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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 54: 05-18-2025



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Introduction to the First Reading:

Missions have always been at the heart of the ministry of the church. Just before His return to heaven, Jesus had told his disciples that they were to be his witnesses (Acts 1:8). He had commissioned them to make disciples, baptize believers, and teach new Christians to obey all that Jesus had taught (Matthew 28:19-20). The Apostle Paul and Barnabas had set out from Antioch to do

precisely that, and they found a mixed reception wherever they went, first reaching out to the Jews.

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They then began a return journey to Antioch, their starting point, and along the way, they "strengthened" and "encouraged" their converts to "continue in the faith." They made it clear, however, that the spiritual journey is often through times of tribulation and difficulty. As the Lord's representatives, they appointed leaders in the various churches and entrusted them to the Lord to guide them. After stops in a few other cities, they arrived back in Antioch to the church that had commissioned them to missionary service (Acts 13:2-3).

Paul and Barnabas gave a complete report to their home church of all that "God had done with them." As all of God's servants, they recognized that anything of eternal value accomplished through their ministry is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit. What God does through his disciples is critical, not what the disciples themselves may do. Their report included a new idea that later was to cause a great deal of disturbance among some of the Jewish Christians. They reported that God "had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles." That was a new and troubling thought to many of their audience. They had thought that Jehovah was the God of the Jews exclusively. They were to learn, and Paul was the chief conveyor of this new truth, that God's redemptive plan is to include all nations and peoples based on faith, not ethnic or religious origin.

Although Paul was to continue in further missionary journeys, he remained in Antioch for "a long time," no doubt teaching and encouraging the saints in this new perspective of Jesus' church.

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> *Acts 14:21-28 NAS95 21 After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." 23 When they had appointed elders for them*

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Introduction to the Second Reading:

The preceding chapters in this final revelation from God included word pictures of cataclysmic events in the heavens and on earth. God's wrath against sin and rebellion is evident in his judgments against evil empires and the devil himself, along with his angels and those he has put in power. When we come to chapter 21, however, the final judgment has occurred, and all those who have rejected God's offer of salvation through faith in Jesus are cast into the Lake of Fire along with the devil and his angels for whom the lake was intended. What remains in this final book reveals more of God's gracious plan for His own redeemed people.

Symbols and figures of speech throughout the revelation leave the reader enthralled with the splendor of God's future provision for the church. John, the human writer of this book, sees "the holy city, the new Jerusalem" coming down from heaven. He considers the city as "a bride adorned for her husband." This is clearly a reference to the church that is often described in the New Testament in terms that clearly define "the bride of Christ." (See, for example, Ephesians 5:22-32 and Revelations 19:6-9.)

John uses the term "tabernacle of God" to describe God's presence among men. Tabernacle means "dwelling." As God "dwelt" symbolically among His people in the Old Testament tabernacle in the Shekinah glory above the Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place, His presence will be known as He dwells among His people in a permanent relationship in eternity.

If all that is true, it is no wonder, then, that there will be no tears in heaven, no death, no mourning, crying, or pain. The ruler (Jesus, the promised Messiah or anointed one), sitting on His throne, says, "Behold, I am making all things new." John indicates that he has been instructed to write these words because they are "faithful and true." We can count on them.

Second Reading:

> *Revelation 21:1-5 NAS95 1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, 4 and 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." 5 And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He *said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true."*

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The Gospel reading is from John chapter 13. The context is just before Judas Iscariot left the Last Supper meal at the table with Jesus to betray Him.

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What someone says just before he dies is often regarded as extremely important. The night before Jesus was crucified, He had close, personal fellowship with His disciples at what we refer to as the Last Supper. In addition to having a meal with them, reminiscent of the original Passover in Egypt, and washing their feet in a new picture of His servant nature and the ministry of cleansing that He continues for His followers today, Jesus made three significant statements.

Jesus said first in the reading that the Son of Man (His most frequent reference to Himself) and God the Father are glorified in Him. Isaiah wrote about this feature of Christ. Undoubtedly, it refers

specifically to His death in which God's marvelous plan of redemption is made possible, ultimately to bring great glory to Jesus and the Father.

In the next chapter of John (14:1-3), Jesus clarifies that He is to leave His disciples to return to heaven. Here, He seems to be speaking more directly of the experience of His death and separation from the Father, which is a path the disciples cannot follow. The Apostle Peter tells us that Jesus, during those three days His body lay in the tomb, actually visited where the devil's angels suffered. He preached, revealing to them their doom as a result of His sufficient sacrifice on the cross (1 Peter 3:18-20).

Finally, Jesus offers what he calls a "new commandment": they are to love one another. The standard for such love is "as [Jesus] loved" them. Previously, He repeated the Old Testament commandment about loving God and your neighbor (Matthew 22:37-39; see Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18). His final statement in this passage is also significant. He says that His followers will not be known by their doctrinal knowledge, astute learning, or their following of religious ceremonies and rites. Instead, they will be recognized as His disciples when they practice His unselfish love for their brethren. Such a lifestyle will draw others to the One who can give that kind of love to His people.

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1. These readings offer a call to self-examination. In what ways is your heart open to receiving fellow believers into your company, regardless of ethnic origin, gender, or previous religious background? When were several times your heart darkened?

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