a privileged position above the Prophets, and even the angels (1 Peter 1:12).

---

*The section that was omitted in the reading dealt with Peter's proclamation that the coming of the Holy Spirit was a *partial* fulfillment of the Prophet Joel's prophecy. Paul also quoted from Joel's prophecy when he said in Romans, "anyone who calls upon the Name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. We noted in the reading from the Book of Acts Peter's use of the phrase "but God" and followed up with a challenge to examine your life to recall some of your "but God" moments. We wish to extend this challenge to you by asking you to pray that God would bring one or two of these circumstances back to your memory. Share this testimony with someone who you sense may need your testimony of how God worked in your life.

2. Spend some time thanking Jesus for being the Lamb of God, redeeming you with His precious blood. What do you think would be a proper personal response to St. Peter's challenge to "conduct

yourselves in fear" ("fear" meaning sober reverence for what has been done on your behalf)?

For Further Study

For those that are on Facebook, consider posting a paragraph on the Christians for Christ Facebook page regarding one of your "but God" moments. You can find this site online at:

https://www.facebook.com/ChristiansForChristMinistries

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/050414.cfm

First Reading ACTS 2:14, 22-33 (plus *skipped verses*)

Acts 2:14-33 NAS95 14 But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words.

15 "For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day; 16 but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: 17 'AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,' God says, 'THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND; AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHESY, AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS, AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS; 18 EVEN ON MY BONDSLAVES, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, I WILL IN THOSE DAYS POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT And they shall prophesy. 19 'AND I WILL GRANT WONDERS IN THE SKY ABOVE AND SIGNS ON THE EARTH BELOW, BLOOD, AND FIRE, AND VAPOR OF SMOKE. 20 'THE SUN WILL BE TURNED INTO DARKNESS AND THE MOON INTO BLOOD, BEFORE THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD SHALL COME. 21 'AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.'

22 "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know– 23 this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. 24 "But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. 25 "For David says of Him, 'I SAW THE LORD ALWAYS IN MY PRESENCE; FOR HE IS AT MY RIGHT HAND, SO THAT I WILL NOT BE SHAKEN. 26 'THEREFORE MY HEART WAS GLAD AND MY TONGUE EXULTED; MOREOVER MY FLESH ALSO WILL LIVE IN HOPE; 27 BECAUSE YOU WILL NOT ABANDON MY SOUL TO HADES, NOR ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY. 28 'YOU HAVE MADE KNOWN TO ME THE WAYS OF LIFE; YOU WILL MAKE ME FULL OF GLADNESS WITH YOUR PRESENCE.' 29 "Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 "And so, because he was a prophet and knew that GOD HAD SWORN TO HIM WITH AN OATH TO SEAT one OF HIS DESCENDANTS ON

HIS THRONE, 31 he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO HADES, NOR DID His flesh SUFFER DECAY. 32 "This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. 33 "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.

Second Reading 1 Peter 1:17-21

1 Peter 1:17-21 NAS95 17 If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth; 18 knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, 19 but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. 20 For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you 21 who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

Gospel Reading LK 24:13-35

Luke 24:13-35 NAS95 13 And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 And they were talking with each other about all these things which had taken place. 15 While they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself approached and began traveling with them. 16 But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him. 17 And He said to them, "What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?" And they stood still, looking sad. 18 One of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, "Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?" 19 And He said to them, "What things?" And they said to Him, "The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, 20 and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. 21 "But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened. 22 "But also some women among us amazed us. When they were at the tomb early in the morning, 23 and did not find His body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said that He was alive. 24 "Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just exactly as the women also had said; but Him they did not see." 25 And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" 27 Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. 28 And they approached the village where they were going, and He acted as though He were going farther. 29 But they urged Him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is getting toward evening, and the day is now nearly over." So He went in to stay with them. 30 When He had reclined at the table with them, He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight. 32 They said to one another, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?" 33 And they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them, 34 saying, "The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon." 35 They began to relate their experiences on the road and how He was recognized by them in the breaking of the bread.

Source(s):

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

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 4-27-2014



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 4-27-2014. Since this Sunday marks the first week after the celebration of Easter, the readings for today are focused upon the activities that occurred immediately after Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Since the grave could not hold Jesus, if we have faith in Him we can trust that someday we too will rise from the dead with an incorruptible body. This week we are beginning with the Gospel lesson in order to accentuate some of the themes that emerged from the Saint John's message. Then we will move onto the first reading from the Book of Acts and conclude with the second from First Peter, a study that will continue for the next several weeks.

The Gospel lesson is from the Gospel of Saint John. The context is just the evening of the day we call Resurrection Sunday, or Easter. Mary Magdalene had just told the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead.

> *19 So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were*

> *shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and *said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." 22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained." 24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." 26 After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." 28 Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." 30 Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:19-31)*

The focus of the reading was Thomas' doubt and then his subsequent faith upon physically experiencing the resurrected Christ. As we saw in the second reading, Jesus proclaimed a blessing upon those that have not seen but yet have believed "v. 27d-e." The key point of the passage though was stated in the last two verses. "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" vv. 30-31).

Several other points can be drawn from the text, First, notice that Jesus entered the room without knocking, without even opening the door; He just walked right through the wall! Talk about a grand entrance, and it's no wonder the disciples were scared. The point is that Jesus had supernatural powers in His new, resurrected and glorified body. Second, although Jesus' resurrection body was different in it's capabilities, there was a one to one correspondence between Jesus' body that was crucified and laid in the grave and His resurrected body. Jesus' appearance to the disciples in His resurrection body served as a foretaste of the body that all believers will receive one day when Jesus returns. Jesus will be forever recognizable by the scars given to Him during His earthly lifetime. Though we will never be God, we will become **like** Him. Saint John said, "We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is" (1 John 3:2b). Third, since it was before the sending of the Holy Spirit the disciples were "in fear of the Jews" (v.19c). This contrasted greatly with what we read about the disciples and first believers in the first reading. Though we may fear those that persecute us, we, like the early Church, have the Holy Spirit of God living in us to give us boldness and hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3). Finally, Jesus was gentle with Thomas even though he expressed doubt among circumstances that

we may consider compelling for him to believe. Since Jesus treated Thomas with such concern even though he doubted Him, we can be sure that Jesus walks with us through seasons of our own doubt.

Jesus bore the scars of His torture and crucifixion even after His resurrection. Although we don't know to what degree **we** will bear the scars of our own humiliation from men upon the earth, we can be certain that God will use our scars as an eternal testimony of our deliverance from the powers of darkness. We can rest assured that "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

Let's move onto the first reading from Chapter 2 of the Book of Acts. This Book was written by Luke, a physician and close companion of Saint Paul, sort of as a continuation of the Gospel by his name. Luke said in the opening chapter of Acts, "The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen" (Acts 1:1-2). When Doctor Luke said, "the first account," he was referring to the Gospel of Luke that he addressed to a certain man named Theophilus. Luke's "orderly account" (Luke 1:3) presented in his Gospel record included exact details concerning the birth and life of Jesus and continued all the way to Jesus' ascension to heaven (Luke 24:51). The Book of Acts retraces just a bit back to the point where Jesus promised He would soon send the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). The overall timeframe of the events recorded in Acts was from the beginning of the disciples' apostolic ministry to the world and concluding with Paul's arrest and subsequent journey to Rome for his trial.

A lot had happened by the time we reach the end of chapter 2 where we pick up with today's reading. Jesus had already been taken up to heaven in a cloud (Acts 1:9). Afterwards, Peter addressed a gathering of about 120 believers (Acts 1:15) with the purpose of telling how Judas' betrayal of Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies and then appointing the traitor's replacement. Lots were cast and Matthias was chosen to hold the twelfth seat (v. 26). The Day of Pentecost had come and the promised gift of the person of the Holy Spirit had been sent (2:1-3). This event launched the full-scale ministry of the apostles to the Jews, which later extended to the Gentiles and the whole world. As you read the text try to imagine the whirlwind of events that had just happened.

> *42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. 44 And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; 45 and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. 46 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)*

The Church at this point was largely communal, and marked by the lavish outworking of God through spiritual gifts and miracles. Though the disciples (except for John) had previously fled from Jesus during his arrest now they ministered with magnificent boldness and power through the Spirit of Jesus that lived inside of them (1 Peter 1:11). First, note that their worship continued in the temple, which was the former site of persecution by the same people that had put Jesus to death on the cross. Peter said that they "had favor with all the people" (v. 47a). Second, the number of believers began to expand exponentially, from just 11 to 3,000 in a very short time. "And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved" (v.47b). Third, the Church began the regular celebration of communion to remember Jesus (v. 46b). Each time we take communion we join into the same celebration held by this first group of Jesus' believers. Finally, there was a special emphasis placed upon the ministries of preaching (prophecy), fellowship, communion, prayer and giving. Peter said, "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (v. 42).

As we transition to the second reading, review in your mind the ministries that marked the Early Church: Preaching, fellowship, communion, prayer, and giving. Can you see how the Church has incorporated all of these foundational elements into each worship service?

The second reading is from the Epistle of First Peter where Saint Peter addressed groups of believers that were dispersed throughout Asia Minor who were undergoing persecution and losing hope in the promises of Christ. Peter addressed the book to "those who [were] elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (First Peter 1:1). Peter told them, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you" (4:12). Peter told them that they were sharing in the sufferings of Jesus Christ so that when Jesus returned they may "rejoice with exultation" (v. 13).

At the time of this writing, many in the world are suffering for their testimony of Jesus Christ. In fact, many report that there is currently more persecution happening to Christians around the world than has existed at any time since Jesus began the Church. Saint Paul warned, "evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Timothy 3:13). This reality was being lived out in the church at Asia Minor and is not much different from what is being experienced by Christians all around the world today. This reading marks the beginning of a study of 1 Peter that will continue for the next several weeks.

> *3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 8*

> *and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:3-9)*

Peter said that God had caused believers to be "**born again** to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (v. 3b, emphasis added). The word "again" in the original is a different word than what Jesus used in His discussion with Nicodemus in John 3:3 when He said, "You must be born again (or from above, depending upon your Bible version)." In John's Gospel Jesus' used a different word to create a word play providing a dual meaning of both "again" and "from above." Peter on the other hand used a word that specifically meant "again." Peter said in effect that a believer is born spiritually (a second type of birth) through God's great mercy to "a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (v. 3b).

Why all the fuss about the meaning of a particular word? Peter's point was that through the evidence of a person's spiritual birth a person has hope through the reality of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. By this time (~ mid-60's AD), the Church had reached the point that many were not direct witnesses to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Peter said, "though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls" (vv. 8-9). Peter said that although the people whom he addressed weren't eyewitnesses of Jesus, they still had the hope that Jesus' resurrection provided to all believers. Just because they experiencing persecution and weren't of the class of super apostles (see 2 Corinthians 11:5), they weren't inferior Christians (v. 6).

An important contrast exists between the Gospel lesson and the first reading from the Book of Acts. Did you notice that before the Holy Spirit was given that the disciples were fearful, then after the Holy Spirit came (Acts 2) they were ministering with a new sense of fervor? The presence of the Holy Spirit in one's life is what makes the difference between the cowering disciples and the bold disciples. Same people, different power source. Before, all they had was their will power – and as we know, it wasn't enough to keep them faithful to Jesus as He went to Calvary. However, now they had the presence of God's Spirit Himself living inside of them and giving them a new strength that went beyond their own strength.

I experienced something similar in terms of this contrast through an event that happened to me some years ago. Before I had placed my faith in Jesus Christ, I was striving to be a good, moral person. I knew right from wrong and tried hard to live up to the biblical standards that I heard about in Sunday Mass each week. However, I found that I did not have the strength to say no to the world's ways, even when I knew it was wrong. I remember a turning point occurred when God gave me the power to say not in a certain situation when a friend was attempting to use me to participate in some shady dealings. While I technically wasn't doing anything wrong, he was – and wanted me to join in with him. Each time I had joined him in the past I had felt horrible about it, but I didn't have the power to tell him no. That was until I gave my life to Jesus Christ, and God's power came into my life through the Holy Spirit living inside of me. On a particular evening God orchestrated a series of

events through which I finally found the power to tell my friend no.

How about you? Meditate for a moment about a time when you felt torn between choosing to do something for God versus something that the world called you to do. How did you deal with the tension? Regardless of what you chose, can you look back on this particular event in your life and see how God could have orchestrated these circumstances in order to reveal His glory to you?

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Mother Teresa, when confronted with the suffering of millions of people in Calcutta expressed doubts during certain seasons of her life. Have you ever experienced a season of doubt during your Christian life? How did you deal with it? In light of what you studied in the Book of Acts, how can you tap into God's power source to deal with such events during the future?

2. We challenge you during the upcoming week to make a commitment to pray. Pray specifically that God would reveal to you one way in which you can testify to or pray for a person whom you sense is experiencing doubts in their faith. Write their name on a card and commit to pray for them at a certain time at least once this week. Second, if you are so bold, reach out to this person and let them know that you have been praying for them.

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/042714.cfm

First Reading ACTS 2:42-47

Acts 2:42-47 NAS95 42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. 44 And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; 45 and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. 46 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Second Reading 1 PT 1:3-9

1 Peter 1:3-9 NAS95 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last

time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 8 and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

Gospel Reading JN 20:19-31

John 20:19-31 NAS95 19 So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and *said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." 22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them and *said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained." 24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." 26 After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus *came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then He *said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." 28 Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus *said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." 30 Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB