Study Notes for the Sunday Mass Published by Christians for Christ Ministries. We are a non-denominational Christian ministry that seeks to encourage and facilitate Christians in studying the Holy Scriptures. **"For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus."** 1 Timothy 2:5

Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 9-20-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **9-20-2015**. This week I just returned from watching the movie *War Room* that featured a man who was engaged in a struggle between the wisdom of God and the "wisdom" of his carnal fleshly desires. We will read about what James said about this struggle in the second reading. Later I will provide some additional insights I gleaned from the movie. Then we will learn about servant leadership in the Gospel lesson from Saint Mark where we see the disciples arguing about whom among them was the greatest.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Apocrypha. This body of work provides some important historical insights into the 400-year silent period just prior to the birth of Jesus. We encourage our readers to become familiar with the cultural and historical context leading up to the publishing of the New Testament.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is a continuation of the study from James but picking up in Chapter 3. The context is just after James' treatise on the power of and danger of the tongue. He calls the tongue a fire (James 3:6), a "restless evil full of deadly poison" (James 3:8). He says, "From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so" (James 3:10). The main theme of today's reading is the contrast between human wisdom and godly wisdom. As you read, take particular notes of the words and phrases that constitute each side of this spiritual battle. Especially take note of repeated words and phrases.

Note: Although the reading omitted verses 14 – 15, we included them below. This was because although verse 14 forms a conclusion to his teaching on the dangers of our speech it also provides a natural linkage to his subsequent teaching below.

Second Reading:

James 3:14 – 4:3 NAS95 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. 18 And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. 1 What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.

In the reading, James contrasts the "wisdom from above" (v. 17a) with that which arise from within the human heart and results in the ungodly speech about which he just finished speaking (James 3:1-12). James calls this outpouring of sinful thought patterns of the heart "bitter jealousy and selfish ambition" and repeats it twice (vv. 14a, 16a). These sinful patterns of the heart result in "arrogance and [lying] against the truth "v. 14b-ff). They are not from God (v. 15a), but are instead of non-divine "earthly, natural, demonic" sources (v. 15b-ff). They result in "disorder and every evil thing" (v. 16). In contrast, wisdom originating from God as described verse 17 is 1. Pure, 2. Peaceable, 3. Gentle, 4. Reasonable, 5. "Full of mercy" and results in good works, 6. "Unwavering," and 7. "Without hypocrisy." It's like there are two freight trains pulling against one another in our hearts. The first is that of sinful patterns originating from within the fallen condition of our hearts with input from Satan our enemy feeding the coal into the steam heading pulling away from God. Opposing that train is another engine that is God's "wisdom from above" Who opposes all of these sinful seeds implanted into our lives. The planting of God's seed in our hearts, meaning the Word of God from the Bible, results in the fruits of righteousness and peace "v. 18).

As James continues his teaching in chapter 4 with the source of the troubles already clearly in our minds, he asks the hypothetical question, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you" (v. 1a). He answers his own question with a summary statement of the things that came before. The source of the "quarrels and conflicts among [us]" is our "pleasures that wage war in [our] members" (v. 1b). These "pleasures that wage war against our body parts" form Satan's tools to lead us to "commit murder" (v. 2b) because of following the lust in our heart (v. 2a). The war between our spirit and bodies continue and when we are "envious and cannot obtain," meaning we covet the things from others which we cannot have; we "fight and quarrel." James says that even when we pray because we want something we don't have, we "ask with wrong motives, so that [we] may spend it on [our] pleasures" (v. 3). Hidden within James teaching upon the contrasts between our

fallen human condition and godly wisdom is a principle to ask God in prayer for the things that we desire (v. 3a). We will speak more about this later.

How many of us can identify with the ongoing struggle between our flesh and the devil's ways that rage in our hearts? In this section, James closely links our speech with the revelation of the secret battles that rages within us. Our ungodly speech provides an insight into the ways in which we are walking in opposition to the plan that God has for our lives. God said, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). I remember once I was talking to a friend of mine and as men have a habit of doing the subject moved to women. He made a statement about engaging in a certain specific form of carnal behavior with a woman. In my heart, I knew immediately that because of his current life situation he had been engaging in viewing pornography. Pornography is one of Satan's key ways in which he pours ungodly wisdom into the lives of people, be they unbelievers like my friend, or believers who know better. Engaging in the viewing of pornography is a channel through which flows the "wisdom" of our enemy. God stands ready to deliver us from our temptations, and as James said, all we have to do is to ask Him (v. 3a).

I mentioned in the introduction that I had just returned from watching the movie *War Room*. This Christian movie providing a powerful illustration to the power of and necessity of prayer for couples as they engage in the unseen spiritual battle surrounding their lives. The movie told the story of a young mother met an older woman who mentored her about the power of prayer. Once this young woman began honestly seeking God by honoring Him in prayer huge things began to her in her life as well as that of her husband. James said in verse 3 of the reading, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures." We need to ask the question, do we even ask? Regardless of our motives, we need to regularly assess whether we are honestly praying for the important things in our lives, such as our mate, children, and the lost people whom God has brought into our lives.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson continues from Saint Mark but moves ahead from 8:35 where we ended last week and picks up with Chapter 9 just after the story of Jesus' transfiguration with His chosen subset of disciples consisting of Peter, James, and John. In between, Jesus had healed a demon possessed boy (Mark 9:16-27). This miracle was unique because someone in the crowd had presented the boy to Jesus after the disciples could not heal him (Mark 9:18). Afterwards, when the disciples had asked Jesus about why they could not heal him, Jesus told them, "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer" (Mark 8:29). Interestingly this followed the father of the boy's request to Jesus when he said, "I do believe; help my unbelief" (Mark 8:24). It was as if Mark expressed a teaching moment with the disciples that the boy's father had the courage to ask Jesus to help his unbelief, yet the disciples were unable to heal the boy "by anything but prayer." As we saw in James, God calls us to ask Him in prayer for the things we desire (James 4:2e), yet at this stage the disciples did not yet understand the power of prayer in freeing the boy from him enslavement to the demon. Obviously, this was because Jesus was still with them, and they would understand later the powerful ministry of

prayer.

Gospel Reading:

Mark 9:30-37 NAS95 30 From there they went out and began to go through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know about it. 31 For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, "The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later." 32 But they did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask Him. 33 They came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He began to question them, "What were you discussing on the way?" 34 But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest. 35 Sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all." 36 Taking a child, He set him before them, and taking him in His arms, He said to them, 37 "Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me."

Jesus and disciples left "from there" (v. 30), meaning the event of the last healing. This would have been at the base of the mountain on which Jesus was transfigured before His disciples. The two traditional sites of this event are Mt. Tabor and Mt. Hermon. After they left "there," Jesus wanted to be alone with His disciples as we see in verse 30b, "He did not want anyone to know about it." Along the way on their journey to Galilee, after they got to Capernaum Jesus asked the disciples what they had been arguing about (v. 33c), but they refused to answer Him (v. 34). Mark tells us that they had been debating which among them was the greatest disciple (v. 34b). It's not coincidental that this argument arose after the chosen three (Peter, James, and John) experienced seeing Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. It is also possible that these three were still radiating some of God's glory after coming down from the mountain as happened with Moses. (Exodus 34:29). Perhaps this created in these disciples' minds a sense of superiority, and the others maybe wondered why they weren't chosen for the trip up the mountain. Jesus quickly corrected their misunderstanding concerning the pecking order by telling them, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all" (v. 35c). Next, Jesus proceeded to provide them with an object lesson by placing a child in front of them to illustrate this principle (v. 36). Jesus used this illustration of the child to show them greatness does not consist of one's position. Even the lowest "child of the kingdom" can act as an ambassador for Jesus, and an ambassador for Jesus is one for God the Father. Therefore, the disciples shouldn't be arguing about their relative positions of greatness but should purse the kingdom with a childlike faith and humility as servants of Jesus in pointing people to God the Father.

In summary, Jesus illustrated in the story today the principle of servant leadership. Even though He told the disciples that He was going to be "delivered into the hands of men" and killed (v. 31), they persisted in arguing about whom among them was the greatest. The presence of children provided Jesus with a means of using these young people as an example of how the disciples should view themselves.

What does this mean for our lives? Regardless of our social position in society, God calls us to view ourselves as servants of the Lord Jesus. This Lord of the Universe is the same One Who washed the

feet of the disciples (John 13:12-17). Saint Paul emulated these principles of servant leadership in his ministry. He said, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (Philippians 2:3-4). God empowers us through His Holy Spirit to carry out the work that He has started within us (Philippians 1:6). As we go about the week, let's keep these principles in mind when we are tempted to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think (Romans 12:3).

God continues to teach me about my sinful pride and how I have often viewed myself as superior to others. This week I was mowing my lawn using my large zero turn lawn mower while my neighbor was mowing his using an older riding type mower with a missing hood and various Band-Aids holding it together. The background of this particular neighbor is that he is some two decades younger than his wife who moved in a few years ago with her first husband and two kids. However, something happened between them and she later married the much younger "boy" who was not out mowing her lawn. As I was contemplating the matter as I zoomed past him on my tiger-striped racing machine I admit that I felt superior to him as he mowed with the broken down junk that was handed down to him from the neighbor's former husband. In an attempt to get a handle on my pride I actually found myself saying, "When I was his age (i.e. riding a bike with training wheels), I would have been glad to have had a mower as nice as that." How's that for getting a handle on my pride! In reality, God calls me to be the servant even of my boyish neighbor who also needs to hear the message of the Gospel. In retrospect, what I can do in the future is to pray for him as I see him mowing his lawn, and even pray for an opportunity to build a bridge to him in order to be able to share the hope that I have through faith in Jesus Christ.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. All of us have heard the expression, "put your foot in your mouth." Jesus said in Luke's Gospel, "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart" (Luke 6:45). From what you learned from the second reading today, reflect upon the last time which you put your foot in your mouth. What was the underlying condition that brought about this action? Through God's wisdom in the Bible, what are one or two ways that you can avoid this in the future?

2. The super disciples including Peter, James, and John had every right to view themselves as being in a privileged position since they were the only ones invited to the travel up the mountain with Jesus and subsequently experienced His transfiguration. In what ways are you tempted to view yourself as being in an exalted position either in society or in the church? Using what you learned from the Gospel lesson how does what you know about Jesus' view of leadership change your view?

Readings for the Week

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

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site:

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/092015.cfm

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 9-6-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **9-6-2015**. This week, in the first reading, we examine the Prophet Isaiah's message regarding the future healing coming from God upon the whole sin-broken world. This message especially resonated to the Jews who were under attack from the King of Assyria during this time. Then we continue the study from the Book of James in the second reading. We close with the continuing study from the Gospel of Mark in which Jesus heals a deaf and mute man.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Prophet Isaiah. The historical context is during the time when King

Hezekiah had made an alliance with Egypt (Isaiah 30:1-2) thereby provoking Sennacherib the King of Assyria. Hezekiah's revolt against Assyria ultimately led to his humiliation in which he was forced to cede reparations as recorded in Second Kings. The people were very afraid of the Assyrian King because he had already conquered and taken captive the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Hezekiah's unwise decision to trust in an alliance with Egypt angered God. However at some point he came to his senses and confessed his wrongdoing, then tried to buy peace with Sennacherib. "*King Hezekiah of Judah sent to the king of Assyria at Lachish, saying, 'I have done wrong; withdraw from me; whatever you impose on me I will bear.' The king of Assyria demanded of King Hezekiah of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the LORD and in the treasuries of the king's house. At that time Hezekiah stripped the gold from the doors of the temple of the LORD, and from the doorposts that King Hezekiah of Judah had overlaid and gave it to the king of Assyria* "2 Kings 18:14-16).

Equally import to the historical context is the location of the reading in the whole of Isaiah and the overall theological context. Today's reading from Chapter 35 precedes a section in Isaiah regarding the future judgment of the Edomites. This is a people that can be taken both literally (as a region) and figuratively, as anyone (or nation) who opposes God. Edom is the nation that descended from Isaac's firstborn son, Esau. Esau was Jacob's brother and the one who claimed the promises of God and the blessing from Israel. Although Esau didn't war with the Hebrew people during the time of Jacob, his descendants became sworn enemies of the Jews. God says about the Edomites in Chapter 34, "For My sword is satiated in heaven, Behold it shall descend for judgment upon Edom And upon the people whom I have devoted to destruction" (Isaiah 34:5). Although we don't know exactly how God's judgment of Edom will play out, we are told many details about the judgment of the earth which must take place before Jesus returns to rule the earth. Scripture seems to indicate that the timing of the judgment is in the distant future, during what is known as the Day of the Lord (DOL). This period of God's judgment of the seals, trumpets, and bowls as described in Revelation will be accompanied with signs in the heavens. Isaiah said "the sky will be rolled up like a scroll" (Isaiah 34:4b) just as it says in Revelation 6:14. Today's reading is a message regarding the future restoration after the terrible period of time after the DOL. As in many of the prophetic passages in the Bible, and especially in Isaiah, we can locate both near term fulfillments as well as unfulfilled events that will happen sometime in the future. In some cases we can clearly see partial fulfillments of certain passages through the first coming of Jesus, but yet it is clear that the complete fulfillment won't occur until the second coming of the Lord. This is the case with today's reading.

First Reading:

Isaiah 35:4-7 NAS95 4 Say to those with anxious heart, "Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance; The recompense of God will come, But He will save you." 5 Then the eyes of the blind will be opened And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. 6 Then the lame will leap like a deer, And the tongue of the mute will shout for joy. For waters will break forth in the wilderness And streams in the Arabah. 7 The scorched land will become a pool And the thirsty ground springs of water; In the haunt of jackals, its resting place, Grass becomes reeds and rushes.

The heart of the message was that God would first destroy His enemies and then restore the land. Although the message contained a message of physical healing, the prophet was also speaking metaphorically about the spiritual healing that would occur in the future when all of Israel would be saved (Romans 11:26). In terms of the historical context Isaiah spoke to the people of Judah that were being threatened with attack from the Assyrian Empire who had already devastated their brothers in the Northern Kingdom. The Prophet provided a message of hope to the people, that ultimately God would prevail over his enemies by "com[ing] with vengeance, with terrible recompense" (v. 4d). This will lead to the salvation of the people, "He will come and save you" (v. 4f). During that time the land shall be restored from war, all the evils of the world will be reversed including blindness, deafness, lameness, and the inability to speak (v. 5). The desert shall be watered (v. 6c) and the hot sand shall be blessed with cool water (v. 7). The land, including the region of Edom that was destroyed by God (Isaiah 34:5) and had been turned into the haunt of jackals will be restored. The Prophet's message would have provided comfort to the people as they faced the onslaught of King Sennacherib while their own king tried to buy the country's freedom against this vast imposing army. While the people lived with the imminent threat of the Assyrians, Isaiah's message would have been a rallying cry for exclaiming the power of the one true God over their enemies.

When we look at the ways in which Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled after his time we see that Jesus quoted from this very text. The way in which this happened was while John the Baptist was in prison. He evidently began to have some doubts as to whether Jesus truly was the Messiah. Perhaps he questioned why Jesus would allow him to be imprisoned. John the Baptist sent word to Jesus from prison saying, "Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?"(Matthew 11:3). Jesus answered by quoting from Isaiah. "Go and report to John what you hear and see: the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM" (Matthew 11:4-5). Jesus said that His healing ministry was in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. Later in the Gospel reading we will see another instance of how Jesus fulfilled this prophecy from Isaiah. Like many prophecies in the Old Testament this one was only partially fulfilled during Jesus earthly lifetime. The final fulfilment will happen when the Lord returns to establish his kingdom on earth.

The message of Isaiah for our current day includes a couple of possible application points. One, we can believe in Jesus as the Messiah and be saved from the destructive nature of sin in our own lives. No matter what we have done or what has been done to us that is sinful, Jesus the Messiah, can heal and restore the brokenness of sin. Two, when we have this type of relationship with Jesus, we can also see God the Father's heart, now, through a different lens. Instead of fearing God's wrath and punishment for sin, we can draw close to God's heart that is tender and fiercely loyal to His sons and daughters who are in distress. Romans 8:1 tells us that there is no longer any condemnation associated with those who are in Christ Jesus. So we can boldly approach the throne of grace with confidence (Hebrews 4:16). The fact that God is eager to save and embrace us should encourage and embolden us to live in light of His abiding presence in our lives.

You may wonder how things turned out for Judah. If you read further ahead in Isaiah you can see

how God worked mightily but only after Hezekiah came to his senses. Instead of leaning upon foreign alliances and gold to buy his way out, King Hezekiah eventually turned to God for deliverance, "he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth and entered the house of the LORD" (Isaiah 37:1). God answered his heartfelt plea by devastating the Assyrian army: "Then the angel of the LORD went out and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men arose early in the morning, behold, all of these were dead" (Isaiah 37:36).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is a continuation of the study begun in James last week. The Book of James is a Book called the "Proverbs of the New Testament" and is filled with practical wisdom for being a Christian. This reading follows James' teaching on the basic practices of religion which included "visiting orphans and widows in their distress, and keeping oneself unstained by the world" (James 1:27). This James is the one who led the first Ecumenical Council recorded in Acts 15 which dealt with rebutting the false teaching that "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1). During this meeting James stood up, announced a summary of the scriptural teachings on the matter (from the Old Testament), and provided the authoritative, final judgment on how the church should proceed. His teaching in the Book by his name came to the early church with the same sense of authority that he had during the proceedings of the first church council.

Note: The reading omitted verses 6 – 7 which have been included below.

Second Reading:

James 2:1-5 NAS95 1 My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. 2 For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, 3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? 5 Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? 7 Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?

This passage is teaching the importance of reflecting the nature of God by treating everyone with fairness and honor. Showing favoritism in the church reflects a muddy picture of God's heart, confusing people about who God is and what He values. We are to value each person as God values them, and thus avoid the class wars and pecking orders of the world. The poor in this world have a lot to teach those who are supposedly "rich" by material standards. Instead of favoritism dictating our treatment of people, God's love for all should level the playing field. We can now approach others (rich or poor) with a sense of humility, giving them honor as image bearers of God.

James provides an excellent warning about how God hates pride (Proverbs 8:13) and desires for unity in the Church (John 17). If you think about it, the higher a person is, the further they have to fall! James' lesson closely parallels the Parable of the Wedding Feast:

7 And He began speaking a parable to the invited guests when He noticed how they had been picking out the places of honor at the table, saying to them, 8 "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, 9 and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this man,' and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place. 10 But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you. 11 For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Lu 14:7-11)

In the parable, the central truth is Jesus' message regarding the sinfulness of pride as well as a call to servanthood. In reality, using the illustration of the feast, the proudest person in the room may be one collecting the food trays after the mea! Only God truly knows the heart (1 Corinthians 2:11), although wealth and power are often accompanied with pride. In this illustration Jesus is calling us to reflect upon the times in which we have positioned ourselves "at the head of the table," or when we have learned from the mistakes of others in positions of power.

As a college professor who taught in various state prisons for a half dozen years one of the primary lessons I learned was to avoid rushing to judgment of a person based upon their appearance. Prison had a way of leveling the class differences because although everyone dressed uniformly, between hairstyles, tattoos (and scars) the students had ways of making themselves appear differently. Yet even with the students wearing the same uniforms over the course of the class, it would become obvious that there was a "pecking order" among them. Some, like the rich man, "sat" in positions of power, regardless of the location of their physical desk in the classroom. Others were subservient to the leadership positions among the students which became obvious to me over the course of the semester, but which the students already knew. Places of power don't always mean sitting at the head of the table.

It is instrumental to have a proper understanding of the point that James and Jesus were getting at in order to apply these lessons to our lives. The meaning that they had in mind is best illustrated by Psalm 73. Let's read that entire text and meditate upon it before moving onto the Gospel lesson.

Psalms 73:1-28 NAS95 1 <<A Psalm of Asaph.>> Surely God is good to Israel, To those who are pure in heart! 2 But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling, My steps had almost slipped. 3 For I was envious of the arrogant As I saw the prosperity of the wicked. 4 For there are no pains in their death, And their body is fat. 5 They are not in trouble as other men, Nor are they plagued like mankind. 6 Therefore pride is their necklace; The garment of violence covers them. 7 Their eye

bulges from fatness; The imaginations of their heart run riot. 8 They mock and wickedly speak of oppression; They speak from on high. 9 They have set their mouth against the heavens, And their tongue parades through the earth. 10 Therefore his people return to this place, And waters of abundance are drunk by them. 11 They say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge with the Most High?" 12 Behold, these are the wicked; And always at ease, they have increased in wealth. 13 Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure And washed my hands in innocence; 14 For I have been stricken all day long And chastened every morning. 15 If I had said, "I will speak thus," Behold, I would have betrayed the generation of Your children. 16 When I pondered to understand this, It was troublesome in my sight 17 Until I came into the sanctuary of God; Then I perceived their end. 18 Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. 19 How they are destroyed in a moment! They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors! 20 Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when aroused, You will despise their form. 21 When my heart was embittered And I was pierced within, 22 Then I was senseless and ignorant; I was like a beast before You. 23 Nevertheless I am continually with You; You have taken hold of my right hand. 24 With Your counsel You will guide me, And afterward receive me to glory. 25 Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth. 26 My flesh and my heart may fail, But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. 27 For, behold, those who are far from You will perish; You have destroyed all those who are unfaithful to You. 28 But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, That I may tell of all Your works.

Although the people who are rich in faith may suffer during this lifetime, those that are only rich in material things and full of pride will suffer eternal destruction.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading continues from Mark that we looked at last week. This week the context is Jesus' teaching in the Gentile region of the Decapolis to the east of the Jordan. Today's reading follows the healing of a Gentile in the region of Tyre and Sidon (Mark 7:24) when Jesus cast out a demon from the Syrophoenician woman's daughter (Mark 7:24-30). Interestingly, the Decapolis was the same region in which Jesus was asked to leave after healing the man possessed by a legion of demons. Once the demons left the out of control man, they entered a herd of 2000 pigs, which caused them to run off a cliff into the Sea of Galilee and be destroyed. When the owners found out about this "they began to implore Him to leave their region" (Mark 5:17). Nonetheless, Jesus returned there and resumed His healing ministry. Perhaps this was because the formerly demon possessed man whom He healed went and told many others in that region about Jesus (Mark 4:20).

Gospel Reading:

Mark 7:31-37 NAS95 31 Again He went out from the region of Tyre, and came through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, within the region of Decapolis. 32 They brought to Him one who was deaf and spoke with difficulty, and they implored Him to lay His hand on him. 33 Jesus took him aside from the crowd, by himself, and put His fingers into his ears, and after spitting, He touched his tongue with the saliva; 34 and looking up to heaven with a deep sigh, He said to him, "Ephphatha!" that is, "Be

opened!" 35 And his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was removed, and he began speaking plainly. 36 And He gave them orders not to tell anyone; but the more He ordered them, the more widely they continued to proclaim it. 37 They were utterly astonished, saying, "He has done all things well; He makes even the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

He took a very long and circuitous route to get to the Decapolis by going from Tyre through Sidon and then back to the Decapolis (v. 31). We are not told the reason why he would have taken this route and the possible many months it would have required. Despite them having earlier asked Jesus to leave their region someone brought a man to Him for healing. Jesus separated the man from the crowd then proceeded to heal him. Jesus used two physical signs to manifest the healing given to Him by His Father God. First, he put his fingers into the man's ears, and then placed His own saliva on the man's tongue (v. 33). Evidently he did this to accommodate the others who were watching ("they" in v. 37). Jesus looked up to heaven and sighed showing His reliance upon God the Father as well as His compassion for the man's condition brought on by the fallen world. Next, the first thing Jesus told them including the man whose speech was restored was to keep silent! Jesus knew that His time had not yet come (John 7:6) and having these people broadcast about Him wouldn't serve the timing of the perfect plan the Father had for Him. Another perspective is that His statement to keep quiet had more to do with His disciples than about the Gentiles who were present during the healing. As we mentioned in the first reading, the prophets like Isaiah used physical blindness and deafness as a metaphor for the people's spiritual condition. At this point Jesus' own disciples didn't understand the spiritual significance of all that was going on because in the very next chapter He told them, "Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? HAVING EYES, DO YOU NOT SEE? AND HAVING EARS, DO YOU NOT HEAR?" (Mark 8:17c – 18b). Jesus, knowing that by asking the Gentiles to keep quiet may stir them on to proclaim the healing that much more may have been making a statement to His disciples about their unbelief. This, along with the fact that the disciples would have been familiar with the Old Testament metaphor of blindness and that Jesus opened the eyes of a blind man lends more credence to this interpretation. Jesus is in effect telling His disciples that He can open the eyes of the blind but they were still spiritually blind to many of the realities of His nature. Although Peter soon afterwards confessed that Jesus is the Christ (Matthew 16:16), all of them had a lot to learn about Jesus – even after He rose from the dead.

There are many applications of Jesus message for our lives today, here are a few:

- Jesus' healing of the blind man's physical ailments reminds us of the need for everyone's need for a spiritual birth. Spiritual blindness is the primary condition that vexes humanity today, the only unforgivable sin (Mark 3:22-30). In John's Gospel Jesus said that "unless a person is born from above they will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (John 3:3). Saint Paul said that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), and "the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Paul continued by saying, "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" (Romans 10:9). The Scripture is clear that "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17). We cannot earn this free gift but must accept it in faith. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that

not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Ephesians 2:8-10).

- If we desire to be like Jesus, we too can be drawn to minister to the handicapped. Taking into account what we learned from James, the "handicapped" aren't necessarily just the people with obvious physical issues. Instead, we can pray to consider ministering to those who are marginalized in our society.
- As we learned in the reading from Isaiah, if we and others for whom we care are struggling with handicaps, remember how the prophetic messages in the Bible point us to the perfect healing we will one day receive with the Lord Jesus. For some this may mean experiencing physical death and meeting Jesus in heaven (John 14:3).
- We too can be astonished that Jesus does all things well (v. 37a,b)! Jesus lived a perfect life and we can be changed by how He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Develop a list of some categories of people who are marginalized in our society. Second, ask God in what ways you can be praying for specific people that you know fall into this category. Ask God to show you His will regarding ways in which you could minister to one of these people before the end of the year.

2. Read John 14:1-3 and answer the question that follows.

John 14:1-3 NAS95 1 "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. 3 "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.

A. How does knowing that Jesus is 1. Going to prepare a place for you, and 2. Going to meet you when you get there, help you to face the handicaps you are experiencing in your life today?

B. Especially in light of how God has helped you with any "handicaps," would you consider sharing your testimony with the fellow readers of Mass Notes? If so, please send me your testimony or upload it in the form provided on the web site.

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/090615.cfm

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

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB