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 Lectionary 73: 02/08/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass Study Notes. This week, we will begin with the Gospel reading, where we will study a portion of Jesus' famous "Sermon on the Mount." Jesus' teaching in that portion of Saint Matthew's Gospel has led many people, including me, to leave the Sunday Mass feeling tremendous guilt because we sense that we are not doing enough for God. Scripture provides clear guidance on the appropriate response to this teaching, and we will address it in today's study. Then we will move on to the first reading from the Old Testament, and then conclude with a continuation of our study in Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson is from Matthew 5, a portion of the Sermon on the Mount that includes Chapters 5 through 7. It is important to understand the context of Jesus' message to His disciples. Jesus' sermon was given on a mountain somewhere in Galilee (v.1). Most commentators believe that it was on a hill near the west edge of Capernaum, which would have provided a commanding view of the

Sea of Galilee. Since this wasn't a productive area for growing crops, it would have allowed large numbers of people to sit and listen to Jesus' teaching without damaging the area. Jesus gave at least the first portion of the address directly to the disciples away from the crowds. In verse 1 Saint Matthew said that Jesus went up to the mountain with His disciples, then, "he opened his mouth and taught 'them.'" (v. 2, emphasis added). This was, then, at least during the beginning portion of the message, a private discipleship training session by Jesus to his handpicked team. However, at the end of the Sermon, the crowds seem to have rejoined Him because at 7:28 "the crowds were amazed at His teaching." In summary, at the beginning, Jesus addressed His disciples with the crowds in view, but in the later section, He addressed the crowds with the disciples in view.

The message today was just after the portion of the Sermon on the Mount known as the "Beatitudes." The Beatitudes are pronouncements of blessings for those waiting for the promises of the Messiah, and curses for those who were trying to obtain God's blessing through their own effort. They begin with Chapter 5, verse 3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." They continue, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (v. 4). This pattern continues with blessings for the gentle (v. 5), those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (v. 6), the merciful (v. 7), the pure in heart (v. 8), the peacemakers (v. 9), and finally the persecuted (vv. 10-11). These blessings aren't so much about representing the hallmarks of a true Christian as about the blessings that follow when a person submits to God and receives the gifts of His empowerment through the Holy Spirit in community with other believers. Instead of the motto, "If it's going to be it's up to me" the Spirit indwelled believer says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3) and "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (v.4). The nature of the blessed person is the essence of life in the "kingdom of heaven" (John 3:3). It's with this God-directed empowerment that we must approach the interpretation of the verses about salt and light being covered in the message today.

As you read the message, think about the importance of salt and light to the people of the first century.

Gospel Reading:

> *13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. 14 You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; 15 nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16 Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your*

good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:13-16)

Salt and light were essential to survival in a society without the modern conveniences of electricity and refrigeration. Light was essential for survival, both for seeing at night and for cooking and food preservation. Just as I struggled to find fuel in the dark when my truck ran out of gas, the First Century people were dependent upon their own source of fuel. Salt and light were essential staples of First Century life. However, what does Jesus mean by asking the rhetorical question about hiding the light and salt losing its saltiness?

Our Christian lives as salt and light are important to the world. Regardless of our career or status in life, our Holy Spirit-empowered lives are important to seasoning and lighting our relationships with people in the world. In the same way that Jesus first directed His message in the Sermon on the Mount to His disciples, our place of training and fellowship is in the Church. However, we are not to remain inside the Church to the point of becoming a part of "churchianity." Instead, just as the crowds in the Sermon on the Mount were curious about Jesus' teaching, we too must go out and teach the world. We will not only carry the light of the Gospel to the lost, but we ***are*** the light to the lost world. The crucial difference between someone who has lost their saltiness and covered their light and one who spreads salt and light is that the latter has accepted the free gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, who then empowers this person to accomplish those goals. This Holy Spirit-directed life is the hallmark of a true believer. The ultimate goal of every believer should be sharing your faith with others, in words and deeds. "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (v. 16).

I would like to share an illustration with you to help you understand the importance of leaning upon God and others for the empowerment to serve God. I remember back sometime around the late 1980's when my friend and I decided to pack up our snowmobiles and drive from southwestern Michigan to the great white north country of northern Michigan for a one-day trip to ride our snowmobiles. Because we didn't have any means of carrying two snow machines, we both loaded our snowmobiles into our separate trucks and headed north. In my case, I had borrowed my dad's Ford F-150, which, although it ran well, consumed large amounts of gas. It had a second minor issue; the gas gauge wasn't accurate below about one-quarter of a tank. We had an excellent day of riding on the trails around Kalkaska and Bellaire, Michigan. At the end of the day, we even stopped for refreshments at the Schuss Mountain Ski resort. All that was left was to make the two-and-a-half-hour trip back to my parents' home back south. This was shaping up to be an easy and relaxing end to a very fulfilling day of riding. As we made our way south in the dark, I was uncomfortable with the speed my friend was driving, so just north of Grand Rapids I lagged behind him a bit. Right after that, the truck began losing power, so I blinked my headlights furiously to attract the attention of my friend, who was now about a quarter of a mile ahead of me. He evidently didn't see me. The

truck soon ground to a halt as I pulled onto the shoulder of the highway. I knew what had happened; I had run the truck out of gas!

Here's a bit of background about me to help you understand my thought process that evening. I was raised on a farm and was a member of the clan of engineers known as "MacGyvers," named after the television character who could construct something out of almost nothing. If you gave me some bits of wire and a few hand tools, I have been known to fix almost anything. My motto was something like, "If it's going to be, it's up to me."

Back to what happened that night. I considered my options and came up with a plan to drain some fuel from the snowmobile into a soda pop can. Since the truck had a cap on the bed, I had a difficult-to-impossible time tipping the machine over far enough to drain any fuel. Moving on to Plan B, I tried to remove a line from the primer bulb to pump some fuel into the can, but couldn't get it to work either. When this failed, I moved to Plan C. Since I had very few tools with me, I attempted to remove the snowmobile's fuel tank to pour the gas into the truck's fuel tank. I couldn't get the tank off without the necessary tools. The cars continued to zoom past me on the highway. I was furious at my friend for leaving me in this mess! Since I was near civilization, I started walking. I had to cross a small creek, navigate dense underbrush, and finally cross a very tall barbed wire fence that led me to the parking lot of a movie theatre. I finally reached the point where I had to ask someone for help. The thought crossed my mind to pray, so I asked God to help me. I don't know why it was so hard for me to turn to someone else for help, but I guess I hoped that I could just get myself out of this situation! Next, I flagged down a security guard who, as it turned out, had seen me scale the barbed wire fence. He kindly drove me across the street to a gas station where I was able to borrow a gas can and buy some fuel. This kind man then drove me back to a better location from which I could walk back to my vehicle, although I had to cross the creek again – at night, in the middle of winter, through briars, and without a flashlight. Over the years, I never forgot about that evening!

What did I learn from all of the events that night? One of the areas in which I struggled spiritually was whether I was doing enough for God. I didn't feel that I was salt and light to my nonbelieving friends or to those with whom I came into contact. In addition, I remembered the decades of my life hearing the Gospel readings at Mass, which left me feeling guilty about how little I was accomplishing for God. I served as an altar boy until I was sixteen, but didn't find much fulfillment through it. Once, I visited a rest home with our Catechism class and promised myself I would go back there, but never did. Years later, after I began studying the Bible on my own, I began to understand that I had to come to the end of my own means and turn to others for help, both in practical and spiritual matters. I reached a major turning point with this revelation. I couldn't "MacGyver" my way through the Christian life; instead, I needed to humbly turn to God for help.

God doesn't expect us to accomplish great things for Him without providing us with the means to do so. The Holy Spirit is our spiritual fuel. If we have truly repented of our sins and trusted only in the finished work of Jesus Christ, He has empowered us through the gift of the Holy Spirit and by our relationships with other believers. As you think through the Sermon on the Mount, ask yourself if you have come to the end of yourself and turned to the one and only Source, Jesus Christ. Do you feel guilty that you aren't accomplishing enough for God? As always, we will continue each week in the Mass Notes to reveal what it means to be a true follower of Jesus Christ.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Now we will move on to the first reading, from Isaiah 58. Since you have already studied an example of what a God-directed life looks like in the Sermon on the Mount, you will likely understand Isaiah's text quite differently. As you read, praise God for how He has empowered His children as salt and light in our generation through their generous Holy Spirit-directed actions. Second, contrast the behavior of the former person with someone like King Saul, who was motivated by self-centered thinking (1 Samuel 13).

First Reading:

> *6 "Is this not the fast which I choose, To loosen the bonds of wickedness, To undo the bands of the yoke, And to let the oppressed go free And break every yoke? 7 Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry And bring the homeless poor into the house; When you see the naked, to cover him; And not to hide yourself from your own flesh? 8 Then your light will break out like the dawn, And your recovery will speedily spring forth; And your righteousness will go before you; The glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. 9 Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; You will cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.' If you remove the yoke from your midst, The pointing of the finger and speaking wickedness, 10 And if you give yourself to the hungry And satisfy the desire of the afflicted, Then your light will rise in darkness And your gloom will become like midday. (Isaiah 58:7-10)*

Notice the amazing similarity with the Sermon on the Mount. The Holy Spirit-directed believer "divides bread with the hungry" (v. 7a), houses the homeless (v. 7b), and provides clothing to those without it (v. 7c). As a result, these believers shine light like the dawn (v. 8), and God hears and answers their prayers (v. 9). They respond in physical ways by filling the needs of those less fortunate, but more importantly, they are spiritual salt and light to a lost, sin-stained, dying world.

Isaiah's message was given to a generation of people who had neglected what Saint James in the New Testament called "basic religion." "Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world" (James 1:27). His message is equally relevant to the people in our generation.

What do the Sermon on the Mount and Isaiah's message mean for us today? First, God bestows blessings on those in spiritual communion with Him. This communion comes only through a personal relationship and saving faith in Jesus Christ. Second, God provides us with the means to empower us to live the Christian life, to be salt and light to a dying world. Jesus said, "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever" (John 14:16). He has given us this Comforter Who is God living inside of us (John 14:17c). What should you do if you feel that you aren't doing enough for God? Ask Jesus to be your sufficiency and allow God to change your heart from being motivated by guilt to being motivated by grace.

A few years ago, my wife and I had dinner with our neighbors and their three daughters. During dinner, we found out that one of the young ladies had recently taken a special interest in a certain young man at her church. She explained that this was a recent development because, prior to this, she had considered him awkward and didn't want any sort of romantic relationship with him. Then one day she told us she had decided to pray about that matter and had an idea about how to proceed. She felt the need to pray that, if this relationship was from God, she should ask God to change her heart towards him; and if not, that God should change his heart away from her. So, she prayed this prayer, and God did indeed change her heart. The message is that if you don't feel you are doing enough for God, you should ask God to change your heart.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Now we will move on to the second reading. Last week we completed our study in First Corinthians Chapter 1, and this week we will move on to Chapter 2. As you read, remember what Paul discussed in Chapter 1 about how the Corinthian Church was being torn by sexual immorality and division.

Second Reading:

> *1 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom,*

> *proclaiming to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, 4 and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. (1 Corinthians 2:1-5)*

Paul claimed God's authority for his message (v. 1c), saying that his message was directly from God. Next, he explained how he humbly proclaimed this message from God "in fear and in much trembling" (v. 3a); not through the use of the Grecian persuasive techniques of the day, but rather through a "demonstration of the Spirit and power" (v. 4). The reason he did that, said Paul, was so that the Corinthians' faith would be based upon the Word of God and not on Paul's rhetorical argument (v. 5).

What does Paul's message mean for us today? First, we may not be able to provide an eloquent argument for our faith, but that doesn't mean we should remain silent. Saint Peter said, "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" (1Pe 3:15). This is one way in which we bring salt and light to a world that is dying without the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Second, we are to rely on the Word of God, not our own persuasive strategies, as we share our faith with others. The Word of God is powerful and will provide us with a tremendous resource for witnessing once we have hidden it in our hearts (i.e., memorizing key Bible verses). "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). Third, it is okay to not have all the answers, since we lack will be an opportunity for others to see how Jesus compensates for our weakness (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

Reflection Questions

1. There is a basic misunderstanding of the role of guilt in most of our lives. Guilt often leads us to think: "I'll work on that and get better." Instead, guilt is supposed to lead us to think: "I need You, Lord." Think about a time that you felt guilty about not doing enough for God. What was the circumstance that brought this about? In light of what you learned from the Sermon on the Mount, what would be a better way of responding to this feeling?

2. The Catholic priest Henri Nouwen, who died several years ago, said the following in Wil Hernandez's book "A Spirituality of Imperfection" (Paulist Press, 2006). "God has deliberately chosen to break through human history in the person of Christ, manifesting total weakness in birth and dying on the cross in voluntary powerlessness" (p. 79). How does Christ's example of humility and weakness help you to act as salt and light to those people whom God has placed in your life? Consider this in light of what you learned from the reading in First Corinthians.